FROM OPPOSITION TO COALITION: THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY AND THE POLITICS OF WELFARE REFORM, 2005-2015

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85,700 words

Abstract

This thesis offers an analysis of the ideology of the Conservative Party under the leadership of David Cameron between 2005 and 2015, considering the extent to which the party still embodies a form of 'conservatism' and, further, what sort of conservatism that might be. This is conducted via the application of a theoretical framework combining a strategic-relational understanding of political action, with the conceptual or morphological approach to analysing ideologies. It therefore contributes to understanding both the character of contemporary British conservatism, and the role that ideas and ideologies play in political life at various points in the governing and electoral cycle more broadly.

The research uses the Party's approach to working-age welfare policy as a case study, being an area of policy that has been of a consistently high-profile over the period in question and which has been utilised for several different purposes. It focuses on three central research areas: firstly, how Conservatives have understood key concepts relating to welfare, considering what this can tell us about wider views on the relationship between society, the state and individuals; secondly, how these understandings relate to wider conservative ideological perspectives, and finally how these perspectives have both shaped and been shaped by political practice and strategy, notably in the arenas of electoral appeal and policy development and implementation.

The thesis concludes that despite indications in the opposition years of Cameron's leadership that the Conservatives might seek to move away from or at least draw a line under the Thatcher years, this possibility has remained largely unrealised in 2015. The constraining role of ideology has been significant: 'modernisation' was conceived within a Thatcherite ideological framework which shaped the strategies perceived to be available to the party in developing its approach to social issues and re-invigorating its electoral appeal. Although there were nascent signs of ideological developments within this framework, changes to the strategic context within which the Party is situated between opposition and government meant that in the latter it reverted to more traditional Thatcherite perspectives. The research therefore suggests that these legacies continue to exert a significant effect on Conservative policy and positioning, and will be important in understanding the actions of the in-coming majority Conservative government.

Abbreviations

AME – Annual Managed Expenditure

CPI – Consumer Price Index

CSJ – Centre for Social Justice

DCLG – Department for Communities and Local Government

DEL – Departmental Expenditure Limit

DHP – Discretionary Housing Payment

DLA – Disability Living Allowance

DWP – Department for Work and Pensions

EDWG – Economic Dependency Working Group

ESA – Employment and Support Allowance

IFS – Institute for Fiscal Studies

IPPR – Institute for Public Policy Research

JSA – Jobseekers Allowance

NAO – National Audit Office

OBR – Office for Budget Responsibility

ONS – Office for National Statistics

PCP – Parliamentary Conservative Party

PIP – Personal Independence Payment

PbR – Payment by Results

RPI – Retail Price Index

SJPG – Social Justice Policy Group

SRA – Strategic-Relational Approach

SRSSC – Social Rented Sector Size Criterion

VCSO – Voluntary and Civil Society Organisation

List of tables and figures

Interviewees

Unless otherwise stated, all interviews were conducted face-to-face and ‘on the record’.

Conservative MPs

Andrew MP, Stuart	Portcullis House, 23 April 2013
Buckland MP, Robert	House of Commons, 13 May 2013
Bebb MP, Guto	House of Commons, 23 April 2013
Burns MP, Conor	1 Parliament Street, 4 June 2013
Carmichael MP, Neil	Portcullis House, 2 July 2013
Davies MP, Philip	Constituency office, 17 November 2012
Gale MP, Sir Roger	Telephone interview, 16 July 2013
Hopkins MP, Kris	Telephone interview, 10 July 2013
Kwarteng MP, Kwasi	Portcullis House, 9 May 2013
Loughton MP, Tim	Portcullis House, 13 May 2013
Penrose MP, John	Portcullis House, 1 July 2013
Stevenson MP, John	Portcullis House, 16 May 2013
Streeter MP, Gary	Portcullis House, 21 February 2013
Walker MP, Charles	Telephone interview, 30 October 2013

A further two interviews were conducted with interviewees who opted to remain anonymous. Where specific, agreed quotations have been used from these interviews in the text they are referred to by agreed pseudonyms (for example, ‘a Conservative backbench MP’).

Labour MPs

Begg MP, Dame Anne	House of Commons, 4 June 2013
Field, The Rt. Hon. Frank	Portcullis House, 12 February 2013
Gilmore MP, Sheila	Portcullis House, 12 March 2013
Jackson MP, Glenda	1 Parliament St, 12 March 2013
Pearce MP, Teresa	Portcullis House, 12 March 2013

Other interviewees

Unless otherwise stated, all interviews took place at the offices of the named organisations.

Bennett, Fran	Women's Budget Group	Telephone interview, 3 June 2013
Blond, Phillip	ResPublica	13 March 2013
Ghelani, Deven	Centre of Social Justice	26 November 2012
Haddon, Catherine	Institute for Government	13 March 2013
King, Peter	Economic Dependency Working Group	Telephone interview, 4 March 2013
Lawton, Kayte	IPPR	12 February 2013
McCluskey, Jacqui	Homeless Links	2 July 2013
McIntosh, Steve	Carers UK	3 July 2013
Niemietz, Kristian	Institute for Economic Affairs	22 April 2013
Nolan, Patrick	Reform	12 February 2013
Portes, Jonathon	National Institute of Economic and Social Research	1 July 2013
Rickell, Andy	Equality 2025, Vassell Trust	Telephone interview, 10 May 2013
Sacks-Jones, Katharine	Crisis	Telephone interview, 17 July 2013
Saunders, Peter	Freelance (Policy Exchange, Civitas)	Telephone interview, 20 February 2013
Schmuecker, Katie	Joseph Rowntree Foundation	6 February 2013
Taylor, Corin	Institute of Directors	12 February 2013

A further four interviews with current or former civil servants, and four with representatives of third-sector organisations were conducted with interviewees who preferred to remain anonymous. Where specific, agreed quotations have been used from these interviews in the text they are referred to by agreed pseudonyms (for example, 'a senior civil servant').

Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Does the Conservative Party under David Cameron still represent 'conservatism' as an ideology – and if so, how, why, and in what form? Cameron was elected in 2005 on a platform of change: the need for the Conservative Party, in some way, to move away from its recent past in order to make its way back into government. Shortly before winning the leadership, Cameron claimed that 'fundamental change' rather than 'some slick rebranding exercise' was needed to reinvigorate Conservative electoral fortunes, and to enable the party to respond effectively to the political and social conditions of the day (2005a). Some interpretations of the Conservatives under Cameron, both within and outside the party, have suggested that this necessitated, and has subsequently entailed, substantive ideological change. Notably, this is thought to have occurred around social policy, orientated in a socially liberal direction to match the economic liberalism of the Thatcher years, and hence leaving the parliamentary party 'conservative' in name only (Beech, 2015; 2011; Marquand, 2008). Yet for others, the Conservatives remain (for better or worse) the 'same old Tories'. Clearly there is a great deal of divergence in how the Conservative Party, post-2005, might be characterised and understood.

This debate is at the heart of this thesis, which seeks to explore the Parliamentary Conservative Party's (PCP) relationship with conservatism under Cameron's leadership between 2005 and 2015 via an in-depth study of the party's approach to welfare policy. It is concerned firstly with the development of Conservative ideas in this immediate period, considering this in relation to a range of contextual factors. These include the imperative of achieving electoral success, the need to respond to and ultimately attempt to shape the political, social and economic context, and the pressures introduced by specific policy problems. Welfare policy is used as a focus through which to identify and trace different strands of thinking on social issues within the PCP, and to consider the impact and usage of these ideas in both opposition and in government. However, in analysing the ideas of the contemporary party and relating these to the context in which it exists, the research necessarily takes a wider perspective than the specific period that it focuses on. It looks backwards, linking the conservatism of Cameron's party to both past British Conservative

traditions and conservative ideological frameworks more broadly. It also looks to the future, laying a foundation for understanding how the decisions taken and the ideas that have been emphasised, rejected or re-constituted in this period might contribute to shaping both future Conservative ideological perspectives and strategies, and the British political landscape within which the PCP exists.

As such, the conclusions drawn from this research are interesting and important on a number of dimensions. They pertain directly to the debate regarding the modern Conservative Party's relationship with conservatism, and the case study approach deployed provides a substantial and original empirical contribution to this. When analysed within the innovative theoretical framework of the research, this constitutes a well-grounded and nuanced challenge to the idea of a socially liberal Conservative Party, as many of the ideas surrounding this policy area have much wider implications in terms of understanding how the PCP approaches social issues. Beyond this, the research draws attention to the importance of ideas in understanding political action, and considers how the deployment of ideas varies in line with electoral and governing imperatives. Through this, the case study can offer a window into wider issues, both theoretical and practical. Significantly, it provides both a means of analysing the practical usage and application of political ideologies, and a demonstration of how this can occur within a defined context. As such, the research illustrates not just that ideas matter in understanding outcomes, but why they matter, and in what ways. In turn, this contributes to understanding the relationship between political parties and the British political system, illustrating how ideas mediate between the two and how this has a real impact on context and decision-making that goes beyond the Conservative Party itself. Therefore although the focus of this research is the Conservative Party in a defined period of time, the conclusions drawn have a much wider relevance to the study of conservatism, ideas, and British party politics and policy-making.

This chapter outlines the project. I begin by discussing an issue which, although not the main focus of the thesis, nonetheless requires addressing in order to contextualise the analysis. This is the situation with regard to welfare policy and connected issues in the period immediately prior to the one under consideration, which is addressed via a discussion of the impact of New Labour in this area. I then go on to define the focus on welfare policy, outlining the approach taken to this in relation to alternative possibilities, followed by a brief discussion of the key contributions

and arguments of this research and the limitations of these. Finally, the chapter offers outlines of the subsequent chapters and a discussion of the research methodology.

1.2 New Labour, and the Conservatives in opposition

When Cameron was elected as Conservative leader in 2005, he faced considerable challenges. The Conservatives had been in opposition for eight years and had lost three general elections, struggling to learn the lessons of defeat and enact an effective challenge to New Labour. The circumstances in which the Conservatives had sought to regain power after 1997 were very different from those which presaged its last period of electoral dominance under Thatcher. Upon coming to power within a favourable economic context, New Labour conclusively pushed social issues onto the agenda. Notable within this was a focus on poverty and 'social exclusion', which New Labour proposed to address partly through an ambitious programme of welfare reform. The centrepieces of this comprised greatly expanded welfare-to-work programmes and a raft of enhanced tax credits, alongside measures such as a National Minimum Wage and a focus on child poverty and deprivation (Hills, Sefton and Stewart, 2009).

The Conservative record on these issues was not good. The number of people living in poverty in Britain doubled between 1979 and 1997 (Coates, 2005: 19), and the income gap between the richest and poorest people in the country increased almost year-on-year in the same period (Belfield et al., 2014: 38). Additionally, New Labour had effectively (but not necessarily accurately) sought to portray the Conservative approach to welfare issues as passive, willing to blame the poor for their situation but not to provide them with the help that might allow them to improve it (Atkins, 2011: 114). It was within this context that Theresa May memorably referred to the Conservatives being seen by the electorate as the 'nasty party' (2002), and Cameron proposed that altering this perception was central to reinvigorating Conservative electoral fortunes (2005a).

However, it was difficult to see where the Conservatives could begin to confront New Labour on such issues. This was firstly because elements of the policy agenda on welfare built on Conservative reforms from the 1980s and 1990s, furthering a focus on employment and

increasing conditionality attached to the receipt of benefits. The trajectory of New Labour's reforms, in this respect, offered continuity rather than change.[1] The programmes and policies themselves also appeared to be performing quite well. The New Deals, implemented against a backdrop of falling unemployment, nonetheless produced some good results when their effects were isolated, up until around 2003 when these levelled off (McKnight, 2009; van Reenan, 2004). As such the Conservatives had little space to challenge these, and little reason to do so.

Similarly, increasing income inequality was arrested through substantial investment in tax credits, and child poverty consequentially fell, although not by as much as New Labour would have liked (Hills, 2013). While some Conservatives might have felt uncomfortable with the means through which advances were being made in this area, or even with the goal of decreasing inequality overall (see Chapters 2 and 4), directly challenging such policies risked reinforcing the impression of the Conservatives as harsh and uncaring. In this respect, focusing on child poverty in particular was a shrewd political decision by New Labour (although not, as Chapter 7 discusses, one that has subsequently proven immune to challenges). Equally, however, given the strong emphasis on this policy agenda and the extent to which New Labour drew on it within their governing strategy, it was becoming increasingly clear that doing nothing on welfare and connected issues such as poverty and disadvantage was not an option for the Conservatives.

As New Labour's time in government wore on, however, flaws in their poverty strategy began to emerge. Alongside this, a Conservative critique of the approach began to develop. The content of this critique is part of the main subject matter of this thesis and is discussed in the subsequent chapters, but it is worth outlining some of the key weaknesses of New Labour's approach here as a means of contextualising this.

As discussed, all of the New Deals achieved some success initially. However, in addition to the slowing of gains mentioned above, there are further caveats to the success of these programmes. They tended to deliver the best outcomes for claimants with a history of steady employment, and were much less effective for those with no employment history, a history of unstable

[1] A discussion of the relationship between Thatcherism and New Labour is outside of the scope of this thesis: however, Driver and Martell (2006) and Heffernan (2000) provide comprehensive accounts of this.

employment, or low qualifications. ‘Recycling’ of claims was also an issue: around two thirds of all new JSA claims per year (an average of 1.6 million) were repeat claims (Finn, 2011), suggesting that there were problems around job retention for claimants who did move into work. There was also insufficient linkage between the New Deal infrastructure and in-work support, meaning that many of those who did move into employment found themselves trapped in low-paid, low-skilled work, which is often also lacking in security (Leitch, 2006: 51). Although the New Deals represented a significant expansion of welfare-to-work, there were clearly areas in which their effectiveness fell short of what was expected. After 2005, both the Conservatives and Labour began to move towards considering these shortcomings, with Labour implementing the Flexible New Deal and the Conservatives developing the Work Programme in response to a review of the system by David Freud (2007), who would later receive a life peerage from the Conservative Party.

Additionally, after a promising start, New Labour’s progress on poverty and inequality began to stall. Some of the innovations that had provided the initial progress were of a sort whose effects could not be easily replicated. Firstly, for example, the National Minimum Wage provided a significant ‘jump’ in income to the 1.5 million people who were earning less than £3 per hour in 1997 (Coates, 2005: 20). Whether or not this was seen as good in itself, it certainly made it difficult to sustain progress, especially as New Labour’s commitment to the National Minimum Wage stressed that its level should be recommended independently by the Low Pay Commission. By limiting its own input on this, New Labour may have helped to bolster the credibility of what was perceived as a risky policy, but it also reduced its own ability to push for large increases. Secondly, tax credits provided an important means of boosting incomes, including those as a result of low pay. However, these required sustained investment to maintain progress. Having been reticent to make the case for higher taxes to fund this, New Labour was not able to replicate the achievements of the first four years in office (McKnight, 2009; Sefton, Hills and Sutherland, 2009). Finally, on a slightly different note, New Labour had discreetly increased the incomes of workless households with children during their time in office. Income from such benefits is vulnerable to inflation. This produced a situation whereby with high inflation during the economic downturn in 2009/10, some of the strongest income growth was amongst those wholly reliant on benefits, in comparison to sluggish wage growth (Belfield et al., 2014: 5).

All of this meant that New Labour became increasingly politically vulnerable on these topics on several fronts, representing a series of opportunities for the Conservatives to intervene and, potentially, to challenge New Labour's apparent dominance on social issues. This is explored further in subsequent chapters. Overall, the changes brought about in the British political landscape by New Labour forced the Conservatives to deal with some issues that they would probably have preferred to avoid – and that, indeed, the leadership largely shied away from facing between 1997 and 2005. It is within this context that Cameron's leadership of the party should initially be viewed.

1.3 Scope of the research

Even if a broad consensus had been reached that some kind of change was needed in the Conservative Party in 2005, much less could be said of the level of agreement regarding what form and direction this change should take. As indicated above, New Labour had pushed issues around poverty and disadvantage onto the political agenda, requiring the Conservatives to act on areas of policy that had been relatively neglected under Thatcher owing to the overwhelming focus on the economy, and that had proven challenging for subsequent leaders (see Chapter 5). Yet while for some Conservatives the obvious response to this was a parallel extension of the economic liberalism that was a hallmark of Thatcherism, into social liberalism, for others a socially conservative response was required (Streeter, 2002: 9).

The ideological direction of 'modernisation' was therefore contested from the outset of Cameron's leadership. The direction that it initially appeared that this would take, in line with Cameron's own, self-professed 'liberal conservative' values was not universally accepted within the party owing to the existence of a significant intra-party division on 'social, sexual and moral' issues (Hayton, 2012: 19; Heppell, 2013). This became painfully evident in the ensuing furore over totemic social liberal policies such as same-sex marriage (Hayton and McEnhill, 2015). As one MP of the 2010 intake suggested, there were those in the party who had 'never accepted the intellectual underpinning of so-called "modernisation"', alongside a suspicion that 'some of the modernisers – but by no means all – seem to want to engage in a repudiation of everything Margaret Thatcher did and a bit of an embrace of everything Mr Blair did' (Burns, private interview). Welfare policy, understood in relation to the remit of the Department for Work and

Pensions, provides an interesting location through which to explore the resolution of these debates and, consequentially, the implications for conservatism within the Conservative Party.

This thesis focuses on working-age welfare policy and, after 2010, the actions of the DWP. Questions around this policy area have loomed large within the PCP during the period with which this research is concerned, and it has consistently formed a significant part of the Conservative Party's agenda. It was the focus of an entire, influential section of Cameron's policy review in 2006, led by Iain Duncan Smith; within the 'Big Society' and 'broken Britain' narratives in opposition, and within the austerity and reform programmes introduced in government. These culminated in the Welfare Reform Act (2012), which, in April 2013, brought in the majority of policy that this research focuses on. Welfare also played an important role in the Conservative election campaign in 2015, and further reforms in a similar vein to those enacted under the Coalition appear very likely under the in-coming Conservative majority government.

Yet working-age welfare policy has been used for different purposes, often varying with the electoral cycle. Initially a means of demonstrating change and inclusiveness in opposition, it later became a vehicle for illustrating an authoritarian 'toughness' and willingness to make difficult decisions in government. Pensions policy, in contrast, has been both much lower-profile and utilised in a far more consistent manner, which is closely related to the imperative of retaining Conservative support amongst pensioners. What makes working-age welfare such an interesting case is its consistently high profile combined with the volatility in how it has been deployed. This means it is particularly apt for exploring shifts in the usage of and emphasis on different ideas, as well as the contextual pressures and that prompt such changes.

The research further confines the focus of the analysis to the PCP. It seeks to understand decisions and strategies in this area as they are conceived by elite actors within the Conservative Party, in relation to the broader governing and electoral context in which it exists. Political elites can be assumed to act strategically: that is, they formulate actions in pursuit of a range of varied goals and aims. These goals do not exist singularly or in isolation from each other. It is not possible, practically, to isolate elements of what can broadly be termed 'statecraft' (Bulpitt, 1986): for example, separating electoral motivations from governing motivations, or party

management concerns, or problem-focused policy issues. Neither is it feasible to assume that all of these concerns are of consistently equal importance, particularly in the months surrounding general elections. Strategic action therefore involves balancing this multitude of pressures in pursuit of the different, but often interrelated goals that political parties seek to achieve. However, even well-informed actors cannot ever have perfect knowledge of their circumstances: context is never fixed, and actors are unable to predict with any great accuracy changes in context or 'events'. This requires continual assessment and potential adaption of both means and ends. As such actors must rely on their ideas as a frame through which to access this complex landscape, and hence in formulating strategy. The ideas of elite Conservatives, the way that these influence decisions, and the way that they are formed and adjusted in relation to context, both historical and present, are hence central in understanding outcomes in the policy area at hand.

Within this it is necessary to take into account factors outside the party, such as the electoral context or the strategies of the opposition. Nonetheless, it is how the Conservative Party itself has responded to these within the time period concerned that is the object of inquiry here. The case study method deployed is an appropriate means of analysing contemporary developments in depth. This can offer a window into the longer-term possibilities for Conservative policy development. However, the theoretical foundation of this thesis emphasises that strategies must be flexible and that events, often largely outside of the control of elite actors, may engender substantial strategic revisions. Extended discussion of the longer-term development of welfare as an element of a hegemonic approach therefore seems somewhat premature and speculative. As one analysis notes, there is 'every reason' to believe that Conservative moves towards establishing a permanently 'leaner' state are vulnerable to roll-back (Ashbee, 2015: 171-172). With many developments still on-going and an unavoidable lack of historical perspective on these, the focus of this work is on understanding of the usage of welfare in terms of shorter-term goals and the interaction between these and policy priorities and effects. In turn this could provide a foundation for understanding longer-term developments in the usage of welfare, but it does so with the conviction that understanding the detailed decision processes underpinning such developments is an essential precursor to this. Therefore the longer-term usage of welfare policy is discussed in Chapter 5 and returned to in Conclusion: however, it is not the focus of this research.

The research is operationalized through a combination of Colin Hay's Strategic-Relational Approach (SRA - Hay, 2002), and Michael Freeden's morphological approach to ideologies (1996) which, it is proposed, can be used to ameliorate a weakness within the way that the SRA conceptualises the process of ideational development. The SRA has previously been applied to both party politics (Hayton, 2012a) and policy – not least within Hay's own work (see Chapter 2). However, in identifying this weakness and proposing a solution to it, this thesis therefore makes a theoretical contribution, in additional to its substantial empirical one, which is returned to below.

There are a number of alternative analytical angles that might have been taken on this topic. One could consider the relationship between New Labour and the Conservatives: how might Conservative policies and political decisions be explained in respect of the impact of New Labour on the political, economic and social landscape? This, however, would tend to focus the analysis on New Labour itself, which is at cross-purposes to the central task of this thesis. We might consider the role played by external actors in influencing the Conservative policy or ideational development process: notably in relation to this period, the role of think-tanks has already attracted some attention (Pautz, 2013). Finally, we might focus on the broader social context around the policy area, considering how this introduces pressures on the Conservatives to respond and hence informs strategy, perhaps framing this in relation to social attitudes towards welfare issues at the level of the electorate. The decision to focus on the Conservative Party itself reflects the theoretical approach of this thesis, which emphasises the agency that its elites possess in responding to context. These alternative approaches reflect slightly different emphases and different locations of inquiry: they might, in turn, arrive at different conclusions regarding the nature of change in the party and the primary influences on this. This divergence is not necessarily problematic, as long as the perspective from which the research has been conducted and the basis on which its conclusions are made, is clear from the outset. This is returned to below, in the discussion of research methodology

The approach outlined also therefore imposes certain limitations on the research and the claims that can be made for it. The central one is that the conclusions drawn pertain specifically to the Conservative Party in the period 2005-2015: these cannot be generalised to other conservative parties or other British parties, or other periods outside of those specifically discussed. This is

because the analysis is tied to the actors involved, whose particular interpretations of their circumstances and hence their decisions are inextricably embedded within that context. However, this does not mean that the claims have no analytical or empirical utility beyond this, as returned to below.

What the research presented here does do is contribute to a broader political analytical tradition of studying the Conservative Party, which is still emergent in relation to Cameron's leadership. It utilises an innovative theoretical framework to explore the relationship between Cameron's Conservatives and conservatism as an ideology in a way that is sensitive to the constantly changing political context in which the party operates. This can account for the range of different pressures and imperatives that it has to negotiate, which will both contribute to shaping, and themselves be shaped by, the strategies adopted and executed by Conservative elites. By focusing on a specific policy area and using this as a means through which to analyse Conservative ideas in depth, the research offers a different way of approaching the topic of the Conservative Party and conservatism to that used in existing extended studies in this area (see Chapter 3). In doing so, it adds value not only to this specific research area by offering a nuanced analysis from a different perspective, but also to the broader understanding of how, and in what way, ideas and ideologies matter in the practice of politics. As a result, the conclusions of this research (and the application of the method more widely) could finally contribute to a second research area which is more focused on the analysis of policy itself and its impacts. Through understanding the processes that have led to particular policy decisions, and the ideas and perceptions that these are constructed with reference to, we are better placed to assess policy success or failure on the Conservative Party's own terms.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 begins with an exploration of perspectives on structural and agential, and material and ideational factors in understanding political action and the process of change. Through this, it introduces the SRA as a central component of the theoretical foundation for this thesis. The SRA provides a convincing and nuanced account of the significance of ideas in informing action, and can adequately account for the range of real-life pressures and motivations that inform political decision-making and ideological development. However, it is less effective at theorising the process of ideational change itself. This would seem to be an essential step in any account of the

role of ideas in political life. I therefore propose a way of ameliorating this weakness, combining the SRA with the morphological approach to theorising ideology advanced by Michael Freeden. This can provide a means of analysing not just whether change has occurred, but in what ways and to what extent. Following this, the chapter discusses how this approach will be applied to the research topic of this thesis and outlines central research questions. These are:

1. What are the key concepts informing the Conservative Party's approach to welfare policy, and how are these decontested in relation to one another?
2. How do these concepts relate to the wider structure of conservatism? In particular, to what extent do they reflect, subvert or re-constitute the character of previous Conservative ideological traditions?
3. How have these ideas been utilised in practice, in relation to policy and the competing strategic motivations that impact on this, and what is the effect of this on the character of the Conservatives' conservatism?

Both the SRA and Freeden's morphological approach suggest that ideas and ideologies have a crucial bearing on political action: and yet, many Conservatives have displayed, and continue to display, a distinct unwillingness to acknowledge the role played by ideology in their own decisions and actions. Drawing on Freeden's adaptable and flexible definition of ideology as outlined in the previous chapter, Chapter 3 explores the literature on what 'conservatism' means in historical perspective: what is it, and what is 'conservative' about the Conservative Party? The chapter considers this first in theoretical terms, before going on to discuss manifestations of Conservatism in the post-war period, notably considering how the apparent disjuncture between One Nation and Thatcherite forms of Conservatism might be understood. It argues that the two display greater continuity than is often claimed, particularly with respect to individual and social morality. Certainly, both fall within the conservative ideological family. Where they differ is in their attitude towards the interventionist state, and this has remained a key issue within British Conservatism. This discussion provides a basis for analysing the ideological heritage from which Cameron's Conservative Party has developed, in subsequent chapters. Finally, the chapter offers a brief overview of the existing literature on 'Cameronism', situating the present research within this.

The main contribution of Freeden's morphological approach is to direct our attention towards concepts as the building blocks of ideologies. This suggests that while different ideologies may seem to use the same concepts, these are often imbued with different meanings owing to their position in the ideology's structure and the concepts that they are connected to. Chapter 4 identifies and explores the central concepts informing Cameron's Conservative Party's welfare policies, considering these in relation to each other and in terms of how they relate to the broader ideology of Conservatism. It is suggested that hostility towards the interventionist state, tied to the concept of 'responsibility' and poverty expressed as 'welfare dependency', is central to contemporary Conservative ideology on welfare. This is widespread across the PCP, suggesting that on this significant area, One Nation Conservatism no longer offers a viable alternative view of the state-society relationship, and that on this aspect of 'modernisation' at least, the party is largely unified. As such, the chapter finds Cameron's Conservatives attempting to expound a post-Thatcherite approach to social policy – and developing some potentially interesting ways of doing so - whilst still heavily constrained by the same assumptions and suspicions of the impact of the state that underpinned Thatcherism.

The continued strong influence of Thatcherite Conservative ideology over Cameron's party therefore has significant implications for the kinds of strategies that it is willing to adopt. As the SRA suggests, even while considering a specific policy area, formulating strategy is not solely a matter of resolving policy problems but is linked to other party political concerns. One very important such concern is electoral strategy and appeal. Chapter 5 explores how the Conservatives have utilised and deployed the concepts outlined in the previous chapter in attempting to further their electoral advances. It considers the electoral challenges that the PCP has faced since 2005. In particular, it seeks to explain the increased prominence of welfare policy within Conservative positioning between opposition and government, and how this can be understood in relation to the change of context, strategic learning and development. The chapter argues that both the financial crisis, and the failure to win an overall majority in 2010, had an important impact on the party's use of welfare, transforming it into a high-profile electoral issue on which the Conservatives perceive that they can win support without having to make a potentially troublesome departure from Thatcherite principles. This, of course, exerts a considerable influence on the sorts of policies that have been considered viable since 2010. The chapter discusses these in relation to the outcome of the 2015 election.

Chapters 6 and 7 explore the translation of the ideological concepts set out in Chapter 4 into policy proposals and then concrete policy, with reference to a range of contextual factors including the electoral imperative identified in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 explores the aspects of reform developed in opposition, focusing on Universal Credit and the Work Programme. The chapter shows how the relatively coherent framework for policy set out in Chapter 4 has been put under pressure within the reality of government, which has served to bring tensions within the PCP, regarding both immediate priorities and broader ways of thinking about the relationship between state, society and individual, to the surface. There is evidence of longer-term, substantive thinking on reducing reliance on the state in both policies. While proceeding from Thatcherite-influenced assumptions about the basic undesirability of state welfare provision, these propose a means of alleviating 'dependency' that goes beyond simple welfare retrenchment. This incorporates a significant dimension which views reliance on benefits as a matter of rational choice, essentially drawing economically liberal market logic alongside traditionally conservative moral perspectives on the undesirability of welfare support and importance of work. However, this more innovative policy element is undermined by both the identification of the immediate need to reduce spending as the central task facing the government, and the elevation of the electoral significance of welfare.

Like Chapter 6, Chapter 7 concentrates on the translation of ideas into policy. It focuses on the package of reforms introduced after the Conservatives moved into Coalition government, examining changes to Disability Living Allowance, the Social Rented Sector Size Criterion or 'bedroom tax', the benefit cap and changes to benefit up-rating. The chapter draws out further tensions between these strategies and those outlined in the previous chapter, emphasising the extent to which these reforms draw on moralistic, traditionally conservative understandings of the effects of welfare support. These are not necessarily compatible with the more liberal-influenced reforms discussed in the previous chapter. Combined with the need to reduce spending urgently, in line with economic ideology and electoral imperatives, the result is a heavily Thatcherite-influenced approach which suggests that reliance on welfare cannot co-exist with self-sufficiency for individual claimants. The direction of reforms discussed in this chapter cuts across the thinking behind those discussed in Chapter 6, being illustrative of a deeply negative view of the state's impact on society and individual behaviour. Even transitional

support is viewed as a sop to welfare dependency, understood primarily as a consequence of individual moral failings. The ascendency of this approach further illustrates where the balance of power lies within the Conservative Party under Cameron. This links welfare policy back to the broader question of Conservative change and development since Thatcher. Overall, Conservative thinking on welfare and the relationship between the state and society remains both firmly within socially conservative parameters, and quite under-developed from Thatcherism. 'Modernisation', it seems, has yet to effectively permeate this aspect of Conservative thinking.

1.5 Methodology

In the final section of this chapter, I discuss the research methods employed in this thesis alongside their limitations and suitability for the topic at hand, as well as outlining how the data was collected and analysed. At this point, however, it is perhaps useful to explicitly state the ontological and epistemological position from which this project is approached. The ontological position taken here, and embodied in the SRA, is anti-foundationalist. It suggests that there is not a 'real world' that exists independently of our knowledge of it: instead, it is actors themselves that constitute the landscape in which they operate (Parsons, 2010: 97). This necessarily leads to an epistemologically interpretative approach, emphasising that social processes and outcomes 'cannot be understood independently of our interpretation of them: rather it is these interpretations/understandings of social phenomena that directly affect outcomes' (Furlong and Marsh, 2010: 199). Additionally, as discussed in greater detail below, starting from such an ontological position entails accepting that the researcher is not in a sufficiently privileged position to be able to assign meaning to the actions of others. In adopting the position that the world is socially constructed, the aim of this research is to study and understand these particular, subjective constructions. This has methodological implications for the research.

The main methodological implication of proposing the centrality of ideas and interpretations in understanding political outcomes is that actors' interests, interpretations of context and strategic priorities cannot be assumed or 'read off' from looking at either the 'facts' of context or material circumstances, or the outcomes (in terms of policy) themselves. Writing on the application of the SRA and the privileging of ideas within this, Marsh points out that 'in order to identify the agent's preference, their perceptions of the strategic context, the reasons for their strategic choices and their reflections on the outcomes of their actions, we need to ask them' (2010: 219).

It is therefore essential that agents are directly involved in the research process, and that they are given the opportunity to explain their own perceptions and ideas of context relating to the policy area discussed. In understanding decisions and outcomes, it is important to interrogate the ideas underpinning these as they are explained by the actors involved. Without this, any conclusions drawn regarding motivation, influence or understanding (and, ultimately, the variety of Conservatism that we are looking at) might be incorrect, but would certainly be invalid, since one cannot assume on behalf of the researcher a superior vantage point for detecting Conservative politicians' reasons and understandings.

The bulk of the research for this thesis is therefore qualitative. In some instances, notably related to electoral strategy, statistics in the form of public opinion polls are used, since these indicate potentially important influences on the direction of policy which cannot be adequately captured though qualitative means. Two main sources of qualitative data are used: semi-structured elite interviews, and document analysis.

Interviewing is a particularly appropriate method for this study for both methodological and practical reasons. Methodologically, interviewing works well as a means of investigating the complex issue of actors' subjective interpretations of problems and goals (Furlong and Marsh, 2010: 200). Semi-structured interviewing is more appropriate than a rigid interview structure. This allows participants to explore issues in their own terms, emphasising ideas and events that are important to them and their understanding of these: in effect, it transfers some of the control over the interview to the participant while still maintaining a coherent core across interviews (Bernard and Ryan, 2010: 29-30), which is directed by the research questions outlined above.

Moreover, in elite interviews the balance of knowledge and expertise is usually in favour of the participant (Burnham et al., 2008: 231): Conservative MPs should be expected to understand more about the internal workings of the party than the researcher, for example. It is therefore sensible to allow some latitude within the interviews, to account for individuals' divergent interpretations but also for their particular strengths in knowledge and understanding and areas of interest, which a more standardised interview might preclude discussion of (Manhein, Rich and Willnat, 2002: 321-323). In this way, richer and more detailed data can be obtained. Since

responses were not going to be quantified, the lack of standardisation in this approach is not a major concern (Burnham et al, 2008: 240).

On a more practical level, this thesis is concerned with very recent events. There is not currently a significant amount of literature such as memoirs, which might offer an alternative insight into the way that actors concerned interpreted and responded to their context, available. Even if this was available, it would tend to only give the perspectives of the central actors which, while undoubtedly important (as discussed below), is only part of the story. Interviewing thus offered a way of exploring very recent developments with actors whose perspectives might not otherwise be available. Indeed, since the bulk of interviewing took place between September 2012 and June 2013, the implementation of the policies discussed was unfolding concurrently.

This, in turn, leads to a further methodological point. There are specific difficulties and challenges inherent in 'real time' research. These include, for example, the problem of maintaining perspective with regard to the wider significance of particular events, which becomes increasingly difficult towards the end of the time period in question (Hazell and Yong, 2012: 6). For this reason, much of the analysis here focuses on the measures introduced through and prior to the Welfare Reform Act (2012). This can, with some confidence, be assumed to mark a significant juncture in welfare policy development, although later events are also discussed, notably with reference to the 2015 election. The time frame discussed in the interviews also covered a much longer period (as the project focuses on developments since 2005 in relation to the Conservative Party's past), allowing for some reflection on the more enduring significance of developments. Furthermore, the use of additional data sources was helpful in determining the wider significance of issues raised in interviews. Nonetheless it is important to bear in mind that the full significance of the policy and political decisions discussed here may not become apparent for some time. This research therefore necessarily takes what Farrall and Hay refer to in their exploration of the legacy of Thatcherism as an 'implementation perspective' in trying to understand developments unfolding almost concurrently (2014: 16): however, such a perspective offers significant scope for further research building on this.

In total, sixteen Conservative MPs were interviewed.[2] Conservative MPs were initially contacted on the basis of a clear demonstrated interest in the policy area: for example, those who held or had held ministerial positions within the DWP or former DSS, those who had contributed to parliamentary scrutiny of welfare reform, or those who had published material on the topic. Document analysis itself was therefore central in informing this. Eleven of the interviews were arranged through this process, with another five obtained by writing to all remaining Conservative MPs. The MPs tended to prefer to talk in broad terms about ideas around welfare (and the interview topics were directed towards this), rather than the specific technical details of policy. This reflects the role of MPs as generalists, and was helpful in acquiring the kind of data required for this project.

However, there were limitations to the data obtained from interviewing. Again, some of these were practical, and some methodological. On the practical side first, despite a number of approaches, none of the DWP ministers during the time period in question nor other key figures such as the Chancellor of the Exchequer agreed to be interviewed. This reflects the difficulty of interviewing MPs belonging to the party in power, and particularly those in cabinet or ministerial roles. It also underscores the importance of not relying solely on one data collection technique. This would apply even if these actors had agreed to interviews. From a methodological angle, the main issue with interviewing is how to interpret the data obtained (Lilleker, 2003). It may not be accurate, and the reliability of the accounts given by interviewees might be questionable. As such, the interviewer 'must constantly be aware that the information the interviewee is supplying, can often be of a highly subjective nature' (Richards, 1996: 201). This is of particular concern in relation to topics such as the balance of power within the party, why certain aspects of policy have been emphasised over others, and why particular decisions have been made.

Use of additional data sources compensated for both of these problems. Welfare reform has been a very high profile topic in the 2010 to 2015 parliament, and the Conservative Party's approach to social policy formed a significant part of the 'modernisation' agenda leading up to 2010. The leading actors in relation to this policy area directly, and the trajectory of policy more broadly,

[2] Initial contact with potential interviewees was made by letter, with a follow up phone call or email after two weeks if no response was received. This usually resulted in a decision, although in some cases a third and final call was required.

are on record speaking about their motivations and understandings, either implicitly or explicitly in a number of primary document sources that are publicly available. These include materials such as transcripts of speeches and articles by Conservative MPs, literature including pre-2010 policy papers, and Hansard records of parliamentary debates and proceedings pertaining to the reforms that were studied.

Document analysis therefore comprised a second main source of data. Overall, the data obtained from document analysis enabled a fuller and more accurate representation of the development of ideas on welfare across the Conservative Party than interviewing alone. This provided an essential means of establishing the extent to which backbench MPs' perspectives were concordant, or discordant, with those of party leaders. Essentially, document analysis provided a means of triangulation which is essential in supplementing, and allowing cross-checking of the material obtained through interviews (Davies, 2001). This helped to fill in the gaps in interview data, providing additional material which strengthens the confidence of the conclusions drawn from the project (Lilleker, 2003). This made up for much of the shortfall associated with the lack of interviews with senior Conservatives, and helped compensate for the methodological difficulties of interviewing.

The interviews with and statements of Conservative MPs themselves form the primary material for this thesis. Beyond this, there was a body of secondary material that contributed to filling in the broader context within which the Conservative Party operates, or 'telling the story' of how the party's approach to welfare developed (Vromen, 2010: 262). Further secondary document sources included a wide range of materials, from newspaper and journalistic reports, to parliamentary publications such as the inquiries of select committees into aspects of welfare reform. Given the relatively current nature of the topic at hand, think-tank and charity reports and government departmental publications were particularly useful secondary sources, often providing the most up-to-date analyses in terms of the development and implementation of policy and the concerns that fed into and arose from this.

Interviewees closely linked to the development of welfare policy, but outside of the PCP itself, were also contacted. These were 'informed observers', with various levels of closeness to the party. They included Labour members who had worked closely on welfare policy, including

some who had worked with the Coalition such as Frank Field; former and current civil servants; representatives of think-tanks such as the Centre for Social Justice which had played a significant role in developing some aspects of welfare policy, particularly in opposition; others who had been involved in the SJPG policy review in 2006, and representatives of charities and non-Conservative think-tanks which had been involved in the policy process, often during the parliamentary scrutiny stages. Here, the response rate was much better than amongst MPs. There were 27 interviewees in this group, bringing the total to number of interviews to 43.

The content of these interviews was much more varied than those of the Conservative MPs, reflecting the diversity of the participants and the slightly different purposes for which the interviews were conducted. For example, civil servants tended to prefer to focus on technical detail regarding policy development and implementation issues, while some think-tank and charity participants were more inclined to discuss broader ideas around welfare policy in addition to the policy developments themselves. Most interviewees were able to offer insights on aspects of the priorities of the Government and the process of policy-making. This was helpful in filling in the background to how Conservatives understood and approached the issues that they sought to address, as well as providing a further form of triangulation with the Conservative MPs' interview data.

Interviews were conducted in person wherever possible. However, due to scheduling difficulties (both my own and that of the interviewees) and time constraints, some were conducted by telephone. Telephone interviewing brings a range of challenges that are more easily overcome in person, notably around establishing rapport with interviewees which is essential for in-depth qualitative interviewing and the lack of non-verbal cues (Stephens, 2007). However, as Burnham et al. (2008: 234) point out, it is possible to exaggerate the extent to which real rapport can be developed in a single interview, whether face-to-face or not. Such disadvantages do not necessarily add up to a case against telephone interviewing. Overall, the benefits of being able to interview these participants compensated for these shortcomings, and there was not a noticeable difference between the sorts of responses gathered from the telephone interviews and those conducted in person. This was undoubtedly aided by the fact that most of the interviewees would have been experienced in this style of interviewing.

Having discussed how the data was collected, and from where, a final task is to outline how the process of analysis was approached. This was carried out via a thematic analysis, which is a very common (if somewhat poorly-defined) method of qualitative data analysis. A complete thematic analysis proceeds from identifying, analysing and reporting patterns as they occur across a particular data set, through the process of coding each item of data and then collating these codes into wider themes. This then allows for '[making] a judgement about the data in light of the theoretical framework' of the research (Burnham et al. 2008: 245). Thematic analysis is often used within other traditions: for example, Bernard and Ryan (2010) locate it within analytical approaches including narrative analysis, discourse analysis and grounded theory. However, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that it can be conceived as an analytic method in its own right – albeit one that is flexible enough to fit within a variety of theoretical frameworks. In using thematic analysis in this way, Braun and Clarke suggest that it is important to be clear about the theoretical approach underpinning the analysis. Many of the important features of this – for example, regarding epistemological concerns around what claims we can make of the data – are addressed in full in Chapter 2, and so will not be repeated here. However, there are a number of other choices and judgements that inform the analysis process that are worth briefly addressing and explicitly outlining (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 82-86).

The analysis for this thesis was problem-driven. It sought in the first instance to address a specific initial research question, outlined above, in identifying the key concepts that Conservatives use to inform and convey their approach to welfare, and the meanings and understandings that MPs attach to these. This then formed the basis for the subsequent analytical task of considering these in relation to historical variations of Conservative ideology, and the ways that these ideas are translated into practice. As such the coding process involved identifying a set of themes which, in this case, are analogous to these concepts. The themes that were judged to 'count' were those that occurred regularly in Conservative discussion around welfare (indicating some level of ideational significance), thus capturing something important in relation to the central research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 82). As the research was concerned with actors' interpretations of concepts, the analysis was conducted at a latent level. This is where the analyst 'starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations - and ideologies - that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data', as opposed to a semantic level where the analyst 'is not looking for anything

beyond what a participant has said or what has been written' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 84). Clearly, the latter approach would have been inconsistent with the research aims of this project as it would not take us beyond the 'naming' of concepts, into considering how they have been decontested.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the context within which the Conservative concern with this policy area has developed, beginning to identify a range of pressures that the party was responding to when Cameron won the leadership in 2005. These include its own legacy on welfare and social issues, changes in the political and social context brought about by New Labour, the challenges of 'modernisation' in relation to party management, the on-going electoral imperative, and specific policy problems. All of these are essential factors in understanding the response of the Conservative Party to social issues in 2005 and throughout the following decade, and these are explored further in Chapters 4 to 7 of this thesis. It has also outlined the contribution of this thesis to existing research on the Conservatives and conservatism, and political parties and ideology more broadly.

The theoretical angle from which this task is approached emphasises the role of ideas in understanding decisions, specifically paying attention to the way that the ideas of Conservative elites provide 'points of access' to the densely-structured political, economic and social context within which strategies are formulated and re-formulated. This grounds the analysis firmly in the 'real life' of the Conservative Party, in relation to governing context. To carry this out, the thesis deploys an innovative combination of the SRA and the morphological approach to ideologies in understanding Conservative ideational development. In doing so, it makes a theoretical contribution to the study of ideas and ideologies in political life (see Chapter 2).

The depth of analysis contained in this research, and the policy area-focused angle from which it approaches the topic, means that it also makes a substantial and original empirical contribution that complements much of the existing scholarship on the Conservative Party. By considering an entire area of policy in detail, the analysis contained here aims to understand the ideas informing this on a deeper level to much of this existing work, which has often engaged with policy in a more limited sense owing to variations in focus (see Chapter 3). In turn, this research

significantly adds value by bringing a different perspective to bear on understanding the ideology of the Conservative Party (since ideas related to this policy area pertain to much wider issues than welfare policy), and provides a nuanced account of how, and why, Conservative ideology has developed in the way that it has. Finally, its empirical conclusions are illuminating beyond the immediate topic at hand, providing a detailed illustration of the role and application of ideas in political life, and the differing contextual factors that have influenced this in the context at hand.

Overall, the thesis argues that ideologically, the Conservative Party was very much socially 'conservative' when Cameron took the leadership, and it remains so after the 2015 election. Given the narratives of change and 'modernisation' that have surrounded Cameron's leadership, this is perhaps surprising, but socially conservative perspectives on individuals, the state and society have been more, not less strongly emphasised as the decade has worn on. This is significantly due to the ideological framework within which 'modernisation' was conceived, developed and implemented, which was recognisably Thatcherite. In turn, the pressures of governing in particular have forced a retreat from the more innovative aspects of the party's approach to social issues that some Conservatives began to articulate in opposition, and clearly hoped would come to fruition in government. Instead, what we have seen between 2005 and 2015 is a strong re-assertion of Thatcherite social conservatism.

Chapter 2
The Strategic-Relational Approach and ideological morphologies

2.1 Introduction

The accusation of 'having an ideology' or being motivated by ideas is often used in a pejorative sense in political argument. This is particularly notable in relation to the Conservative Party. Throughout much of its recent history it has often sought to deny the status of 'conservatism' as an ideology, instead presenting a commitment to guiding principles of pragmatism or 'common sense' in opposition to this. This tendency is no less prevalent in contemporary British party politics: acknowledging one's ideological influences is, it seems, deeply unfashionable and perceived as electorally unappealing (see Chapter 3).

However, the central theoretical claim of this thesis is that ideas matter, both in informing decision-making and governing strategies in the shorter-term, and in constraining or enabling longer-term policy trajectories. Decisions are indicative of the ideas and perceptions of those who make them, and this is no less applicable to Conservatives than to those of other political persuasions which are perhaps more easily identified with the concept of ideology. It is also the case that decision-making with regard to policy does not occur within a vacuum: perceptions of other, perhaps competing priorities will impact on the process, affecting ideas around the policy area in question and shaping eventual outcomes. This chapter is dedicated to supporting these premises and explaining how they are deployed in informing this study, which requires exploring the ontological and epistemological assumptions sustaining this position. These are fundamental questions of what the nature of 'reality' or the social and political world is, and what we can know about it (Furlong and Marsh, 2010). Addressing these issues is the object of this chapter, which provides a theoretical foundation for the remainder of the thesis.

The first section of the chapter introduces the basis of the theoretical approach of the thesis, which is the Strategic Relational Approach (SRA) as developed by Colin Hay. The SRA points towards the role of actors' ideas in understanding political outcomes, alongside an appreciation of the way that these ideas may be adjusted or re-evaluated in relation to contingent contextual events. Ideas are thus intrinsically connected with 'real life' – they shape, and are shaped by, the

context within which parties operate. Through this, ideas are implicated in actors' capacity for strategic action, meaning that ideational factors are allocated a central role in understanding outcomes. However, the chapter suggests that while the SRA effectively illustrates the centrality of ideas in understanding political outcomes, it is not so effective in theorising the process of ideational change itself. In seeking to understand the relationship between ideas and political life, this seems to be an important step, yet it is one that Hay omits. The second section of the chapter suggests a means of ameliorating this weakness. It introduces Michael Freeden's morphological approach to ideologies as a means of understanding ideational change which can be combined with the SRA to produce a comprehensive theoretical framework for this thesis. This can be used to investigate the extent of change and the role of the ideas in this, the ideological orientation of change, and the level at which this change occurs, whether ideologically substantive or more superficial. Finally, the third section discusses how this is applied and utilised within this thesis, including further discussion of the central research questions to be investigated.

2.2 Ideas, context and political action

Justifying the central theoretical claim underpinning this thesis regarding the significance of ideas in explaining and understanding political outcomes necessitates exploring the ontological and epistemological assumptions sustaining this position, in relation to other opposing or partly-opposing positions. The starting point for this is considering the relationships between structure and agency, and ideational and material factors in political analysis. Hay notes: 'whether in sociology, social and political theory, political science or, now, international relations, the tendency has been to keep separate the twin conceptual pairings structure/agency [and] material/ideational.' Challenging this tendency, he suggests that: 'the issues of structure and agency, the ideational and the material cannot be separated and should not be "bracketed"' (2001). This is the basis of Hay's development of Bob Jessop's SRA (1996; 1990) in his seminal 2002 work *Political Analysis*. This work informs the theoretical claim of the significance of ideas within this thesis, and is the basis of the discussion in this section.

Questions of structure and agency (or 'context and conduct') refer to the relationship between the individual, and the social context in which they exist. Fundamentally, these questions concern 'the extent to which political conduct shapes and is shaped by political contexts' (Hay, 2002: 89), or how far individuals are free to act in accordance with their own desires, in pursuit

of individually or collectively-defined goals. This is the issue of 'agency', referring to action or political conduct. In this context agency is usually associated with deliberative action: the agent is conceived as both rational and capable of reflexivity, and as motivated with respect to particular intentions or preferences (Giddens, 1984: 5-8). Conversely, 'structure' refers to 'the setting within which social, political and economic events occur and acquire meaning', and implies some kind of ordering or 'patterning' of social and political behaviour (Hay, 2002: 94; Giddens, 1984: 16-17). Therefore addressing the relationship between structure and agency requires consideration of the extent to which actions are constrained, enabled, or rendered more or less likely by the existence of social conventions, norms or institutions – and, conversely, how such structures are shaped and re-shaped by political conduct.

The nature of this relationship – and of the intrinsic nature of both 'structure' and 'agency' - has become a central topic of debate within political science, reflecting its status as 'something of a cottage industry throughout the social sciences' more widely (Wendt, 1987: 338).[3] Yet, as Hay acknowledges, the structure-agency debate is 'not a "problem" to which there is, or can be, a definitive solution'. This is because each position in the debate rests on ontological assumptions regarding the nature of social and political reality. These cannot be resolved via appeals to evidence, as a solvable empirical problem could be, and to suggest that this is possible is to 'conflate the empirical and the ontological' (2002: 90). For example, it is possible for those with differing stances on the relationship to identify and agree sets of empirical observations that lead up to an event, while nonetheless disagreeing considerably on the relative importance of structural and agential factors within these. These are claims that cannot be adjudicated empirically (see also Hay, 2009a; 2009b). As such, structure-agency (or context-conduct) is 'not so much a problem as a language by which ontological differences between contending accounts might be registered' (2002: 91).

The idea of a largely unfettered agency is perhaps appealing (particularly, as is evident in later chapters, in relation to the topic of this thesis and the capacity of individuals to shape their own life paths). It suggests individual control, free will, and the corresponding absence of constraints.

[3] Hay (2002: 89-115) and McAnulla (2002) provide overviews of the contemporary nature of the debate and positions within it.

This leads to the idea that the particular lifestyles that people lead, and the positions that they achieve, are a result of their individual choices. The other extreme – a fatalist approach in which life unfolds according to some preordained path, determined in this case by independent social structures which allow little or no room for human agency – potentially leads to quite bleak conclusions for both the topic at hand and more broadly (Gamble, 2000: 12-14). More pressingly, neither of these provides particularly satisfactory explanations for behaviour considered independently (Gamble, 2000: 17). Instead, the very existence of the structure-agency debate suggests:

> That human agents and social structures are, in one way or another, theoretically interdependent or mutually implicating entities. Thus, the analysis of action invokes an at least implicit understanding of particular social relationships (or 'rules of the game') in which the action is set - just as the analysis of social structures invokes some understanding of the actors whose relationships make up the structural context. It is then a plausible step to believe that the properties of agents and those of social structures are both relevant to explanations of social behaviour. (Wendt, 1987: 338)

The implication of this is that positions within the discussion of structure-agency do not need to fall squarely on one side or the other and, as noted below, such positions have become less prevalent in recent years. Neither, however, is resolving the theoretical debate a matter of deciding how great a proportion of the explanation to allocate to either side, as Hollis and Smith point out (1991). Rather, the beginnings of a social ontology such as that contained in Wendt's statement above constitutes a 'general statement of the manner in which agents are believed to appropriate their context and the consequences of that appropriation for their development as agents and for that of the context itself' (Hay, 2002: 113). The ontological position taken in this respect will indicate which aspects of explanation should be emphasised, in turn suggesting suitable areas of investigation and informing the methods that are appropriate for doing this (Hay, 2002: 95-6).

The limitations of theoretical positions that rely heavily on either structural factors (structuralist approaches) or agential factors (intentionist) approaches have been widely discussed.[4] In short, the central theoretical criticism of these is that 'for structuralists, structure determines agency,

[4] Hay (1995) offers a review.

and for intentionalists, agency causes structure'. This essentially reduces structure to agency and vice-versa, leaving little that is either theoretically or analytically productive or useful (Hay, 2002: 116). This led to the development of a body of work supporting moves towards a theoretical and analytical 'middle ground' (Adler, 1997). This includes the SRA, which seeks to explain 'structure in relation to action [and] action in relation to structure' while retaining some level of separation between the two (Jessop, 2001: 1215), as well as Anthony Giddens' 'structuration theory' (1984). It also includes a further significant approach, in the morphogenetic/critical realist position associated with Margaret Archer (2000; 1995; 1986).

All three approaches share a common goal, in theorising the relationship between structure and agency whilst attempting to avoid falling back on mono-causal understandings of political outcomes, thus seeking to avoid the pitfalls of both structuralist and intentionalist explanations. However, the conceptualisation of the status of and relationship between structure and agency differs, notably between the critical realist positions and the SRA, as recent debate has illustrated (Hay, 2005; McAnulla, 2005). Hay proposes that critical realist approaches support an ontological dualism between structural and agential factors, in maintaining that both play a role in explanation, and also that both 'exist' and cannot be conflated: there is a 'real world' that exists independently of actors' cognition of it (Hay, 2002: 24). The SRA, while falling into the same broad category of approaches to structure and agency, differs in its ontological conception of structure from the critical realist position.

Hay's position is that 'structure' and agency are not ontologically separable. This forms Hay's central contribution to constructing a theory of structure and agency that fully overcomes the dualism between the two (and thus avoids claims that either is conceptually prior to the other). As King (1999: 201) notes, one of the major points of Archer's work has been 'the rejection of any social theory which threatened to conflate society and the individual, or structure and agency'. Her position shifted from referring to the divide as purely analytical (1989), to explicitly differentiating between the two ontologically (2000; 1995) and, crucially, suggesting that 'structures pre-exist agents (or subjects)' (Hay, 2002: 124). Hay's criticism of this follows King (1999), in suggesting that Archer's position presents a rather individualistic perspective on the morphogenetic sequence, or the way in which structures are transformed or reproduced through action. King argues that Archer arrives at 'the sociological conclusion of the existence of a social

structure from the perspective of a single individual' (1999: 217). While this seems to 'capture well the practical consciousness of engaging with a densely structured social and political environment' (Hay, 2002: 125), it erroneously leads to the conclusion that 'because I have no say over the conditions of *my* actions, the social conditions of actions are independent of *anyone* and exist autonomously' (King, 1999: 217, emphasis added). Had Archer 'de-centred her perspective to see that the constraint which I face is other individuals – and no less serious for that – just as I form some of the social conditions which mutually constrain these others, she would not have fallen into ontological dualism' (King, 1999: 217; Hay, 2002: 125-126). Structure or context is therefore understood as the product of human interaction and only exists insofar as it is understood and experienced by actors, neither pre-existing nor continuing to exist on a separate level to this.

Hay further contends that by insisting on the temporal dualism of structure and agency and the pre-existing character of structures, Archer's view (in contrast to the individualistic perspective from which it is derived) implicitly exhibits a somewhat limited role for agency which is framed as 'rather episodic, disjointed and discontinuous'. He argues that the impression of structure as 'distant, external and long-enduring' contrasts with a characterisation of agency as 'an ephemeral or fleeting moment'. This:

> Seems to imply a residual structuralism punctuated only periodically yet infrequently by a largely unexplicated conception of agency. This appears from the shadows and returns swiftly from whence it came, a perturbation or disruption in the otherwise pristine logic of structural reproduction. (Hay, 2002: 126)

Thus Hay proposes that such an approach can tell us little about the process of interaction between the two aspects of explanation. Instead, it reproduces a version of 'methodological bracketing' proposed by Giddens (1984: 288-93) in which it is possible to consider *either* conduct- or context-related aspects of a given situation. This results methodologically in a 'simple alternation between structuralist and intentionalist accounts' (Hay, 2002: 120) which fails to live up to the initial theoretical promise of the morphogenetic approach in helping us to understand the dialectical relationship between structure and agency.

In addressing these weaknesses, the SRA posits the ontological relationship between structure and agency as a duality, rather than a dualism, with the two concepts separable only as analytical devices. This, then, differs considerably from approaches such as critical realism which posit a separate realm of 'the real' even if we do not have unmediated access to it (McAnulla, 2005), and moves the SRA closer to some varieties of interpretivism (see Finlayson et al., 2004 for a review). For Hay: 'neither agents nor structures are real, since neither has an existence in isolation from the other - their existence is relational (structure and agency are mutually constitutive) and dialectical (their interaction is not reducible to the sum of structural and agential factors treated separately)' (2002: 127). Hay acknowledges that structures may serve as 'useful analytical abstractions' (2005: 40) that can aid our understanding of political outcomes (see also Hay, 2014). However, he maintains that 'it is important that this analytical distinction is not reified and hardened into a rigid ontological dualism' (2002: 127-128). Ultimately, it is this ontological separation within critical realism that leads us towards a conception of the relationship between structure and agency that is characterised by dualism, rather than duality. Instead, Hay suggests that we 'concentrate upon the dialectical interplay of structure and agency in real contexts of social and political interaction' (2002: 127).

The link between structure and agency in this understanding is the concept of strategy. Actors are presented as being strategic, capable of devising means of realising their intentions, and revising these as required. Hay argues that this, in itself, is illustrative of a dynamic relationship between actor and social context:

> To act strategically is to project the likely consequences of different courses of action and, in turn, to judge the contours of the terrain. It is, in short, to orient potential courses of action to perceptions of the relevant strategic context and to use such an exercise as a means to select the particular course of action to be pursued. On such an understanding, the ability to formulate strategy (whether explicitly recognised as such or not) is the very condition of action. (Hay 2002: 132)

Thus rather than looking at either 'structural factors' or 'agential factors' in understanding and explaining political action, Hay suggests that a more enlightening approach is to consider the relationship between *strategic action* on the one hand, and the *strategically selective context* within which that action is formulated, and on which it impacts. These are the key concepts within the SRA. The first implication of this is that not all outcomes are possible in any given

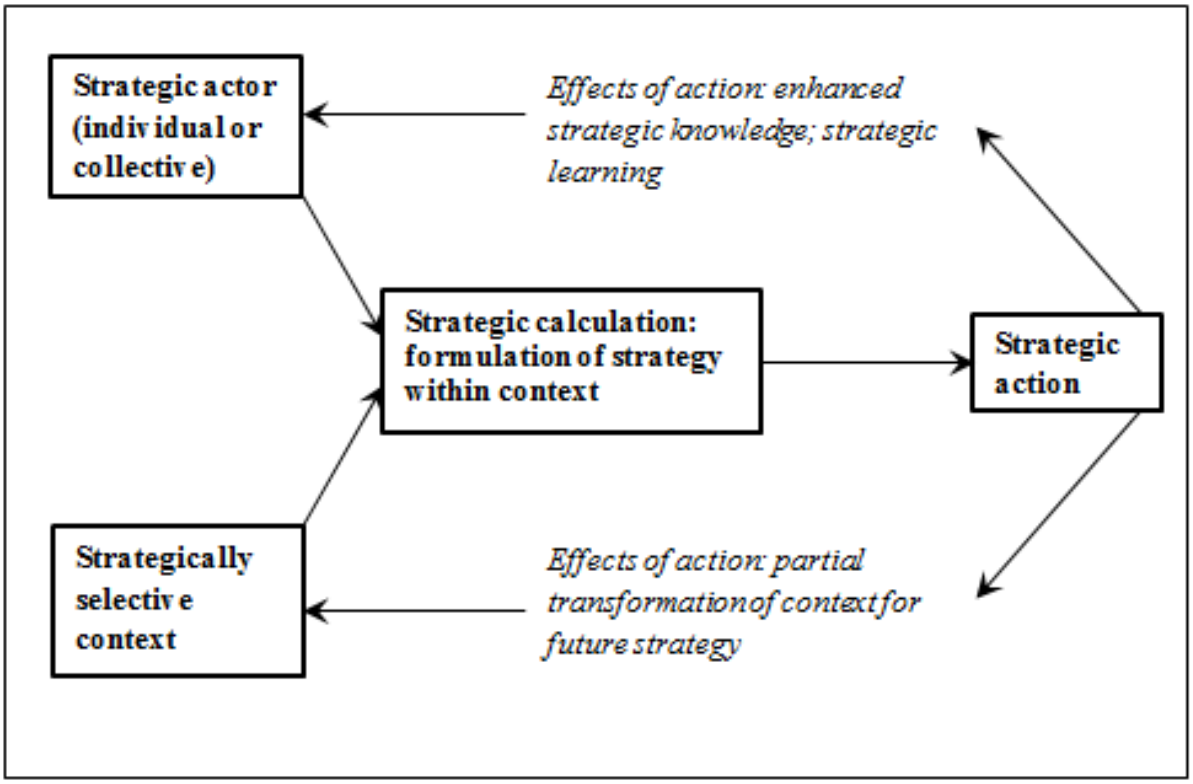
situation and, further, not all outcomes are equally likely. This is because 'the context itself presents an unevenly contoured terrain', which favours the adoption of certain strategies whilst mitigating against others. Hence, the SRA suggests that 'over time, such strategic selectivity will throw up a series of systematically structured outcomes'. Consequentially, 'while the outcome of any particular strategic intervention is unpredictable, the distribution of outcomes over a longer time frame will exhibit a characteristic regularity' (Hay, 2002: 129-130). This is represented diagrammatically on the following page.

However, it can be seen that faced with apparently similar contexts, actors do not always chose the same strategic courses of action each time. This will, to some extent, reflect subtle differences within the terrain facing each actor: one significant benefit of the SRA is that it is flexible enough to accommodate such change in context. However, even within a strategic context that is ostensibly the same, and between actors facing similar challenges, actors still do not necessarily adopt the same strategies: indeed, if they did, this would render the SRA deterministic, leading us towards predictive, rational choice-like models of political behaviour. To shed light on why certain strategies are selected over others by specific actors, Hay makes the link with another set of conceptual tools. These are considerations of the relative significance of, and relationship between, material and ideational factors.

Material and ideational questions consider the extent to which outcomes can be understood in relation to the interests of actors, or to their beliefs and ideas, or through some form of interaction between the two. Hay identifies three broad positions on this issue, framed in terms of whether, or the extent to which, ideas should be accorded a causal role in political analysis, independent of material factors (2002: 205-208). These are idealism, including postmodernism and some forms of interpretivism; materialism, including rational choice theorists and realists; and constructivism, including constructivists and critical realists. Idealism and materialism both imply a relatively simple relationship between the ideational and the material, respectively identifying ideas and material factors as dominant. These are analogous to the simpler positions on structure and agency, discussed above. Critical realism and constructivism both rest on a dialectical understanding of the relationship, with a further distinction between 'thin' constructivism and critical realism which 'prioritise material factors and causal logics', and 'thick' constructivism which 'prioritises ideational factors and constitutive logics' (Hay, 2002:

206). The significance (or lack of) accorded to ideas in political analysis, and within sub-sets of these positions, varies widely and remains contested.

Diagram 2.1: Structure, strategy and agency in the strategic-relational approach



Source: Hay (2002: 131)

Traditionally, the study of non-material factors such as ideas as a factor in understanding political action has received comparatively little attention within politics as a discipline. Partly, this is due to the materialist perception that ideas are 'epiphenomenal' (Berman, 1998: 16): they are simply the consequence of material factors which can be observed and analysed separately. Berman (1998: 17) cites Marx as the most famous proponent of this belief; more recent examples include Goldstein and Keohane (1993) and North (1990). This represents a softening of an 'aggressive and assertive' behaviouralist stance (Farr, 1995: 202), based on a rigidly positivist account of political science in which 'the material circumscribes the realm of the real': hence, there is no distinction between appearance and reality (Hay, 2002: 207). Despite this softening, both approaches suggest that since it is essentially the material that is the cause of political outcomes (whether directly or through influencing actors' ideas), ideas are not worth studying in their own right (Blythe, 1997). This is linked to methodological concerns, similarly connected to

a positivist approach to studying politics, which is that: 'political scientists prefer to study things they can see, measure, and count, and ideas seem the opposite – vague, amorphous and constantly evolving' (Berman, 1998: 16, see also Converse, 1964). Finally, there is a concern that an over-emphasis on the significance of ideas in explaining events leads to a form of voluntarism or idealism: indeed, this was a charge that Jessop was keen to refute in framing the SRA (1990: 265-266; see also Hay, 2002: 208).

It is worth briefly exploring the accusation of voluntarism and idealism in ideas-focused approaches to political analysis in more depth. This is not a charge that has been made of the SRA as much as it has of interpretivist theory: specifically, the approach associated with Mark Bevir and Rod Rhodes (2005). Critical realists including Marsh (2009) and McAnulla (2006) contend that in rejecting the idea of a 'real' structural realm separable from the ideational, such approaches imply that there is little to prevent actors from acting exactly as they wish, leading to an idealistic account of political action. The interpretivist approach explicitly rejects the concept of structure itself on the basis that it is excessively rigid (Bevir and Rhodes, 2005: 175-176). As Hay points out, this is something of a misreading of interpretivism. The concept of 'situated agency' within Bevir and Rhodes' work implies an appreciation of the extent to which actors' ideas, and hence their actions, are embedded in ideational contexts or 'traditions'. Hence they are subject to considerable constraint (Hay, 2011: 177-178). The SRA, despite also placing great emphasis on the importance of ideas in understanding action, provides a fuller response to such criticisms and is therefore better insulated from them. This is due to its self-conscious accommodation with the analytical utility of the concept of structure and, crucially, the way that beliefs develop and acquire resonance *within particular institutional contexts* (Hay, 2011: 179-180). This is situated alongside an understanding of the significance of ideational contexts, effectively and clearly linking the development of beliefs to institutions external to actors themselves. Of course, this is not fundamentally incompatible with an interpretivist approach: however, it is developed much more fully within the SRA.

As with the relationship between structure and agency, Hay suggests that the relationship between the material and the ideational is dialectical (Hay 2002: 101). Thus, 'just as structures and agents do not exist in isolation, so too the material and the ideational are complexly interwoven and mutually interdependent' (Hay, 2001). Moreover, dealing with questions of the

material and ideational necessitates dealing with structure and agency, and vice-versa. This relates to the point raised above, concerning how actors formulate strategic actions. Hay warns against assuming that 'strategic actors have a fairly direct and unmediated access to the contours of the terrain they inhabit, such that they can effectively "read off" the likely consequences of their actions', finding this to be a 'most dubious premise, akin to the perfect information assumption much beloved of neoclassical economists and many rational choice theorists' (2002: 209). This tendency can be found within some of the literature relevant to this thesis, notably Bulpitt's 'statecraft' account of Thatcherism (1986) which rather over-estimates the extent of knowledge of the consequences of actions held by the politicians involved (Stevens, 2002; Buller, 1999). As long as one rejects this premise then it implies a central role for ideas within the structure-agency relationship. The issue of contingent interpretation and re-interpretation of context in pursuit of goals (as opposed to forming a 'grand plan' and then enacting it regardless of intervening events) becomes central to enabling action.

The SRA offers a way of bringing this together, such that ideas 'provide the point of mediation between actors and their environment'. Therefore, Hay argues that ideas must be accorded an independent causal role in explaining political outcomes (2002: 210). It is important to restate here that Hay is not asserting that ideas are 'independent' or separable from material factors ontologically, but that they are not epiphenomenal. In later work, Hay clarifies that he does not suggest that ideas assert an effect 'in isolation from, or independently of, other material factors', rather, they are 'not reducible to such material factors' (Hay, 2004: 144, 162). In other words, ideas and their effects are worthy of investigation in their own right if we are to explain outcomes. As with structure and agency, Hay is here arguing for the analytical utility of separating ideas and material factors in explaining outcomes.

Before continuing, it is worth noting that there is perhaps an issue in claiming that ideational and material factors are only separable analytically, yet awarding one an 'independent causal role' at the expense of the other. Analogously, Hay's own reasoning suggests that any claim for an 'independent' role for structural or agential factors would appear suspect within a theory that emphasises the dialectical relationship between the two. This assertion therefore moves away from the dialectical approach that Hay purports to illustrate, towards a more uni-directional analysis of the relationship between the ideational and the material. In turn, this suggests more

than an analytical separation between the two sets of factors – which is not compatible even with Hay's clarification on this point, outlined above. Marsh (2009) suggests that a solution to this might be to similarly allocate a separate causal role to material factors, but this again would harden the distinction between the two and move away from the ontological position underpinning the SRA. As discussed below, it is tenable to argue for the analytical priority of ideational factors in understanding outcomes, but extending this into claiming a causal role independent of the material appears theoretically inconsistent.

Hay argues that interrogating the ideas and assumptions underpinning strategic action is essential to understanding political behaviour, since 'actors behave the way they do because they hold certain views about the social and political environment they inhabit'. This is an argument for the analytical priority of ideas in understanding outcomes. As indicated above, the important point here is that such views cannot be reduced simply to context or assumed interests: they are prior, in that they shape actors' understanding and interpretation and provide a point of access to a 'densely structured context', as well as a means through which actors' continually re-negotiate and adjust to changes in context which may be outside of their direct control (Hay, 2002: 213). This underpins the claim that ideas play a causal role in determining action, and the analytical emphasis on ideational over material factors in understanding change in much of Hay's empirical work (2009c; 1999; 1996). Ultimately:

> How actors behave – the strategies they consider in the first place, the strategies they discount, the strategies they deploy in the final instance and the policies they formulate – reflect their understanding of the context in which they find themselves. Moreover, that understanding may eliminate a whole range of realistic alternatives and may, in fact, prove in time to have been informed by a systematic misrepresentation of the context in question. (Hay, 2002: 211)

It therefore makes sense to claim that if we wish to understand political actions, looking at ideational factors and the way that they continually inform, shape and re-shape these actions (or strategies) is the key. Empirically, this is also borne out in the observation that policy change is often preceded by changes in the ideas informing policy (Hay 2002: 166; Hall, 1993). Changes (or the lack of changes) in actors' ideas and their interpretations of given governing challenges or policy problems are dialectically related to the possibility of change in material circumstances, shaping the outcomes resulting from such and thus altering context itself, via strategic action.

Importantly, forming a strategic plan is not necessarily synonymous with actually achieving ones' goals at the outset. It is almost unfeasible that any plan would account for all of the complex challenges and barriers that actors will encounter along the way. These in themselves may prompt both reassessment of strategy and perhaps reassessment of the goals themselves.

Moreover, as the passage quoted above suggests, such ideational change has something of a cumulative nature, even if the material impact of it and indeed the level of ideational development itself at any one point in time is understood as modest and incremental (Hay, 2002: 163). Strategic development does not take place anew at clearly defined points in time, although there certainly may be events that lend themselves to promoting strategic re-assessment. However, even this occurs within the context of what has come before, which will already have served to embed (or de-legitimise) certain ways of approaching or understanding problems. As discussed above, this in turn impacts on a densely structured, strategically selective context, rendering some actions more feasible than others to particular actors. This does not discount the possibility of more fast-paced, intense change, such as that in periods of 'crisis' (Hay 2009a; 1999; 1996). However, it also draws our attention to the slower-paced, less dramatic process of ideational change that takes place between these moments and the way that this can contribute, cumulatively, to shaping future understandings and interpretations of context.

At this point, it is useful to summarise what the SRA tells us, and does not tell us about the role of ideas in political life. The SRA provides a convincing theoretical rationale for claiming that 'ideas matter' in understanding political outcomes. It does so by identifying ideational factors as the condition for action. These provide a point of access to context. They are a condition of formulating strategic actions, and hence are central to understanding these actions and the outcomes that result from them. Through this, the SRA can also direct our attention towards the process of change. It provides a basis for the more specific claim that changes in approaches to challenges or policy problems are informed by the ideas preceding these, thus indicating that ideational factors are a central area for analysis in understanding change and development. Conversely, this suggests that when analysing decisions or apparent change, it is possible to trace these back to actors' ideas.

What the SRA does not accomplish quite so effectively is explaining how these changes in the ideas informing action take place. In other words, it explains what ideas *do* but has little to say on what they are and therefore how they are constituted (Freeden, 1996: 47). Understanding this involves taking a step back from considering the role of ideas in outcomes, considering instead how ideational change itself occurs as precursor to this. This is surely an important step in fully theorising the relationship between ideas and political life, yet it is not one that Hay addresses in any great detail in either *Political Analysis* or his later work. This is perhaps due to the tendency to focus on ideational factors as having an independent causal role, which informs and drives his later analyses of the impact of these. It is addressed to some extent in his work around crisis, highlighted above, but the process of slow-paced ideational change – of ideological development without the pressured context of crisis - is largely unexplored. This is curious given Hay's insistence that such change should not be neglected, and forms an important element of our understanding of outcomes (2002: 156-163). Accordingly, the next section of this chapter begins to address this, outlining a means through which this ideational change can be theorised and mapped.

2.3 Theorising ideational change

A central point of the SRA is that ideas do not develop on a level separate from 'reality': they are embedded in context via the concept of strategic action. One implication of this is that ideas held by actors are interconnected: since actors cannot exist independently of context, and context is constituted by actors' collective strategic actions, so their ideas and strategies will overlap and combine in a multitude of ideational locations in pursuit of a range of varied goals. Even within an institution such as a political party, whose historical and institutional characteristics shape the goals and perspectives of its existing members, a number of overlapping goals and priorities will co-exist. These might include, for example, individual-level priorities such as attaining a cabinet post and running ones' own department successfully, short-term strategic issues such as constructing a winning electoral strategy, responding to external pressures or 'events' and the effect of these on agendas, and considering how these fit within longer-term issues, including policy programmes and constructing an enduringly successful 'statecraft' (Bulpitt, 1986). Within the study of party politics, the extent of complexity of context suggests that looking at one or more of these issues in isolation from each other will not lead to satisfactory explanations or understandings of outcomes, nor of the ideas underpinning these. Rather, it points towards

considering ideas collectively, as they develop in relation to context. One way of accomplishing this is through considering 'ideologies' as collections or clusters of interconnected ideas, which can support a range of different purposes.

'Ideology' is a contested concept with a wide range of possible useful interpretations, not all of which are compatible with one another. A number of these interpretations point towards a pejorative definition of the term. Ideologies are commonly conceived as closed, totalitarian ways of thinking, impractical and unsuitable as guides for political action owing to the inflexibility resulting from this (Freeden, 2003: 1-2; 2006a). As such, ideologies might be understood as somewhat divorced from everyday life (Minogue, 1993): an ill-suited attempt to impose an abstract, rigid blueprint or plan over a constantly changing and nuanced reality. Within such an outlook, no one would readily describe their own thinking as ideological because ideologies are then readily conceptualised as biased or unyielding. As such, 'opponents have ideologies, whereas "we" are characterized by principles, pragmatism or common sense' (Eatwell, 1999: 2). This has become the 'everyday' understanding of ideology, and it is the way that the term is commonly deployed in political argument. However, as should be clear from the preceding discussion, this is not a particularly useful or accurate way of theorizing ideologies or the role of ideas in understanding political action.[5]

This then leads to into the question of what ideology is, and what it is not. Theoretical studies of ideology often broadly concur with the SRA, in suggesting that the practical antipathy towards the concept of ideology obscures what is an important factor in understanding political action and outcomes (Eagleton, 1991; McLellan, 1995; Freeden, 1996, 2003; Eatwell, 1999). This is on the basis that the rigid, doctrinaire conception of ideology outlined above is far too narrow. Along similar lines to Eatwell, above, Eagleton suggests that the common usage of the term 'ideology' is a means of dismissing the viewpoints of political opponents as stemming from a 'schematic, inflexible way of seeing the world', tinged with a hint of fanaticism. This is set against one's own 'modest, piecemeal, pragmatic wisdom' (Eagleton, 1991: 4-5). What the 'everyday' conception fails to take into account is the centrality of ideas and preconceptions in

[5] The characterisation of ideologies as rigid and dogmatic, however, is important to understanding the Conservative relationship with the concept of ideology. This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

informing action, as well as the interaction between theoretical assumptions and ideas, and policy practice and outcomes. This means that the content of ideas may evolve as they are tested against reality. The main point here is that ideologies, even while suggesting some structuring of beliefs, need not be understood as dogmatic or fixed. Rather they are flexible, evolving systems of thought that cannot exist independently of either the social, economic and political context in which they are deployed by political actors, or of actors themselves.

Michael Freeden offers a fuller understanding of ideology that is counter to the pejorative perception, suggesting that ideologies are far more varied and flexible configurations of ideas than is suggested in the common usage. For Freeden, ideologies are: 'those systems of political thinking, loose or rigid, deliberate or unintended, through which individuals and groups construct an understanding of the political world they, or those who preoccupy their thoughts, inhabit, and then act on that understanding' (1996: 3). This suggests that ideologies are inherently action-focused: indeed, the systems of beliefs embodied in them are presented as a necessary condition of action. It also, as noted above, draws our attention to the interconnectedness of ideas, actors and contexts, and in doing so emphasises the role of actors in interpreting, re-interpreting and applying ideas. On this basis, the understanding of ideologies deployed by Freeden, and the significance of ideational factors as theorised by Hay overlap considerably and appear consistent with one another. However, if the notion that ideologies can be defined by rigidity and the presence of specific, clearly defined means and ends is being discarded, then there needs to be another way of identifying an ideology as such. Otherwise it is not much more than a loose gathering of perhaps vaguely connected, but perhaps more or less random ideas. This ceases to have much analytical value in terms of understanding the relationship between ideas at different points in time and the way that these impact on outcomes, and hence is of little use in understanding the process of ideational change and outcomes.

Freeden's major contribution to the study of ideologies is to argue that political ideologies display a recognisable structure or 'morphology' (1996). This aspect of definition is in addition to more commonly cited attributes. These include political ideology as the ideas, beliefs and opinions of a significant social group which seeks to compete over plans for public policy, reflecting both their socially constructed and political nature (Freeden, 2003: 25-32; McLellan, 1995). Freeden proposes that the structure of any ideology consists of a core of concepts,

surrounded by adjacent and peripheral concepts. The arrangement of these concepts, and their relative significance, denotes the ideological family to which any particular manifestation of ideology belongs. Freeden uses the analogy of furniture in a room, which Seawright paraphrases, suggesting that: 'if on entering the room we see that tradition, order and authority are elaborately presented while equality is hidden under the bed then, for Freeden, we are looking at a version of a Conservative room' (2010: 29). The precise nature of Conservative morphology is discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Freeden suggests that all ideologies contain interpretations of the main political concepts – liberty, equality, rights, justice, power and democracy – somewhere within their morphologies. Within these concepts there are a range of sub-concepts and categories. Therefore Freeden proposes that the concept is the individual unit of analysis in any study of ideology. Importantly, these concepts do not have fixed and immutable meanings. There may well be a common, broadly understood and accepted meaning attached to each concept at a particular point in time but this does not constitute the only possible meaning: it is historically, culturally and contextually contingent. Concepts and the sub-categories that compose them are therefore essentially contestable, with each concept acquiring meaning through the way in which it is understood in relation to others within its ideological family (1996: 4).

Ideological families can be therefore be identified by their core concepts, 'without which a particular ideology simply would not continue to be that ideology' (Freeden, 2003: 11). Freeden does allow that more complex ideologies are more likely to be able to shift elements of their cores outwards in response to contextual change. However, it is unlikely that they could dispense with them altogether and still remain identifiable as such (1996: 83). Some ideologies have features that cannot be removed from their cores, otherwise they cease to be recognisable as examples of a particular ideological family. Returning to the furniture analogy, there are certain pieces of furniture in certain rooms that indicate the sort of room that we are looking at. Washing facilities signify a bathroom, for example. If these were removed entirely, it would be difficult to say that the room was still a 'bathroom'. Examples of such central pieces of ideological 'furniture' include liberty as a core concept of liberalism, or equality as a core concept of socialism (1996: 84). However, this does not entail that the meaning or decontestation of the core concepts is fixed. Analogously, we might strip out the bath and replace it with a shower –

perhaps due to some emerging concern with conserving water or saving money - which would alter the appearance but not the central purpose of the bathroom. Freeden proposes that like concepts elsewhere in the morphology, 'the core concepts of an ideology are non-specific, allowing for diverse interpretations to be attached to them through adjacent and peripheral concepts' (1996: 77). Therefore it is possible to find various 'types' within the same ideological family, as the outer layers of adjacent and peripheral concepts are shifted inwards and outwards, bearing on each other and the core and affecting the overall character of the ideology.

Adjacent concepts are essential in 'fleshing out' core concepts. The central core concepts have no meaning on their own and no implications for political action: without adjacent concepts, they remain 'barren' notions. Peripheral concepts then add a 'vital gloss' to core concepts (Freeden, 1996: 68). These are the 'more specific, detailed, concretized, and often ephemeral concepts, ideas and opinions that flesh out the main body of an ideological entity' (Freeden, 2003: 3). Freeden further divides peripheral concepts into two categories: the perimeter and the margin.

The perimeter 'reflects the fact that core and adjacent concepts are located in historical, geographical and cultural contexts'. Perimeter concepts are essential in maintaining the practical relevance of an ideology, because: 'for an ideology to relate to, and emerge from, those contexts, indeed to avoid being couched at levels of generality that have no relevance to social and political worlds, it must conceive of, assimilate, and attempt to shape "real world events"' (1996: 79). The marginal concepts' importance to the core of the ideology at any given point in time is emotionally and intellectually insubstantial; however, this does not preclude such concepts from assuming greater importance in the future, or having done so in the past, depending on circumstance (1996: 78). This is because the position of concepts within the structure of an ideology is not fixed, aside from within the core. Concepts may travel from a more central to a marginal position, and vice-versa. They may end up pushed out because they are inimical to the survival of the ideology – such as nationalisation as an element of socialism in Britain. Equally, they may be pulled inwards because other ideologies have forced them onto the political agenda, necessitating an accommodation and response from strategically-orientated actors.

This suggests that if we want to analyse change in ideas and the extent to which this change is either superficial or more substantive, it is with the outer layers of concepts that we need to be

begin, since these are where such changes are likely to become evident. This is discussed further in the following section. However, prior to this it is necessary to further elucidate how concepts are understood and, crucially, how they relate to both one another other and the context in which they exist.

Given the contested nature of ideological concepts, an ideology is therefore further defined as a configuration of decontested meanings of different political concepts. Its identity is determined by the 'rotation of each participating concept through a range of meanings held vis-à-vis the similarly held, or decontested meanings of every other concept'.[6] This is affected by the 'location secured by a political concept within the ideological framework' (Freeden, 1996: 83): core concepts, for example, exert a greater influence on adjacent concepts than do peripheral concepts, which are in turn unlikely to affect any significant alteration on the core even though they may form a contingently important part of the perimeter. This can account for the stability of ideological cores whilst still allowing for a significant degree of variation between different manifestations of ideological families. Further, while the meaning of a concept may be decontested within an ideology or family of ideologies at a particular time, this does not mean that the decontested meaning becomes immutable outside of the ideological framework. As McAnulla suggests, 'similarities in language may obscure quite different philosophies' (2010: 306). Therefore, while opposing ideologies can appear to use the same concepts and language, on closer investigation it may become clear that they have attached different interpretations and meanings to these.

Consequentially, we should not assume that the arrival of a 'new' concept (or even a few new concepts), likely on the periphery, is evidence in itself of substantive ideological change, even if it seems to form a substantial part of a party's contemporary agenda. Neither, therefore, is this necessarily indicative of a shift in strategy or the understanding of a problem. Indeed, if the broader ideological structure that a concept is defined in relation to remains fundamentally unaltered then such change is unlikely, but this in itself is instructive in helping us to understanding subsequent decisions and outcomes. What is required to understand the outcomes resulting from such an apparent shift in ideas is a much more detailed consideration of the

[6] See also Bevir (2000) on the 'spill-over effect' of ideological concepts.

decontestation of these concepts, their relationship to broader ideological perspectives, and the extent of ideational change that they entail and enact. This, in turn, aids in our understanding and analysis of the outcomes associated with this process.

As Hay's account makes clear, the relationship between 'ideology' as an input and 'policy' as an output is complex. Certainly, it cannot be conceived as linear, with the latter read off as a direct consequence of the former, in part because of the multitude of different strategic ideational concerns and pressures that feed into formulating the final 'product'. In fairness this is outside of the remit of Freeden's work, and we would not necessarily expect to find such an account here. What Freeden's understanding of ideologies can do is contribute to filling the 'gap' in the SRA, which is the theory of how ideational change occurs within a given context or period of time. We can infer from the SRA that it is unlikely that all ideational developments are of the same significance and magnitude. However, by omitting a discussion of the process of ideational change, Hay does not provide us with a basis for distinguishing between those shifts that do produce significant changes in context and those that do not. This omission also then leaves ideologies curiously detached from their context, as it provides little in the way of theoretical illumination regarding the process of continuity and the shaping effects of previous ideas, outcomes and learning processes on present strategies, despite an acknowledgement that the impact of these ideational factors is cumulative. Without an adequate conception of ideational change itself, the extent to which the SRA can provide a comprehensive means of analysing ideologies is limited. Freeden addresses this effectively, within a theory of political ideologies that exhibits many similarities with the SRA in its treatment of ideas and their significance in informing action. As such, the following section discusses the integration of the two approaches as the theoretical basis for this thesis.

2.4 Application to analysing Conservative welfare politics

The subject of this thesis is Conservative Party ideology under the leadership of David Cameron between 2005 and 2015, analysed via a study of the party's approach to welfare policy. The Conservative approach to social policy has been widely identified as one of the central components of the 'modernisation' strategy through which Cameron aimed to decontaminate the Conservative brand. This would take place through 'changing their image, altering their rhetoric, and adopting a more socially inclusive approach' (Heppell, 2014: 155). A strong initial emphasis

on broad social issues, including poverty and an apparently new concern with 'social justice', has continued into government, and working-age welfare has been one of the most prolific policy arenas through which these have been developed.

Yet since 2005 the context in which these issues are situated has altered significantly, perhaps most so in relation to the financial crisis of late 2007, and the subsequent Conservative move into government with the Liberal Democrats. The direction of policy has perhaps not been what some early analyses might have anticipated (Dorey, 2007). This has engendered a broad-ranging debate on how far the Conservative Party has substantively 'modernised' ideologically, usually in comparison to its Thatcherite past. Within this, a number of analyses raise questions regarding the extent to which the policies implemented in government reflect the Party's apparent shift in perspectives on these issues, or conversely indicate a lack of ideational development despite a rapidly shifting context (see Chapter 3). With this in mind, the central objective of this thesis is to consider the extent and nature of ideational change within the party since 2005, as well as the principal drivers of this, particularly given the emergence of some apparently antithetical early policy effects emerging from this supposedly modernised approach. In doing so, I combine the SRA with Freeden's morphological theory of ideologies.

The SRA directs us to view actors as rational, although not in the narrow sense that they are solely motivated by self-interest. It also rejects the idea that action can be boiled down to a clear set of separable, hierarchical goals - personal progression always taking precedence over the collective advancement of the party, for example (Hay, 2009b: 895). The personal pursuit of ministerial office cannot be separated from the imperatives of winning elections and good party management, which equally cannot be separated from more immediate policy objectives such as reducing public spending, alleviating poverty, or nurturing economic growth. All of these goals – and more – co-exist, with their significance varying temporally and between actors. Understanding the politics of welfare within the Conservative Party requires investigating the densely structured context in which this is situated and, crucially, actors' interpretations of this. This comprises not just the policy area itself but broader issues, particularly those around a more instrumental concern with electoral appeal which is intrinsic to modernisation. This, then, directs our attention towards different aspects of context, which are explored in Chapters 4 to 7 of this thesis.

It is worth re-emphasising that it is the issue of actors' *interpretation* of context that is central within the SRA as an analytical tool: politicians, in developing an approach to welfare, or any other area of concern, do not have unmediated access to and knowledge of the context in which they find themselves acting. While the context itself will render certain courses of action more favourable than others (increasing welfare spending in a time of increasingly stretched public spending may be untenable, for example, even if one might feel inclined to do so in other circumstances), actors rely on their own ideas as points of access to context in determining what is feasible, desirable and possible. Thus in understanding the development of Conservative welfare policy it is necessary to look at the ideas and perspectives of those closely involved in it. These contain important clues as to the understanding of issues around the policy area, and hence explanatory value for the policy solutions selected and implemented.

In considering ideological change in relation to a specific policy area, the empirical element of this thesis is very much grounded in the reality of Cameron's Conservative Party: how it has negotiated the changing context and, beyond this, what we can ascertain from this regarding the substantive extent and drivers of change and its relationship with conservative ideology. As discussed, the SRA does not really provide a means of adequately theorising this. Drawing on Freeden, it is suggested that change occurs, or becomes evident, at the perimeters of ideologies. It is here that 'the interchange between an idea and a practice' takes place, with the perimeter forming 'the fluid area where an ideological component is detailed enough to be translated into a practice, or where a practice is sufficiently regular and non-trivial to carry consequential ideological messages' (2003: 3-4). The concepts here, therefore, provide the crucial link between broader perspectives and tenets, and the real-life context in which political parties operate and within which ideas are applied, tested and (re)developed (Atkins, 2010: 410). Consequentially, indications of possible ideational change (however minor or major) are likely to appear via the concepts deployed at the perimeter which relate directly to the policy area itself. These may, or may not, denote change at the inner layers of adjacent concepts and the core.

This, then, suggests a starting point for analysing ideational change within the Conservative Party: it is necessary to *identify the concepts informing the Party's approach to welfare policy and the meanings and purposes attached to these*, in relation to one another. This in itself might

be quite helpful in understanding ideational change in some ways, even without considering the relationship of these concepts to the broader ideological morphology. Deploying 'new' concepts, or more accurately attempting to redefine existing ones in such a way that they fit with the wider ideological structure, might indicate that those within the party (and its leadership, in particular) perceive a change in the strategic context that they face and are attempting to adapt to this. We might investigate this, for example, through considering the Conservative Party's apparently renewed concern with poverty or the shift towards 'compassionate' or 'liberal' Conservatism, considering how these concepts are decontested in relation to one another, and to more enduring aspects of Conservative ideology. By examining the ideas informing such a perception of change and the purposes towards which this is orientated, it is possible to begin to analyse the drivers of change. Drawing on the SRA, we can then start to form a picture of the ideational factors informing the PCP's welfare politics. However, by breaking the 'whole' of Conservative ideology down into its component parts, as Freeden does, we can also begin to consider the substantive extent of change indicated by these identified concepts. This allows us not just to observe whether change has occurred, but to understand what sort of change we are looking at, and why.

If ideologies are conceived as monolithic, it might be tempting to view the consistent deployment of a 'new' or redefined concept as evidence of ideational change. Freeden concurs, after all, that change happens at the perimeter, when practices pertaining to core and adjacent concepts are 'endorsed, challenged or re-negotiated' (2003: 5). However, not all peripheral concepts enact substantive change on the wider structure and character of an ideology. This leads to uncertainty in distinguishing between substantive ideational change and the instrumental role of ideas: for example, in 'framing' or justifying policy (Blyth, 2001; Béland, 2007) or providing a broadly rhetorical sense of purpose and direction in terms of electoral appeal (Bulpitt, 1986). To overcome this, further consideration of how change can be theorised is necessary. The SRA suggests that contemporary ideas do not develop in a vacuum, unrelated to the ideas that preceded them, as does Freeden's morphological theory owing to its emphasis on relatively stable cores and the temporal shifting of concepts. In providing a contemporary 'point of access' to context, actors must draw on former ideas and experiences, constructing strategies in relation to the beliefs and understandings of issues embedded in these. This suggests that to understand the extent of change, our analysis needs to look back from the period of time in question (as well

as forward in considering the solutions proposed, discussed below), considering how these peripheral concepts relate to the broader structure of Conservative ideology.

Through considering the way that contemporary action orientated beliefs are framed or warranted by previous ideological systems (Moss and O'Laughlin, 2005), and placing the decontestation of contemporary concepts in the context of their relationship to more enduring ideas, it possible to situate Cameron's Conservative Party's ideology within the broader context of post-war Conservatism. This, then, can tell us what sort of 'Conservative' party we are looking at: 'how much' change has occurred and in which areas. Consequentially, this significantly improves our understanding of outcomes and the likely durability of change. As such, alongside identifying and analysing Cameron's Conservatives' usage of peripheral concepts, it is necessary to consider how these *relate to broader Conservative ideological traditions, interrogating the extent to which they subvert or re-constitute the character of these.* Essentially, this indicates the extent of change at the deeper core and adjacent levels, exploring the strategic considerations that have informed the adoption and deployment of particular peripheral concepts within the contemporary party. In forming an important part of the institutional context within which policy solutions are implemented, these perform a powerful shaping role on contemporary decision making, both constraining (or de-legitimising) or enabling (legitimising) certain course of actions.

Concurrently, however, the SRA reminds us of the need to avoid the assumption that outcomes can be understood as a direct result of actors' reading or understanding of a single task or priority: in this case, the need to construct a 'conservative' approach to perceived problems related directly to the welfare system. The perimeter concepts will pertain quite directly to this policy area, because perimeter concepts form a link between broader ideological perspectives and practice. However, ideas are not static: they may shift in importance, or evolve as they are incorporated into other elements of strategy, and they may be re-interpreted or transformed both in relation to this and developments in the context in which they exist. This is particularly important to bear in mind with regard to the translation of ideas into policy because there is an inevitably messy 'translation' process between the two, and strategies may be re-interpreted even as their policy manifestations are still being implemented. Moreover, the development of policy will be limited by what is considered feasible or desirable with the institutional and electoral

context. Hence, it is ‘not possible to explain policy practice and outcomes from ideological discourse alone’ (Moss and O’Laughlin, 2005: 180), as stopping with the two research areas above might suggest. In short, the translation of ideas around welfare into policy cannot be considered in isolation from the day-to-day business of party politics.

An account of the ideas and motivations underpinning the Conservative approach to welfare policy can give us some indication of the sorts of policies that we might expect to see introduced, the problems that might be emphasised, and ways that these problems might be understood. However, at this distance from the core, the amount of competing considerations and goals are likely to engender tensions within the approach. Ostensibly slight differences of emphasis on different concepts can have a significant influence on policies. For example, shorter-term considerations such as appearing ‘tough’ on benefit claimants because this plays well with the electorate might not sit easily alongside more substantive reform of the benefit system intended to produce behavioural change. Equally, wider priorities such as the need to reduce spending might serve to expose tensions on the purpose and impact of welfare spending itself, again leading to slightly differing solutions to identified problems even if the broad nature of the ‘issue’ is relatively uncontentious. These unresolved issues exist within the broader structure of ideas, but they become visible (and perhaps problematic) when they move from an ideational to a practical level. The outcomes reached here – which ideas are emphasised, and which become more marginal - have an impact beyond the party itself. This is because policy development tends to exhibit a level of path-dependency (Hay, 2002: 148-150) and the decisions of one government contribute to shaping both the context and the understanding of problems and goals that follows from this.

This indicates that we need to consider the deployment of concepts within policy itself. This requires analysing policy outcomes in detail in relation to the key concepts identified, considering how these are used and emphasised in relation to one another, and in pursuit of what strategic goals. The SRA is useful here as an analytical device which is capable of accounting for the complex, overlapping and perhaps contradictory influences on this process. This further adds to the understanding of the extent to which ideational change has occurred: we might, for example, identify that concepts that would appear to indicate change have only been utilised in a very limited fashion, suggesting that substantive change has not taken place. As such, a final

research area pertains to *the extent to which Conservative ideas on welfare have been implemented in policy, and how these ideas have been deployed in relation to competing strategic motivations.*

Although the main focus of this thesis is Conservative ideology and the development of ideas, it is far from being an abstract project. It considers the development of Conservative ideology within a specific policy area, illustrating the role of actors' ideas in driving political outcomes, mediated via the concept of strategic actions in pursuit of particular goals. In doing so, it adds to the understanding of the character and identity of David Cameron's Conservative Party, thus providing a basis for understanding future developments. The application of the SRA to this area allows consideration of a range of motivations, thus embodying an approach which is able to take into account both the *politics* and *policy* aspects of the development of welfare policy under Cameron and the interactions between these. Within this, Freeden's morphological approach to ideologies is used to inform the analysis of different levels of change, and the significance of this to broader Conservative ideology, thus allowing an assessment of how substantive and significant any change identified can be said to be. This allows for the development of a nuanced account of ideational change within the Conservative Party, not solely at the level of abstract ideas *or* outcomes, but taking into account both and thereby providing a comprehensive answer to the question of where Cameron's party sits within the broader traditions of Conservatism. Moreover, this analysis can inform our understanding of the wider situation of British party politics regarding the mediating role of ideas in parties' interactions with institutional context, and how context contributes to shaping goals and strategies.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has laid out the theoretical approach for this PhD, and the way that it will be applied to exploring the ideology of the Conservative Party, in relation to the development of welfare policy between 2005 and 2015. The approach combines Hay's SRA with Freeden's morphological understanding of ideologies, as a means of both mapping ideological development and ascertaining the broader extent, and nature of, ideational change. The SRA supports a central role for ideas in explaining political outcomes by utilising two key concepts: strategically selective contexts and strategic action. The idea of context as 'strategically selective' implies that certain courses of action appear more viable and realistic than others

within particular contexts (thus rejecting the notion of absolute agency): accordingly, as context changes, so may the course of action perceived as most suitable. 'Strategic action' refers to the idea that actors formulate plans or strategies in pursuit of certain goals, without having perfect knowledge of the context in which they find themselves acting: hence, this is how actors negotiate the terrain of their environment and thus play a part in shaping and re-shaping that environment. The perspective that actors cannot assume perfect knowledge of context or the results of their action is central in understanding the importance of ideas within the SRA. It is this which separates the SRA from highly intentionalist accounts of the political process which have sometimes characterised studies of the Conservative Party (Bulpitt, 1986).

The SRA also therefore suggests that actors' points of entry into strategic action are the ideas or ideological assumptions that they hold about what is possible, feasible and desirable in relation to the issue at hand (which, inevitably, will only form one part of a complex contextual terrain). Interrogating these ideas and their relationship with political context is of central importance to understanding political decision making. What the SRA does not do is effectively map the way in which ideologies themselves shift and change in relation to context: by not examining what ideational systems *are*, it leaves this under-explored. This, then, is where Freeden's approach can be combined with the strong explanation of the role of ideas in the SRA, drawing our attention to the internal means through which ideologies are composed and re-configured in relation to the perception of alterations in the strategic context. This then provides us with a strategy for analysing ideational development, considering this in relation to the central concepts that are deployed by the party in the time period under consideration, and the way that these relate to previous varieties of Conservatism. Combined, the two approaches offer a fuller means of understanding not just the role of ideas in outcomes, but the process of ideational development itself, firmly linked with the reality in which a political party exists.

The chapter also explored further the central research questions outlined in Chapter 1. These relate to the key concepts informing the Conservative Party's approach to welfare, and how these are decontestated in relation to one another; the way that these concepts relate to the wider structure of conservative ideology and the extent to which they reflect, subvert or re-constitute previous traditions, and the strategic application of these ideas in policy, alongside a consideration of the implications of this for the character of the Conservatives' conservatism.

These questions are derived from the Freeden/SRA framework, and drive the analysis of Chapters 4 to 7 of this thesis. To answer these fully, however, it is clearly necessary to first consider how previous ‘types’ of Conservatism, and the broader category of ‘conservatism’ as an ideology might be understood. This, then, is the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Conservatives, ideology and welfare state since 1945

We must have an ideology…The other side have an ideology that they can test their policies against, we must have one as well.

Margaret Thatcher (quoted in Heppell 2014: 72)

Mrs Thatcher was unique among British prime ministers in gaining the dubious accolade of having an 'ism', because none of her predecessors were so wedded to a set of abstract ideas.

Ian Gilmour MP (1992: 269)

3.1 Introduction

Under David Cameron's leadership, the Conservative Party has embarked on a process of reform of the welfare system, comprising significant cuts to spending and the re-structuring of several key benefits. It has been claimed that this approach is motived by 'ideology'. In the debate following George Osborne's first spending review, Labour's former shadow Chancellor Alan Johnson accused the Conservatives of carrying out spending cuts in accordance with their 'ideological objective[s]' (HC Hansard, 20 October 2010). Similarly, Labour's Ian Lavery MP claimed that the Conservative approach to welfare reform was emblematic of 'an ideological crusade to shrink the state' (HC Hansard, 3 April 2014). Disputing these charges, Conservatives have argued that their welfare reforms are driven by pragmatism and a willingness to make difficult, but necessary decisions in the national interest. For example, in relation to spending, Cameron stated: 'we are not doing this because we want to; there is no ideological zeal in doing this. We are doing this because we have to' (HC Hansard, 20 October 2010). His is supposedly 'a government led by people with a practical desire to sort out this country's problems, not by ideology' (Cameron, 2010a). This represents the continuation of a long-standing (although, with respect to Thatcherism, not entirely consistent) claim by the Conservative Party, and one associated with conservatism more broadly: being 'free' from ideological constraints, Conservative leaderships are able to choose between policy options on the basis of 'what works' in relation to the area of policy under consideration. This implies a neutral, objective approach to policy-making, which is isolated from other more political interests, including party management and electoral imperatives.

Considered in relation to the theoretical framework set out in the former chapter, this claim is suspect, both with respect to Cameron's Conservative Party and for previous Conservative leaderships. For the purposes of political argument, it conveys an image of the Conservatives as practical and realistic in comparison to a supposedly dangerously idealistic Labour opposition. However this misrepresents the fundamental role that ideas and ideological systems play in influencing political action and ultimately in shaping context. The SRA proposes that without ideas, politicians have no way of deciding what constitutes desirable and necessary goals, much less how to go about formulating means of reaching these, since all of these decisions are related to the on-going interpretation and re-interpretation of political context. The rejection of ideology by Conservatives (Thatcherism notwithstanding) has usually been based on a very limited conception thereof, adopted in part as a weapon against the more explicitly ideological character of its main opposition in the immediate post-war years. By use the SRA concerning the role of ideas in explaining outcomes and broadening our understanding of what constitutes an ideology to the more flexible conception proposed by Freeden, it becomes tenable both to view the Conservatives as an ideological party and to analyse its ideology through considering its actions.

The first task of this chapter, therefore, is to identify the ideological 'core' of Conservatism: essentially, what makes the Conservative Party 'conservative'. While a significant body of literature is now dedicated to exploring this, it remained one of the central challenges in analysing Conservatism at least up until towards the end of the Thatcher years. This is because the Conservative Party has appeared to adopt a number of very varied strategies and approaches to the major social, political and economic challenges that it has faced. The core therefore appears to be slippery and insubstantial, to the point that it is possible to conclude that it simply does not exist: Conservatism is perhaps better understood as an instinct or disposition, as many Conservatives have themselves preferred to suggest.

Following Freeden, the chapter proposes that this is because conservatism has a very limited core in comparison to progressive ideologies such as liberalism or socialism, which allows Conservative parties great flexibility in their governing strategies while still potentially falling under the umbrella of 'conservatism'. Conservatives have therefore been well placed to respond to, and exploit, significant changes in strategic context. All three of the manifestations of

Conservatism under consideration (One Nation, Thatcherism and 'Cameronism') share this ideological core – this is what makes them 'conservative' – but the location of adjacent and peripheral concepts around it varies due to these differences in context. This then forms a basis for discussing the contemporary decontestation of relevant adjacent and peripheral concepts around this core in Chapter 4, and for analysing the way that these relate to previous Conservative decontestations.

The second section of the chapter therefore considers the ideological changes and continuities between One Nation Conservatism and Thatcherism, which represents the Conservative Party's most conscious accommodation of ideology. It is argued that the two have more in common than is often suggested, not least by Conservatives themselves. Where they do differ significantly in relation to welfare, and social issues more broadly, is in their respective perceptions of the desirability of an interventionist state and perceptions of the proper limitations of this. However, it is emphasised that the difference is not so much a sharp dividing line but a drift towards supporting a more limited state, framed with reference to maintaining its authority and protecting individual freedoms, and maintaining a morally upstanding society. This is influenced by developments in the mid-1960s to late-1970s, which shook Conservative perceptions of the state's ability to maintain social order and promote economic prosperity. Of course, the extent of this drift was not unanimously supported by the entire PCP. There remained some Conservatives who were far less hostile to the state than the Thatcherite faction. However, unsurprisingly it was this latter faction that increasingly dominated the PCP under Thatcher's leadership.

This chapter makes sense of this development by considering it in relation to the context in which it occurred. It emphasises that the Party's turn towards what become known as 'Thatcherism' was not an abrupt shift. Rather, following the SRA understanding of change, it represented a process of strategic learning resulting from the perceived failure of One Nation Conservatism to adequately address new social and economic challenges, some of which were perceived to have been brought about by the actions and decisions of One Nation Conservatives with regard to social policy. The chapter then identifies elements of the shift that may continue to bear on the Party's thinking, notably the sharp rhetorical rejection of One Nation Conservatism by leading Thatcherites and the on-going implications of this for the state's role in welfare provision.

Overall the empirical chapters of this thesis argue that the developments of the Thatcher years prompted an approach to welfare that the Conservatives have built on in both opposition and government since 2005, particular concerning the proper role of the state. However, this was only beginning to take place in policy terms under Thatcher. While some major welfare reforms were implemented shortly prior to her leaving office, social security was very much an area of unfinished business for both Thatcher's and John Major's governments. Accordingly the second section of this chapter identifies some of the key ideas informing policy directions and the way that these were expressed, highlighting particularly the reasons for rejecting a 'One Nation', more statist approach to welfare provision. This rejection and Conservative Party's shift towards Thatcherism meant that a state-led approach to welfare policy ceased to be part of the strategically selective landscape in which the Party advanced ideas and formulated policy. In turn this helps to explain the dominance of Thatcherite thinking on welfare in Cameron's PCP, the lack of a strong One Nation alternative and the challenges (both cognitive and practical) inherent in moving away from Thatcherism, discussed in the forthcoming chapters.

Finally, as the third section of the chapter illustrates, the topic of the continuing influence of Thatcherite Conservatism, in particular, over the PCP has formed a major part of the academic literature and debate on the Conservative party since Thatcher herself left office. This has also been something that the Conservative Party itself has had to contend with, through the long process of 'modernisation'. The discussion in this section informs the analysis of the character of Conservative ideology under David Cameron's leadership in subsequent chapters, while also situating the contribution of this thesis within the wider literature on British Conservatism.

3.2 Conservatives and ideology: defining the core

'Thatcherism', as it came to be known, represented something of a departure for the Conservative Party from its usual political style, owing to the acceptance by the leadership of the significance of ideological motivations (Hall, 1983; O'Shea, 1984; Gamble, 1994). This is not least because Thatcher herself stressed the need for an ideology (cited in Heppell, 2014: 72) or 'grand plan' (albeit one informed by 'familiar common sense', rather than abstract political theory) to counter the prevailing ideas of the post-war consensus (Thatcher, 1993: 5). Even despite this, there is still evidence of a broad popular unwillingness to grant Thatcher's politics

the status of a sophisticated political ideology, as illustrated in Bale's (2015) analysis of media coverage following her death in 2013. Prior to this, the Conservative Party usually sought to deny that it is motivated by ideology – and the internal acceptance of the Conservatives as 'an ideological party' remains contentious (Gamble, 1996). Conservatives have 'historically been reluctant to provide blueprints of the good society', and this means that there is 'no agreed, definitive statement of conservative ideology' (Page, 2010a: 119). This rejection of ideology, identified with 'blueprints', dogmatism and the promotion of vested interests, is characteristic of both One Nation Conservatism (see, for example, Gilmour, 1992: 30-33) and of the critique of New Labour made by Cameron's Conservatives.

In place of ideology, pre-Thatcherite Conservatives often preferred to claim that they took a more pragmatic approach to politics, working with the grain of human nature and a 'slowly evolving social order, rather than coercive schemes designed by unrepresentative groups or those with special interests' (Page, 2010a: 119-120). The Labour Party has historically been more comfortable with such a conception of ideology as a force for radical action. If it were not, it could not have hoped to effect social change, since social democracy (and progressive ideologies more broadly) relies on the assumption that 'human reason and will are sufficiently powerful for us to be able to shape history in accordance with whatever ideals we may feel inspired to adopt' (O'Sullivan, 1999: 52). Conservatives tended to reject this assumption and were therefore often suspicious of such manifestations of ideology (O'Sullivan, 1999: 52-53). However, the rejection of this particular conception and understanding of ideology – in relation to both the particular character of social democratic ideology and a misrepresentation of ideology as dogmatism - does not equate to an absence of ideology in itself, nor indicate the irrelevance of ideational factors in determining the Conservative Party's practical negotiation of the context in which it operates.

A central task, therefore, is to identify the 'core' of Conservatism. One might start by looking at the word itself: as 'liberalism' suggests something about that ideology's prioritisation of liberty, perhaps the same could be said of conservatism. Andrew Vincent observes that there is a 'perennial debate on the relation between the ordinary and technical uses' of the term 'conservative' (1995: 56-7). The former, unsurprisingly, emphasises the importance of 'conserving' and resisting social change. This might initially appear attractive due to Conservatives' often cautious approach to disruptive social change. However, it ultimately

proves to be at odds with the claims of the Conservative Party to provide a pragmatic and flexible approach to governing, as well as the Party's apparent willingness to adjust to differing social and economic circumstances. As an illustration of quite significant shifts over a very limited time frame, for example, Green (2002: 172-191) discusses the shifts in Macmillan's pre- and post-war political economies, indicating a willingness on behalf of the Party to adapt. Maintaining a staunch and rigid defence of existing institutions or ideas is dogmatic and inflexible in itself. Despite being occasionally portrayed as 'stuck in the past' by its opponents, the Conservative Party in Britain has not sought to tear up existing institutions simply for the purpose of restoring previous order or regime for its own sake. As such, this everyday usage is unhelpful: it 'gives no indication about where a study of conservatism should begin, or about who should be included in it, or excluded from it' (O'Sullivan, 1976: ch.1).

A second approach involves identifying core tenets from different manifestations of Conservatism. A representative example of this approach is given by Seldon and Snowdon (2001) - who, as Garnett (2003: 110) notes, 'unusually for those who write on this subject…Have no obvious axe to grind'. Seldon and Snowdon propose that there are seven core tenets of British Conservatism that have 'consistently influenced Conservative thinkers and statesmen since the eighteenth century' (2001: 18). These are: 'a belief in the imperfection of human nature and the limits to the power of reason'; a belief in organic society and orderly change; a stable social order and framework of liberty; a limited role for the state; maintaining a prosperous economy; respect for property; and support for 'The Nation', conceived in terms of national unity and harmony. These are backed up largely through reference to Michael Oakeshott and Edmund Burke, whose significance to conservatism is returned to in the discussion below. Others identify similar prominent features, with 'the nation' frequently given primacy (Seawright, 2010; Garnett, 2003; Lynch, 2003).

Still others prefer to identify conservative 'dispositions' rather than core concepts or beliefs, again moving away somewhat from identifying Conservatism as an ideology. These might include a focus on the family or community, the importance of personal freedom supported by responsibility, and a commitment to inequality over equality (Oakeshott, 1975; Norton, 1996). Without a focus on the broader concepts underpinning conservative 'dispositions', however, their identification appears almost arbitrary: we have little idea why these dispositions are

preferred, what is supposed to be achieved through them, or what particular approaches they might entail. Actors of most political persuasions believe that families matter, for example, but their precise views on *how* they matter and where they fit within the broader social and political structure are formulated with reference to a number of other considerations. This is not to suggest that the writers who take this approach have not considered such issues (Norton [2008: 235], for example, clearly acknowledges this), but it indicates the importance of explicitly placing such 'dispositions' within a broader ideological framework. It is this that 'fills out' the character of such beliefs. Without this, conservatism risks being presented as lacking deeper principles and purpose, which is surely a claim that few would be keen to see attributed to their actions and ideas.

Moreover, some of the supposedly 'core' tenets of conservatism fit much more easily with some Conservative ideologies than others (Garnett, 2003). A belief in 'organic society and orderly change' and limits to the power of reason is evident in Burke's rejection of revolutionary ideas in general for the harm that they might cause to the institutions of civil society (2009 [1790]). It is also famously embodied in Oakeshott's perspective: that 'to be a conservative is to prefer the known to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried'; that 'the man of conservative temperament believes that a known good is not lightly to be surrendered for an unknown better' and that disruption to traditional institutions by government entails 'certain loss and possible gain' (1962: 168ff). These beliefs are fairly easily linked from Burke, to Oakeshott, to the characterisation of One Nation Conservatism as a cautious, pragmatic approach to politics: not resisting change, but working with the grain of developments, and protecting social institutions. They are not so easily linked with the Thatcher governments, which pushed through some of the most wide-ranging reforms to the state in post-war British politics. Similarly, while an emphasis on a small, strong state was characteristic of Thatcherite Conservatism, it cannot be said to have been such a priority for early One Nation Conservatives (Dorey and Garnett, 2014: 2-3). Other supposedly 'core' tenets seem so ubiquitous as to hardly be identifiable with conservatism and Conservatives at all: what government, for example, would not want to maintain a prosperous economy?

One way of explaining this is to posit that either One Nation Conservatism or Thatcherite Conservatism is not a 'true' manifestation of conservative ideology at all, instead representing an

ideological aberration to some other tradition. This explanation has been employed by Conservative politicians of both sides. The argument put forward by Thatcher and her supporters is that One Nation Conservatism represented acquiescence to Labour's 'socialist' ideology. Thatcher described the Conservative 'wets' as 'political calculators who see the task of Conservatives as retreating gracefully before the Left's inevitable advance'. Therefore, for them to support the fiscal, economic and trade union reforms of her first government would be tantamount to admitting that their whole political lives had been founded on the 'gigantic lie' that 'positive Tory reform' would be neither practical nor popular (1993: 104-5). According to Thatcher, in their quest for power, which was pragmatic largely in terms of self-interest, One Nation Conservatives abandoned conservatism.

Meanwhile, supporters of One Nation Conservatism regarded Thatcherism as 'an alien import into the Conservative tradition' (Evans, 2009: 103). Evans (1998: 19-21) discusses Macmillan's reservations regarding the direction in which Thatcher was leading the Party, including concerns about dogmatism in economic policy and divisiveness that undermined the ethos of 'one nation' and social harmony. Ian Gilmour, who served in Edward Heath's Cabinet and briefly in Thatcher's, criticised Thatcher for 'inserting into Conservative policy an ideological, if not religious, fervour and a dogmatic tone that had been previously lacking' (Gilmour 1992: 6, 269-274). This view tends to suggest that ultimately Thatcher's approach was to the detriment of both British society and British conservatism itself (Garnett and Gilmour, 1997; Gray, 1995).

However, that both periods have been attacked as betrayals - often by those seeking to legitimate the authenticity of their own ideas within the Conservative Party (Gamble, 1994: 147-148) - serves as an indication that the accuracy of these claims needs to be investigated further. From the theoretical perspective of this thesis, these claims are also problematic. If ideas and ideologies only exist insofar as they are constituted by actors, then there is an irreducible relationship between 'conservatism' as an ideology and the political ideas of those who call themselves 'Conservatives' (Norton, 2008). As such, a theory of conservatism that can account for these (and many other) variations is required.

Noting the 'extraordinary variety of "core" concepts' that have been ascribed to Conservatism, Freeden suggests that conservative ideology actually has a far more limited core (1996: 337).

Many of those concepts which have been assigned to the core would be better described as adjacent or peripheral concepts. This is not because they are insignificant in understanding Conservative perspectives or actions. Rather it is due to the varied levels of importance and meaning assigned to them at various historical points, which precludes them from being identified as part of the core. It is proposed that there are three key ideas at the core of conservatism broadly understood, which can be used to explain the variation between the One Nation and Thatcherite manifestations of Conservative Party ideology.

The first, based on a reading of Oakeshott, is not a 'defence of the status quo', but a belief in 'social order and organic change' that works from experimental knowledge of human behaviour. Conservatism is therefore not an attempt to eliminate change (as implied in the everyday usage), but to render it 'safe' (Freeden, 1996: 332). This leaves the problem of what constitutes 'safe', acceptable change. Conservatives, after all, have not always been reticent in leading change, as in the 1980s.

Freeden proposes that a second core component of conservatism is therefore how it legitimates change, while also de-legitimating changes that Conservatives view as dangerous. This cannot be removed from the core, because it is essential to resolving the issue of what constitutes acceptable change. Freeden suggests that this is manifested as an appeal to the 'extra-human origins of the social order' (1996: 334). These might be religious, historical (as in the belief in a natural hierarchy or paternalism) or scientific, for example. What Conservatives are suspicious of – and here, Thatcher's ideas can be identified somewhat with Burke's – is 'grand schemes' that are designed and implemented by government and are devoid of 'natural' justifications. Through this aspect, the Thatcherite appeal to supposed 'scientific' economic laws that govern markets form an acceptable justification for Conservatives to seek to bring about change, while also serving to circumscribe the role of the state. These changes would move away from the managed economy, perceived as an artificial construct, thus negating its negative impact on social order, exemplified in the increasing industrial unrest of the late 1970s.

Finally, Freeden suggests that Conservatism is essentially a reactive ideology, attaining 'self-awareness when exposed by its ideological opponents, rather than at its own behest, and [reacting] to them in a looking-glass manner' (1996: 337). This third, non-substantive concept is

the ‘mirror-image characteristic’. In rejecting what they believe to be the ‘universal, abstract and systematic theories’ of their rivals on the basis that their effects cannot be known, Conservatives are impelled in turn to suggest alternatives. Thus ‘when conservatism perceives change as unproblematic it remains intellectually dormant, and its principles and theoretical stances are only elicited when it is forced to mirror its opponents arguments’ (1996: 337). For Freeden, the concept of an ‘enemy’ is a key element of conservative ideology, and the particular character of this enemy as it is identified by Conservatives is a significant factor in explaining its resulting strategy and policy direction. Where some process or movement is seen to threaten social order, Conservatism moves to work against this. What is perceived as a major threat will almost inevitably change over time. This, therefore, is crucial in understanding the Conservative Party’s shift towards Thatcherism, manifested in a shift towards a strongly articulated ideological stance, and the distancing from ‘consensus’ politics which was identified as the source of disorder. Investigating the identification of principal ‘enemies’ provides an explanation for the apparent dissonance between the One Nation and Thatcherite forms of Conservatism, while allowing both to still be considered forms of conservative ideology.

Establishing an understanding of the core of conservative ideology means that there is now a basis from which to explore how concepts around this have been decontested in the process of relating the ideology to contemporary circumstances, resulting in different manifestations of ‘conservatism’. These are explored in relation to One Nation and Thatcherism below, and subsequently in relation to Cameron’s leadership in Chapter 4.

3.3 One Nation Conservatism, Thatcherism and the state

Interpretations of One Nation Conservatism in relation to Thatcherism can be split into three broad camps. The first two, outlined above, refer to the betrayal of ‘true’ Conservatism by one group or the other. This section will suggest that neither of these views is completely accurate. A third interpretation is that there are considerable continuities between One Nation Conservatism and Thatcherism, and these are articulated more or less forcefully in response to differing governing contexts. The SRA draws attention to how shifts in context, which may not be within the control of Conservative Party, will serve to make certain policy responses appear more or less appropriate. Simultaneously they will give rise to different concerns regarding threats to social order, with the adjacent concepts of the Conservative ideology reconsidered and re-

arranged accordingly. This reflects a process of continual re-adjustment to the effects of a party's decisions (and those of its rivals) on political context, entailing strategic learning and the rejection or modification of existing or former strategies. Such changes in context and its interpretation can explain the apparent disjuncture between the two manifestations, particularly with regard to perspectives on the ideological acceptability of an interventionist welfare state.

'One Nation' Conservatism characterises the political ideas and approach to governing of the dominant faction in the Conservative Party from the 1950s, up until at least the election of the Heath government in 1970.[7] The Thatcher governments conclusively brought this dominance to an end, precipitating the decline of One Nation Conservatism within the PCP (Dorey and Garnett, 2014). The name is derived from Disraeli's novel *Sybil* (1845) which identified the existence of 'two nations' in Britain – the rich and the poor – 'between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy' (cited in Seawright, 2005: 71). Disraeli went on to argue that the task of Conservatives was to unite these groups (Evans and Taylor, 1996: 7). Smith (1967) expresses considerable doubt about the extent to which this vision was translated into policy under Disraeli's governments. Nonetheless, it remained an important strand in modern Conservative ideology, contributing to creating what Seawright refers to as the 'One Nation myth' that heavily influenced the Party in the 1950s (2005: 70-71).

In the post-war Conservative Party, the term is closely associated with the One Nation Group of Conservative MPs, formed in 1950. This group comprised several MPs who would later go on to high-ranking positions with the Party, causing Gamble to characterise it as an 'educational forum for future leaders' (1974: 258). Bochel notes that the number of future Cabinet members within the One Nation Group may have retrospectively helped to reinforce an impression of its influence within the PCP (2010: 124). Interestingly, given the opprobrium that would later be heaped on the tradition by Thatcher's supporters, these figures included those who would come to be more associated with the Thatcherite turn and the New Right. Enoch Powell was a founding member, while Keith Joseph was a later recruit to the Group. These members sat alongside those now more readily associated with the One Nation tradition, such as Iain Macleod or Ian Gilmour. A full list of members up until 2003 reveals that this ideological divergence has

[7] The Heath government might be viewed as a transition between the two traditions: see Seldon and Ball (1996).

been a feature of the group throughout its history: the One Nation Group was not, and has never, been characterised by an absence of opposing factions drawn from within the Conservative Party (Seawright, 2005: 73).

The breadth of membership of the One Nation Group might serve as a reason to avoid using it as way of investigating the ideas and perspectives underpinning the broader tradition of One Nation Conservatism. As Dorey and Garnett observe: 'even the founder members of the group disagreed on key issues'. Moreover, the appeal of One Nation Conservatism was 'considerably wider than the membership of a single and relatively small coterie', as the Group represented (2014: 1-2). Here it is suggested that the ideological diversity of individual members, combined into publications that were all 'collective compromises', is exactly what makes these a useful tool for beginning to uncover the priorities and concerns of a range of Conservative members at the height of One Nation Conservatism's influence (Seawright, 2005: 76, Walsha, 2000: 189-190). They are 'artefacts of their time', detailing a Conservative response to the 'expectations and realities of the post-war period, including the need for economic reconstruction and the popularity of many parts of the welfare state' (Bochel, 2010: 132). Since the character of Conservative ideology is understood as highly contingent and dependent on the circumstances in which the Party finds itself, such artefacts may prove highly valuable in illuminating its primary concerns. This approach is taken by both Seawright (2010; 2005) and Walsha (2000) in their studies of post-war One Nation Conservatism. While recognising that the publications of the group were not necessarily a basis for the leadership's approach to social policy (although they certainly intended to be so), they are nonetheless useful sources in shading in the wider party approach on such issues.

The One Nation Group published a number of pamphlets before Thatcher's election as leader, including three in the 1950s: *One Nation*, *Change is our Ally* and *The Responsible Society*. These aimed to provide an 'underpinning rationale' and theoretical unity to the 'hitherto piecemeal nature of Conservative social policy making' (Walsha, 2000: 191). Despite noting contradictory accounts for the formation of the Group, Walsha states that all of these are linked via the 'recognition of the ineptitude of the Conservative frontbench when dealing with the Atlee government in matters of social policy' (2000: 188). This was an area which fell more naturally to Labour than the Conservatives, owing to Labour's concern with egalitarianism and social

justice. Reviving a Disraelian concern with uniting the 'two nations' provided an opportunity to influence the development of the post-war welfare state along the lines of a 'Tory paternalist' conception of Conservatism (Brigden, 2000: 85), thus wresting some control (and, given the popularity of the welfare state, some potential voters) from Labour.

The Conservative leaderships of the 1950s showed a 'positive accommodation with state activity' that certainly went beyond anything displayed by the Thatcher governments, or by subsequent Conservative leaderships (Page 2010b: 120). In terms of social security policy for working people, this including strong support for the reforms introduced by the Atlee government. The Party initially 'took every opportunity' to remind voters of its role in initiating the bulk of the new legislation through its involvement in the wartime Coalition and, while newer MPs might have been disposed to 'sharper questioning' of the welfare state, there was no impetus to reject it entirely (Raison, 1990: 32). Partly this might be understood in electoral terms, but there was also an acceptance that the interventionist state could be a force for good. It provided a means of elevating the condition of the poor for moral reasons, and securing the benefits that this could bring in terms of social harmony (Dorey, 2015; Hickson, 2009; Freeden, 1996: 386). This support was based on paternalism, underpinning the idea that the well-off and more able in society had a duty to assist the less well-off and less-able (Raison, 1990: 27). This emphasis caused Greenleaf (1983) to suggest that the One Nation tradition that embodied these ideas is reflective of a kind of Conservative collectivism, owing to the sense of social duty implied.[8] Thus, the welfare state was an electorally popular vehicle that One Nation Conservatives believed could help to fulfil these ideals, but Conservative support for it was premised on a very different ideological basis to that of the Labour Party.

As discussed further in Chapter 4, the beliefs that underpinned Conservative support for welfare are not, and were never, egalitarian. Rather, they were justified with reference to a conception of hierarchy as a legitimate system of social order, while recognising that within this there were limits to the extent of inequality than was sustainable (Dorey, 2015; 2010). Hence, as the examples given above suggest, One Nation Conservatism did not constitute a 'shining example

[8] This tendency towards collectivism is also one of the reasons cited by Hayek in his postscript to *The Constitution of Liberty*, as to 'Why I am not a Conservative' (Hayek, 1960: 343-356), indicating an area of tension between One Nation Conservatism and some of the ideas underpinning Thatcherism.

of the acceptance of an enlarged and active state' for its own sake, and the One Nation Group was not 'putting forward a case for a Conservative/socialist compromise' (Walsha, 2000: 190-192; Dorey, 2002). Although there were those in the Party who could be termed 'welfare enthusiasts', there was also a significant element that was concerned about the effect of the welfare state in society and critical of Labour's 'untrammelled support' for it (Walsha, 2000: 192). Support for the welfare state was conditional on it not over-reaching from the maintenance of social order into what Conservatives saw as damaging social engineering.

As such, solutions began to be advocated during the 1950s including greater targeting, means-testing and tighter control of welfare expenditure (One Nation Group, 1954). These are reflective of a belief that the welfare state should provide a minimum standard, beyond which individuals could rise 'as far as their industry, their thrift, their ability and their genius may take them' (Macleod and Maude, 1950: 9). Conservative support for social security, and the concern with elevating the condition of the poor, was therefore underpinned by a conviction that the welfare state must not undermine or discourage these attributes, which were essential for maintaining economic prosperity (Page, 2007: 52). This suggests an acceptance even amongst Conservatives that provisionally supported the welfare system that over-extension might have adverse moral consequences. Notably, as Raison (1990: 38) identifies in an 1954 speech by Rab Butler, the Party was beginning to articulate worries that a 'Socialist', universalist approach to welfare provision, including housing, was imposing unreasonable burdens on 'tax payers and rate payers'. This suggests a nascent concern with the proper balance of the relationship between individuals and the state. This is explored further below in relation to the concept of responsibility, but at this point such arguments were also couched in terms of the concept of 'freedom'. For example, then-Minister for Education Lord Hailsham argued that 'it is an essential condition of a free society that a man may make his own provision, rather than be compelled to use state services' (Raison, 1990: 47). Alongside this, the cost of social security was increasingly becoming a real concern for Conservatives. Despite these criticisms, however, there was scant real policy change on social security for the Conservatives under either the Churchill or Macmillan governments (Raison, 1990: 56).

Initially, therefore, Thatcherite policy on the welfare state looks to be a considerable distance from those characterising One Nation Conservatism. The Thatcher administrations made a

number of reforms which proved beyond doubt that the supposed 'post-war consensus' around welfare had reached its end (Farrall and Hay, 2014). However, although the Thatcher governments may have brought about new policy direction, the ideas and interpretations underpinning this had developed much more gradually. The main policy focus was on reducing spending, in accordance with the economic situation that the first Thatcher administration found itself facing. Within a wider programme of public sector reform, social security was targeted for major budget reductions and reform primarily during the second term, culminating in the Social Security Act (1986). Achieving the desired reductions proved challenging due to the combined impact of an aging population and high unemployment. However, despite these circumstances and the transfer of some of the housing budget into social security, social security spending increased more slowly in the 1980s than in the previous period of Labour government (Hill and Walker, 2014).

This was accomplished through a number of measures introduced in the 1986 Act which sought to devalue and reduce social security payments. These included changes to up-rating rules, cuts to contribution-based benefits, increased conditionality, and restrictions on eligibility. There were also moves to increase means-testing for some benefits, indicating a significant development in the debate over the merits of universal and means-tested benefits that had been on-going in the PCP since the mid-1950s (Raison, 1990: 48). The green paper preceding the act also expressed concerns about the value of out-of-work benefits compared to wages and the need to maintain a gap between the two, the complexity of the benefit system, and the amount of 'churning' within it whereby people were paying tax and receiving means-tested benefits simultaneously (Raison, 1990: 134). The Conservatives also introduced a number of active labour market policies.[9] The direction of reform would prove significant in influencing both the Blair and Cameron governments (see Chapters 1 and 4), illustrating both the importance of placing policy reforms into historical context, and the rather path-dependent nature of policy development in this area. This is brought into view particularly sharply by comparing the very similar goals of the reforms introduced by the Conservatives in Coalition (see Chapters 6 and 7), with those of the Thatcher governments outlined below.

[9] These programmes included the Youth Training Scheme, Job Training Scheme, Community Programme, Enterprise Allowance Scheme and JobClubs (Conservative Party, 1987).

Accompanying these reforms, the ideological attack on the welfare state intensified under Thatcher (Page, 2007: 80). As noted, concerns about the malign influence of welfare provision had been growing since the 1950s and 1960s within the Conservative Party (Green, 2002; Rasion, 1990). The notion of a 'crisis' in welfare spending began to take hold as the economic situation declined in the mid-1970s, and Thatcher 'addressed the task of dealing with the so-called crisis with very much more enthusiasm than her predecessors' (Hill, 1993: 129). However the ideas advanced as justification for the Conservative approach to dealing with this went further than a critique of government spending. Thatcherism extended this into an ideological re-appraisal of the relationship between state, economy, society and individuals. In endorsing this critique, the Conservative Party under Thatcher's leadership turned away from paternalist, collectivist Conservatism in relation to welfare policy, moving towards a more neo-liberal or libertarian-influenced model (Page, 2007; Green, 2002; Hill, 1993). Despite this, the party remained distinctly conservative at its core given the concerns that it mobilised in relation to: the adaptation was a means to ultimately conservative ends concerning the maintenance of order. Moreover, the principles underpinning the attack were reflective of a socially conservative concern with the morality of welfare support, emphasising the negative effect that this might have on the moral fabric of the nation.

The diagnosis of social and economic malaise is summarised in Thatcher's claim that 'the great mistake of the last few years has been for the government to provide or to legislate for almost everything'. While this might have been advisable in the immediate post-war reconstruction, these policies had 'gone far further than was ever intended or advisable' (1988). In proposing this, Thatcher was echoing perspectives which had been developing amongst some party members for some time before she took the leadership. For example, Enoch Powell had been calling for 'less government' (1970) in some policy areas since the late 1960s.[10] Partly, this was justified with reference to maintaining economic prosperity (1968a). However it also reflected a belief that the state had become invasive, with its role extended far beyond managing 'those

[10] Welfare provision was actually one of the areas that Powell singled out as a proper function of the state: for example, providing for 'security in old age, retirement or affliction' (1970). The perspectives of the Thatcher governments had clearly moved some distance from this, exemplified in their pensions policy (Bridgen, 2000)

functions in society which the citizens must not or cannot try to perform for themselves' (Powell, 1970; 1968b).

A first consequence of this extension of state responsibilities was what Thatcherite Conservatives saw as an unacceptable tax burden on British citizens. This was presented as antithetical to economic and, ultimately, political freedom. This reflected a prioritisation of freedom or liberty, conceived in a negative sense as an adjacent concept within this form of Conservatism (Hayek, 1960). The reduction of this burden was the first justification for rolling back the welfare state. As Thatcher stated after reforms were underway: 'every tax-paying individual in this country now pays about £40 a week to social security alone'. Those citizens who wanted increased social security were not asking 'the government' for money; they were asking 'their neighbour' (1988), thereby impinging on them. This suggests that there is no such thing as 'government money' – only taxation taken from citizens – and that framing this otherwise is an act of subterfuge by the state. A broad failure to connect the two had led to a spiralling number of competing demands on the state which it was ill-equipped to manage, thereby contributing to social and economic instability. Reining in the expectations on, and of, the state was essential to resolving this.

A second consequence, connected to the first, was that despite the Conservatives' best efforts to roll back the state, Thatcher stated that her government was still finding that people were 'not out of the way of expecting governments to do things for them' (1988). Similarly, she claimed: 'I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand "I have a problem, it is the Government's job to cope with it!"'; concluding, famously: 'and so they are casting their problems on society, and what is society? There is no such thing!' (Thatcher, 1987). This theory suggests that the interventionist state has undermined individual responsibility and self-reliance, ultimately to the detriment of communities and of the connections between people. This emphasis on self-reliance, entailing hard work in order to fulfil individual responsibility, was an important part of the moral agenda of Thatcherism (Letwin, 1992). The obligation to work rather than expect 'a living from the state' was framed in these terms. Accordingly, Thatcher put forward the perspective that 'life is a reciprocal business. If you expect your neighbour to help you when you are in difficulties, you must in return expect to keep yourself when you are able to do so' (Thatcher, 1988).

Therefore in addition to the underpinning justification that 'sound money' and economic prosperity were key to social prosperity, this moral argument added another reason for rolling back the welfare state which could be deployed even in better economic times. It is related to the idea that dependency on the state is damaging to both individual character and, extending from this, to society. This invokes a concept of individual responsibility which gave a moral thread to the reforms, strongly arguing that the present social security system was stifling 'incentive, opportunity and responsibility' and thus encouraging what came to be termed 'dependency culture' (Raison, 1990: 134-136). The rise of the dependency narrative is a central feature of the Thatcherite approach to welfare (Taylor-Gooby, 2014; Deacon, 2000), leading to a conception of welfare spending as waste rather than social investment due to the undesirable behaviour that it encourages amongst claimants (Hayton and McEnhill, 2014: 107). Through this, responsibility is decontested on an individual basis, as opposed to the more paternalist ideal of the stronger members of society supporting the weak. As explored further in Chapter 4, this is an idea which strongly took hold in the PCP. The decontestation of this concept has major implications for the development of welfare policy since it renders a number of policy options ideologically untenable.

Social policy was secondary to the economic task that the Thatcher governments faced. Even after Thatcher had been Prime Minister for eleven years, the fundamental transformation of the welfare state that might have been expected to accompany the rhetoric was not evident. Hill and Walker (2014) suggest that this was partly because the first half of Thatcher's time in power was characterised by residualisation rather than reform: what change that did take place was more a consequence of lack of policy innovation, stretching the resources of the welfare state further and further. In the second half, policy reforms were made, but largely failed to achieve their goals of reducing welfare spending and ultimately 'shrinking' the welfare system. However, the strong emphasis on responsibility, obligation and the moral virtue inherent in providing for oneself – the idea of 'remoralising' welfare support (Taylor-Gooby, 2014; Letwin, 1992) – was nonetheless a key element of Thatcherism throughout. This reflected a conservative desire to promote a return to reliance on organic institutions, over the artificial, over-extended structures of the welfare state. A strong alternative emphasis on concepts of individual responsibility and self-sufficiency were then necessary to support this.

Viewed in this way, Thatcher's perspectives on society were not quite as coldly individualistic as they have been portrayed as being.[11] Neither, through the emphasis on morality and how this feeds into social order, did they depart substantially from a socially conservative perspective: there was still a strong concern with reining in change and re-asserting a more 'natural', self-reliant approach to welfare as a means of improving social relations (Freeden, 1996: 385). Rather, under Thatcher the Conservative Party attempted to set out 'a political philosophy that goes beyond the State and the individual, and begins to express in human terms the complex network of reciprocal rights and duties in an orderly society' (Conservative Party, 1976: 17). The emphasis on duty and reciprocity is significant, qualified with the belief that individuals should make trenchant efforts to support themselves. The key deviation from the post-war settlement, and from early One Nation Conservatism, is the perception of the extent to which support provided welfare state can co-exist with these alternative sources. Thatcherism views this relationship as zero-sum (Corbett and Walker, 2013), identifying the welfare system as a source of moral degeneracy. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, developing this aspect of Conservative ideology has remained a considerable concern for the Conservatives under David Cameron.

How, then, can the apparent shift in outlook and policy that occurred between the early post-war Conservative and Thatcher administrations be explained in reference to the core concepts of conservatism outlined above? It should be noted here that the centrality of ideology in explaining and understanding the Conservative Party's turn towards Thatcherism is not universally agreed. Some accounts emphasise it heavily (Hall, 1983; Durham, 1989; Green, 2002), while others suggest different interpretations. For example, Jim Bulpitt (1986) understands Thatcherism as a re-assertion of Conservative Party statecraft, leaving little room for ideology aside from where it crosses over with rhetoric. Andrew Gamble (1994: 141) also suggests that Thatcherism can best be analysed as statecraft: 'in which ideas and principles are subordinated to political calculation, the pursuit of office and the management of power', but allows a more expansive role for ideology than Bulpitt. David Coates (1989) suggests that it is a context-specific response to

[11] Gilmour (1992: 272), for example, describes the Thatcherite view of society: 'they saw people as living in a condition reminiscent of Hobbes's state of nature, locked into a relentless competition for material resources, and growing every day more solitary, nasty, brutish and rich...Much as socialists forgot the individual, the New Right were determined to forget society'.

economic decline; although it might be argued that this is not incompatible with its ideological elements. Anthony King (1975) and Peter Riddell (1989a) characterise Thatcherism as a 'way of doing' politics; Riddell (1989b) has also emphasised the extent to which this is based heavily on the personal values and experiences of Thatcher herself, a characterisation which is unsurprisingly supported by her biographers (Campbell, 2000). It is probably accurate to claim that Thatcherism's apparently 'chameleon-like' character is due to its existence as a complex, dynamic process, and to suggest that different accounts reflect differences of interpretive emphasis (Kerr and Marsh, 1999: 168).

The first point to note is that the emergence of what has been understood as 'Thatcherism' retrospectively is not necessarily concurrent with Thatcher's election as Prime Minister in 1979, or even as Conservative leader in 1975. Although Thatcher served in Heath's cabinet, her rhetorical antipathy towards the interventionist state was remarkably consistent: since 1968 she had been publicly arguing that it must be rolled back, contrasting the 'free society with the horrors of socialism' (Durham, 1989: 63). Similar claims can be made of other key figures, including Keith Joseph (1976) and, as discussed, there were indications of discontent within the Party much earlier. Those who supported Thatcher's leadership bid could have had little doubt about the direction in which she would seek to take the Conservative Party. The PCP was arguably moving towards a less collectivist stance under Heath (Lowe, 1996): Thatcher's victory in 1975 illustrated conclusively that the Party wanted to continue down this path (Evans, 2009: 107). Hence, as Green (2002) suggests, the idea that Thatcherism represented the hijacking of a previously unified 'One Nation' party that was opposed to substantial change by a peculiarly ideological individual or small group is untenable. Although Thatcher re-invigorated the Party's approach, the perspectives on state provision that came to the fore under her leadership were not unique to her and her immediate circle. It is possible to trace the development of these ideas within the wider Conservative Party, and to conclude that the stirrings of what became known as 'Thatcherism' were present in the PCP during the period in which One Nation Conservatism was ascendant. Ideologically, there was much about Thatcherism that represented continuity. The changes that came about as a result of her leadership represented the culmination of an iterative process of learning that suggested to Conservatives, by the late 1970s, that previously supported strategies for managing the economy and society had been exhausted.

Particularly notable is the growing suspicion evident within the PCP of the detrimental effects on society of the expansion of the state. In relation to welfare, this was marked by an increasing concern regarding the relationship between concepts of responsibility and welfare dependency. Raison (1990: 185-187) places great emphasis on the former of these, suggesting that it was important enough in shaping policy directions to be elevated to adjacent concept status under Thatcher. Dependency was presented as undermining individual responsibility and thus legitimating a range of choices that were deemed detrimental to an acceptable social order. This this includes, for example, the strong emphasis on discouraging single parenthood which was consistently presented as a source of social breakdown (Raison, 1990: 186).

Moreover, the welfare state apparatus was perceived as having become overloaded through continual attempts by politicians to use it to improve the social conditions of some individuals relative to others: a purpose for which, for many Conservatives, it had never been intended. Rather than providing a minimum standard of living, welfare provision had tipped into social engineering to which Conservatives were ideologically opposed, with concurrent effects on individual morality. The concept of state authority was also challenged, as the extension of such programmes produced 'the mobilisation of pressure from below for state policies and programmes to correct inequalities and disadvantage', as well as giving rise to new expectations about entitlements and rights (Gamble, 1994: 12-13; King, 1975). As tensions grew in the mid- to late-1970s and social unrest became more of a reality, the Conservative ideological response was to 'direct the mirror-image at the spectre of a paternalist, bureaucratic, and artificially manipulative state' (Freeden, 1996: 385). In its place, Conservatives invoked a more limited conception of the state which was obliged to 'do more to help individuals to help themselves, and families to look after their own' (Conservative Party, 1979). Through this, expectations on the state could be managed via a re-assertion of citizens' responsibilities, offering a means for the authority of the state to be restored.

Hence, Ian Gilmour and Mark Garnett's claim that attitudes to the welfare state constitute a clear dividing line between 'One Nation' and 'Thatcherite' Conservatives does not seem to be entirely accurate (1997: 48-9). While it was possible to claim in the 1950s that One Nation Conservatives took 'genuine pride' in the *creation* of the welfare state, as the decades wore on this seemed to be giving way to more suspicion regarding its effects on society. It might be reasonable to claim

that the leadership's attitude remained ostensibly positive for some time longer than that of the lower ranks of the PCP. Green (2002: 219) supports this argument, noting that there is 'evidence of deep-seated hostility' within the Conservative party towards the extension of the welfare state 'from the publication of the Beveridge report in 1942, through the post-war labour reform legislation, to the development and impact of state intervention in the economic and social spheres'. In part, the lack of leadership action on this was likely to be because, for much of the post-war period up until Thatcher's era, the time was not right to challenge this extremely popular element of the post-war consensus and there was little obvious justification for doing so. That the Conservatives went into the 1964 election proposing little in the way of change to the welfare system, despite growing evidence of dissatisfaction within the wider PCP is an illustration of how powerful a constraint strategic selectivity can impose on decision-making. Conservative concerns about the welfare state's impact on society and the economy could scarcely have been missed by the leadership at this point. However, it was only after losing the 1964 election and later returning to government that the Party felt able to build on this (Raison, 1990: 61).

Returning to the previous discussion of Freeden's conception of Conservative ideology, the idea of 'the enemy' is useful in explaining (and, given that Conservatives are in theory averse to unnecessary change, excusing) the apparent radicalism of the Thatcher governments. To recap, conservatism is understood as a reactive ideology. Its principles are articulated in response to alternative, competing ideologies that threaten its core beliefs: notably, an interest in maintaining social order. Therefore when this interest is not threatened, conservatism experiences a sort of ideological inertia (Freeden, 1996: 323). It is when an identifiable 'enemy' emerges that the Conservative Party begins to articulate its beliefs: this is the function of the 'mirror-image' characteristic, whereby Conservatism is defined largely by what it is standing opposite, mentioned above (1996: 324). In the 1970s, this 'enemy' was the welfare state, which had been allowed to extend by such a margin that it had completely overshadowed any kind of 'natural' order or 'organic' social bonds, undermining both its own authority and the goals that it had been intended to acheive. With the enemy understood in this way, radical Thatcherite reforms can be viewed as 'an act of power-wielding', intended to bring to a halt the 'dangerous by-products of the welfare state' (Freeden, 1996: 387). The implication was that while such actions were not desirable, they were necessary if the trajectory of constant expansion was to be arrested, and a

social order based on self-reliance was to be re-introduced. Thatcher's reforms represented a 'judicious but ephemeral' use of the state in returning society to a more acceptable order (Freeden, 1996: 387). It is the presence of this concern within the core of the ideology that makes it possible to understand Thatcherism as being as much a manifestation of conservative ideology as One Nation Conservatism.

3.4 After Thatcher: contemporary analyses of Conservatives and conservatism

Thatcherism proved to be a catalyst for a wealth of literature on the Conservative Party,[12] which had previously been somewhat neglected within academia, evident in the relative scarcity of literature on the One Nation period. Unfortunately, the period shortly after Thatcher left office initially suffered a similar relative neglect. Major's time in office might reasonably be conceived as a broad continuation and consolidation of Thatcherite policies, but lacking the personal flair that marked Thatcher's premiership. With hindsight, Major's leadership proves revealing in terms of what followed for the Conservatives, but it was perhaps not the most obvious area of interest at the time. In contrast, the response of the Labour party and the rise of New Labour provoked a flurry of academic analyses, many of which maintained the focus on Thatcherism by focusing, in whole or in part, on the relationship between the two (Driver and Martell, 2006; Heffernan, 2000).

The literature on the Conservatives in opposition, however, and the emergent body of work on the Conservatives in Coalition government, is more plentiful. Much of this is covered in detail in later chapters, particularly where it concerns the 1997 to 2005 opposition period and the Conservatives' negotiation of the Thatcherite legacy prior to electing Cameron as leader, and interpretations of Cameron's party's ideological leanings. Therefore this is not discussed in any great detail here. However, it is worth briefly outlining the main features of contemporary analyses of Conservatism and welfare policy here. This is in order to indicate where this thesis sits within the wider literature on the Conservative Party since 2005, defining its contribution to this. Existing work can be divided into two broad categories.

[12] See, for example, Bulpitt (1986), Evans and Taylor (1996), Gamble (1994), Hall (1983), Jessop et al. (1988), Kavanagh and Seldon (1989), King (1975), O'Shea (1984), Riddell (1989b).

The first approaches the Conservative Party's perspectives on welfare from a social policy analytical perspective. Conservative social policy has generally been under-researched in comparison to Labour's. This is a further consequence of the focus on Thatcherism within the academic literature. As discussed above, economic rather than social policy appeared to be the main motivation of the Thatcher governments, and where the two overlap (for example, around unemployment), the focus was on economic rather than social policy-based solutions. However, a notable recent contribution on this topic is Hugh Bochel's (2011) edited volume. Chapters within this consider the relationship between Cameron's Conservatives and New Labour (Bochel, 2011), as well as between One Nation Conservatism and Thatcherism (Page, 2011). On welfare specifically, Stephen McKay and Karen Rowlingson (2011) consider welfare-to-work policy and Alan Deacon and Ruth Patrick (2011) examine social security policy under Cameron's leadership. The LSE's Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion's *Social Policy in a Cold Climate* series rovides comprehensive analysis of the impact of the Coalition, led by Ruth Lupton (2015). Ruth Lister and Fran Bennett (2010) also make a notable contribution, crossing over somewhat more into analysis of the politics of welfare than some of the studies discussed here. Overall, however, literature within this grouping approaches the welfare policies of the Conservative Party with the aim of analysing their effects or, given that these policies are in their early stages, their likely impact: as such, the extent of political analysis in them is quite limited. There is also a large amount of non-academic work that proceeds along similar lines, including analyses produced by various think-tanks and charities (see Chapters 6 and 7).

Deacon and Patrick, framing their analysis in relation to the 2010 election, note that the highly politically charged environment of election campaigning is 'not conducive to a measured debate about the detail of policy' (2011: 161). Hence they propose that considering policies separately from such an environment is necessary. They are undoubtedly correct for the purposes of their own task, but this speaks to the different goals of social policy analysis in comparison to this research. Policy analysis has been primarily concerned with the effects after implementation: this thesis, on the other hand, seeks to understand the process of development and outcomes, including why some strategies have been selected over others despite apparently confused or contradictory outcomes, or a lack of firm evidence. As such, to fulfil the goals of this research, it is not possible to separate policy from the political context in which it is conceived. While

covering similar topics, the social policy approach therefore does not provide satisfactory answers to these questions, and does not generally seek to do so in any great depth.

A second category of academic literature approaches the Conservative Party under Cameron from a political analytical angle, with varied focus and perspectives on ideological development and the significance of this in understanding the present position of the party. Some of this takes a much longer-term approach, bringing a political analytical perspective to bear on a period previously characterised academically by a more historical focus.[13] This includes Tim Bale, whose analysis of the Thatcher to Cameron period (2010) is complemented by a further book on the earlier part of the post-war period (2012), and Timothy Heppell (2014). Others, such as Simon Lee and Matt Beech (2009), Peter King (2011) and Peter Dorey, Mark Garnett and Andrew Denham (2011), focus more closely on Cameron's leadership and what this means for the Conservatives and Conservatism. Further edited collections examine the move into Coalition government and its consequences for both parties along a range of dimensions (Beech and Lee, 2015; 2011; Heppell and Seawright, 2012). Chapters within these by Simon Lee (2009), Stephen Driver (2009) and Richard Hayton (2012b) all address welfare policy directly although, as with the social policy literature outlined above, these are limited in scope owing to the time of publication. A somewhat more comprehensive analysis is offered by Robert Page (2015). Finally, a number of journal articles discuss aspects of Conservative modernisation in relation to ideological change and development, several of which relate this to social policy (Bale, 2009; 2008; Dorey, 2007; Evans, 2010; 2008; Griffiths, 2014; Hayton and McEnhill, 2015; Kerr, Byrne and Foster, 2011; Smith, 2010).

Much of this literature shares an over-riding concern with the question at the centre of this thesis, concerning what kind of 'conservatism' (if any at all) is embodied in the Conservative Party under David Cameron. Several contributions, particularly those focusing on the opposition years, interpret the 'modernisation' of social policy under Cameron as either a move away from social conservatism, towards a form of liberalism (Beech, 2011; Marquand, 2008) or a softening of the strongly moralistic approaches of the Thatcher years (Dorey, 2007). Others emphasise the continued emphasis on social conservatism within Cameronite social ideology (Griffiths, 2014;

[13] Notable contributors to this include Ball (1998), Blake (1998), Seldon and Ball (1994) and Ramsden (1998).

Hayton, 2012a; 2012b). It is within this sub-field of the political analytical approach that this thesis sits.

This is an emerging area of study, and the research presented here offers an initial assessment of the development of Conservative ideology over Cameron's entire time as leader of the opposition and first term in government. However, other assessments covering the same time period and beyond will emerge in time: as such, this novel aspect is not the sole contribution of this thesis. As discussed in the previous chapter, changes in policy are often preceded by changes or developments in ideology: this is the rationale for focusing on a particular policy area in this thesis. A number of the publications discussed here do address this policy area and others, either as elements within a much wider time period in the case of Bale and Heppell, or directly in the case of the chapters by Lee, Driver and Hayton and several journal articles. It is, however, difficult to carry out an in-depth analysis of the process of change through policy in either format. In the case of Bale and Heppell, seeking to give a broader overview, this is not really the main focus of the work. In the case of the shorter pieces, the depth of analysis is necessarily limited by time, resources and space available, increasing the need to either focus on a few aspects of policy in depth or to give a broader overview of the policy area. By producing a detailed and distinctive analysis of an entire policy area, the ideas underpinning this and the 'issues-within-issues' in terms of welfare reform, this research complements and extends the existing political analytical literature, providing a nuanced analysis of ideational change in the Conservative Party and the extent to which this is borne out in policy. By extension, it could also prove useful to those conducting social policy-focused analysis, through exploring the pressures, perspectives and goals that Conservatives consider when formulating policy.

3.5 Conclusion

Conservatives have often been wary of conferring the collection of ideas, beliefs and perspectives that have guided their political actions with the status of 'an ideology'. Ideologies have been conceived variously as too rigid, irrelevant or radical to be applied to the governing approach of the Conservative Party. Instead, members have often preferred to see this as based on flexibility, pragmatism and a concern for preserving institutions and practices whose value in maintaining the social fabric and structure of society is proven. Against such a backdrop, the radical approach of the Thatcher governments and their embrace of the concept of ideology

appears to be an aberration. In recent years, the Conservative Party has once again returned to the claim that it is free from ideological constraints under Cameron's leadership. This has prompted some speculation that Cameron was moving the Party back towards One Nation Conservatism (Page, 2010). As returned to below, the SRA conceptualisation of how policy strategies progress, with reference to on-going strategically selectivity buttressed by both party ideologies and the path-dependency associated with policy, suggests that this would be challenging given the Conservative Party's recent, Thatcherite past and the continued influence of Thatcherite perspectives on welfare policy-making.

Further, making the assumption of a return to One Nation on the basis of a commitment (or lack of) to ideology only holds so long as the Conservative rejection of ideology is accepted. This chapter and the preceding one has argued that it should not be, as it is based on an unrealistically rigid conception of what an ideology is and how ideologies influence political behaviour. Ideologies are not blueprints for action that their adherents cannot stray from: rather, their implications will shift and adjust according to context and circumstances. Moreover, actors play an active role in constituting and re-constituting these concepts, and the wider ideas resulting from them. This means that in different contexts ideologies can appear remarkably fluid, as long as the core remains consistent. In the case of conservatism, the core consists of a concern with preserving social order and rendering change 'safe', a mirror-image directed at whatever Conservatives feel is the greatest threat to the preservation of that order, and the use of an extra-human justification to legitimate the Conservative alternative. These features are present in both One Nation Conservatism, Thatcherism and Cameron's Conservatism, rendering all three manifestations of conservatism. The variation can be explained by the different contexts within which each exists, leading to a varying configuration of adjacent and peripheral concepts around the core.

Stemming from this, the chapter also argues that the One Nation Conservatism and Thatcherism cannot be viewed as completely distinct in practice. On perspectives on welfare, there is considerable continuity between the two, reflected in increasing concerns about the effect of an expansive, interventionist welfare state on social and individual morality and, ultimately, order. Concern over welfare dependency emerges as a theme in both periods, although this was far more strongly articulated under Thatcher. The major area of discontinuity is in perspectives on

the role of the state, which underwent a marked transformation between the high point of One Nation Conservatism and the ascendancy of Thatcherism. The critique of the interventionist welfare state continued to intensify under Thatcher's leadership. Conservatives who did not subscribe to this view of the state were marginalised under Thatcher, thus altering the balance of the PCP against One Nation Tories (Heppell and Hill, 2008). This informs a number of key issues around welfare policy, including considerations on the role and nature of poverty in British society, the merits of equality and inequality, the question of dependency and, ultimately, what is considered to be an appropriate or 'successful' approach to welfare provision.

Given this, any subsequent discussion of the ideological leanings of the Party under Cameron must take into account the attitudes displayed, implicitly or explicitly, towards the possibility of a positive interventionist role for the state in the provision of welfare support and the impact of such support on individuals. Using the SRA as a framework it can be argued that such thinking, alongside the limited reforms introduced by the Thatcher governments, will exert an influence on the nature of the strategically selective context within which Cameron's Party has formulated its approach to welfare provision. This is significant firstly in policy terms. The influence of Thatcherism with regard to tackling dependency and encouraging responsible behaviour was visible in New Labour's welfare reforms, which themselves shaped the contours of the context within which the Conservative Party attempted to 'modernise' in opposition, and the policy landscape surrounding the Coalition's reform programme. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly given that Conservative reform of social security was very much a work in progress when the Party left office in 1997, Conservative thinking on and interpretations welfare will have been influenced by the strategies pursued in this period. The continued academic interest in the relationship between the contemporary PCP and Thatcherism supports this: it was, after all, the most recent period of 'successful' government that the Party had experienced when Cameron was elected as leader. Such legacies include the strength of belief that these approaches offered a viable means of tackling Conservative concerns, and their potential instrumental value in returning the Conservatives to power based on past successes. Given that Conservative perceptions of the strategically selective context that the party faced will have leaned towards Thatcherite solutions, a substantial move away from these would prove challenging for Cameron.

The chapter also situated the present research within the context of the contemporary literature on the Conservatives and conservatism, welfare policy and the Coalition, particularly with respect to the relationship with Thatcherism. It is intended that the detailed policy aspect of this research can enrich its political analytical dimension, and the conclusions drawn from this regarding the Conservative Party and the current character of British Conservatism (Chapter 4). Conversely, its appreciation of party politics and electoral strategy (Chapter 5) and the significance and nature of Conservative ideas on welfare as an explanatory factor should also enhance the understanding of policy outcomes, and the trajectory of policy that the Coalition has followed (Chapters 6 and 7). The application of the SRA to this topic, as discussed, suggests that we would expect to see reforms taking place within a Thatcherite framework of hostility towards the interventionist welfare state. However this does not discount the possibility of policy innovation within this framework, in response to the contemporary challenges facing the welfare system. This, then, is the subject of the subsequent chapter.

Chapter 4

Conservative welfare politics under David Cameron: key concepts

So, let this be our vision: A country not just back in the black but back in business. A big society. A prouder people. And we know the values that are going to get us there. Responsibility. Real fairness. Compassion.

David Cameron (2011a)

4.1 Introduction

David Cameron was elected as Conservative leader on 6th December 2005, beating David Davis, Liam Fox and Kenneth Clarke. At least initially, his success was interpreted as a triumph of the centre of the Conservative Party over its right-wing, represented by Davis and Fox, or a victory of the 'modernisers' over the Thatcherite traditionalists (Bale, 2008; Evans, 2008; Heppell, 2008a). However, Cameron attracted support from across the Party, even if only for some members because of his perceived popular appeal (Denham and Dorey, 2006: 36). The scale of his victory was considerable: in the final all-Party ballot, he received 134,446 votes to Davis' 64,398 (Denham and O'Hara, 2007: 419).[14] This was, perhaps, evidence of the Party's acquiescence to the idea that it needed to 'change to win' after losing three general elections and spending eight years in opposition (see Chapter 5). Inevitably the question of how Cameron would seek to negotiate the Party's ideological past arose after his victory: in particular, the relationship with Thatcherism and the PCP's many Thatcherite MPs. In spite of Cameron's victory, the PCP remained strongly Thatcherite; both economically 'dry', and socially conservative (Heppell, 2013). As a 'centrist' Conservative, Cameron was in a minority. He owed his position to a Conservative Party which still felt strongly attached to Thatcherism, even if parts of it had acknowledged that this might be electorally damaging (Heppell and Hill, 2009). Could Cameron's victory really herald 'the final exorcism of the spectre of Thatcherism which [had] haunted the party since 1990' (Denham and Dorey, 2006: 41)? Clearly, even if this was

[14] Denham and O'Hara (2007: 419-420) point out, however, that in the two previous ballots of PCP Members, 'a majority of the Party's 198 MPs voted – twice – for a right wing candidate [either Fox or Davis]'. Ten of these MPs then supported Cameron in the final ballot, but 'only when the option of voting for Fox no longer existed'. This suggests that Cameron's mandate over the PCP may not have been as strong as it initially appeared.

what Cameron intended, the relationship with Thatcherism needed to be managed with some care.

The ascent of a new leader in the wake of a third election defeat might reasonably be expected to bring about significant change within the Conservative Party, with both of these events identified in the literature on party changes as potentially significant drivers (Harmel and Janda, 1994: 266-296). However, as Chapter 5 discusses in more detail, the Conservatives after 1997 had proven remarkably resistant to such change. The evidence cited above regarding the continued prevalence of Thatcherite policy perspectives should serve as a note of caution against assuming that Cameron would move the Party away from this. The SRA proves helpful in aiding our understanding of why this is so since it leads us to view Cameron and the Conservative Party not as unconstrained agents, but as actors within a particular context that brings a number of influences to bear on the possibility of change and the path that this might take. Ideas are positioned as central to this, since ultimately the evaluation and selection of policy strategies is a result of actors' ideological perceptions of what is possible and desirable within a particular social, economic and political context. As Buckler and Dolowitz (2012: 579-581) suggest, 'established ideological blueprints' are likely to exert a considerable effect on the 'scope of positioning' available to a party, functioning as a major structural constraint for any would-be reformist leader.

Thus this chapter focuses on a major on-going element of the strategically selective context that Cameron entered as leader in 2005. This is existence of bases of support within the Party for particular ideas and ways of approaching policy, adapted in an attempt to allow the Conservative Party to respond effectively to contemporary (and often externally-shaped) context. The assessment of party ideology contained begins to explore how Conservative thinking applied to this area has sought to respond to challenges such as the position of the New Labour government and the move into Coalition, while maintaining an authentically 'Conservative' perspective. In this way, examining the decontestation of central concepts in relation to their application to policy challenges provides an illustration of the mediating role of ideas between actors and political life.

Moreover, the SRA emphasises the cumulative nature of change and the extent to which strategic decisions rely in part on received wisdoms of 'what works' with relation to both policy and electoral strategy (discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7). Significantly, Hay states that these wisdoms and perceptions may turn out, in time, to have 'systematically misrepresented' what is required to fix a particular policy problem (2002: 211). Nonetheless, such ideas exert a significant impact on context as they are translated into policy actions, which then form a part of the policy landscape around welfare and frame future thinking and debate on the topic. The effect is a form of path-dependency, in which the ideas and actions of one government or administration have real implications for those following it. As such the decontestation of the concepts discussed in this chapter can be understood as precursors to policy change, developing after the Conservatives moved into government in 2010. In turn this impacts on the selective nature of the policy, political and economic context that is inhabited by both the PCP and other parties around it, serving to begin to embed certain ways of approaching policy problems while de-legitimising others.

Chapter 3 suggested that it is not possible to draw a clear line between One Nation and Thatcherite Conservatism; the two traditions are best viewed as a continuum, although it is possible to make an analytical distinction based on their respective attitudes towards the interventionist welfare state. In the immediate post-war years, Conservative leaderships initially supported the welfare state as a means of maintaining social order and elevating the condition of the poor, two mutually supportive objectives. Thatcher's supporters, in contrast, saw the over-extension of the state that resulted from this as a source of disorder and decline. In Freeden's terms, the extended state had become the 'enemy'. This chapter considers four key concepts in Conservative welfare policy under Cameron: poverty (and welfare dependency), responsibility, compassion and fairness. It analyses the meaning that members of the PCP attach to these concepts and the extent to which these ideas are reflected by the leadership. The ideas are understood in relation to each other, with reference to One Nation and Thatcherite Conservatism, and to the specific circumstances in which the Party has found itself governing. Particular attention is paid to underlying perspectives and assumptions about the proper role of the state, since it is proposed that this is the key difference between One Nation and Thatcherite Conservatism.

The chapter suggests that as far as welfare policy is concerned, hostility towards the interventionist welfare system has become deeply embedded in the Conservative Party's ideological outlook. It exerts a considerable hold over the PCP, exemplified in the widespread belief in the problem of 'welfare dependency', caused by what Conservatives perceive to be an overly generous and insufficiently challenging welfare system. It also underpins, in a more subtle form, the ideas emerging from the Party relating to the extension of the role of civil society organisations in providing welfare services. This hostility to the interventionist state is reflected in both the language of the leadership and their policy choices. Insofar as on-going state intervention is acceptable, this is largely limited to an authoritative, enforcing role. This reflects the extent to which Thatcherite perspectives have become embedded in the ideas informing Conservative approaches to the policy area and suggests that they will continue to exert a strong influence on Conservative strategic learning,

As such, speculation that Cameron's leadership might turn away from Thatcherism in this area has proven to be misjudged. The Party is struggling to develop an approach to social policy that can address both the challenging economic circumstances in which it finds itself in government, and the recognition that parts of the Thatcherite approach to welfare were less than adequate. However, it is doing so while heavily constrained by the anti-state ideology of Thatcherism.

4.2 Poverty and welfare dependency

Poverty is usually understood as either absolute, defined in relation to a basic standard of living, or relative – defined in relation to the wealth of others in society. Dorey (2010) and Hickson (2009) suggest that Thatcherite and One Nation Conservative social policies differ due to the concept of poverty that each uses. Thatcherism uses an absolute concept. Therefore Thatcherite welfare policy focused on the provision of a minimal safety net to meet minimal needs, defined at an individual level. Inequalities and the desire to better oneself were understood as crucial human motivations (Conservative Party, 1987): hence, anything beyond minimal provision would discourage these motivations, inhibiting self-sufficiency. This was accompanied by the theory that as long as the economy was growing, wealth would 'trickle down' from top to

bottom, effectively alleviating poverty without the need for government intervention.[15] The extension of the welfare state to address poverty was therefore not only ideologically undesirable, but practically unnecessary as long as the markets were operating freely.

In contrast, One Nation Conservatives initially embraced a relative concept. Unlike for social democrats, this was not due to a concern with egalitarianism. Rather it was a result of the perceived moral imperative of elevating the condition of the poor. This was in part owing to the social disruption that might occur should inequality become too great, and also so as to provide a Conservative counter to the disruption of the 'natural' hierarchy that might occur under more egalitarian schemes (Garnett, 2009; Hickson, 2009). Correspondingly, One Nation Conservatives saw a greater role for the state in managing poverty. The welfare state was conditionally supported as long as it played a positive role in preserving social order, of which levels of inequality were a part. One Nation Conservatism can therefore be characterised as a defence of existing inequality or 'bounded' inequality (Dorey, 2010; Hickson, 2009). Thatcherism, owing to the dismissal of relative poverty, renders increased inequality unproblematic, and any attempt to decrease it simply unnecessary and damaging.

The Conservative Party initially appeared to have moved towards a relative conception of poverty under Cameron's leadership. In a section on 'economic dependency' in the Social Justice Policy Group's (SJPG) policy review, Duncan Smith stated that Conservatives needed to understand that 'all forms of poverty, absolute and relative, must be dealt with' (SJPG, 2006a: 3). Launched by Cameron in 2006, the policy review drew extensively on New Labour's language of social exclusion and the 'social dislocation' that poverty could cause, suggesting adherence to a relative concept. In the same year, Cameron appeared resolute in his conviction that Conservatives had misunderstood the nature of poverty in the 1980s. He stated: 'we need to think of poverty in relative terms', and 'the Conservative Party recognises, will measure and will act on relative poverty' (2006a). These announcements are an example of Cameron's attempt to capitalize on the momentum gathered by his leadership campaign. Newly elected and garnering higher approval ratings than both his predecessors and, frequently, Tony Blair (Ipsos MORI,

[15] Even early in Thatcher's time as a leader there were significant doubts over the efficacy of 'trickle down' as a means of reducing poverty: see Thornton et al., 1978 and Arndt, 1983.

2015a), Cameron was in a strong position to signal a departure from previous Conservative ideological mainstays. Reflecting this, the Conservatives also voted for the Child Poverty Act, which received Royal Assent in March 2010. This enshrined in law New Labour's goals of eliminating child poverty by 2020, placing a duty on future Secretaries of State to meet four income-related relatively poverty targets in each subsequent year (Child Poverty Unit, 2010).

The apparent shift towards relativity led Hickson to suggest that Cameron's leadership heralded a revival of One Nation Conservatism, albeit one that is tinged with a 'Thatcherite influence' (2009: 360). However closer examination of the Party's conception of poverty reveals that it differs from the One Nation Conservative conception of 'bounded inequality', based primarily around alleviating material deprivation (Dorey, 2010: 50). The Party also rejects large parts of New Labour's somewhat redistributionist approach. Under Cameron, the Conservative Party began to develop and act upon a concept of poverty that does not fit easily within either a conventional 'absolute' or 'relative' understanding.

Cameron's Conservatives are far less accepting than One Nation Conservatives, Thatcherites, or New Labour of the centrality of income in poverty definitions. In government, Cameron appointed Labour's Frank Field to chair the *Review on Poverty and Life Chances* which would 'examine the case for reform to poverty measures, in particular for the inclusion of non-financial elements'. In doing so, it would shed light on 'the real causes of poverty' (Cabinet Office, 2010: 5). Chris Grayling, then Minister for Employment, remarked that Labour: 'always talked about poverty simply in terms of money and seldom demonstrated a clear understanding of the far deeper problems that can leave so many people struggling' (HC Hansard, 10 June 2010). Duncan Smith, returning to a theme articulated while he was still leader of the Party (2001), criticised income-related relative poverty targets and suggested that it is not enough to simply lift families above a 'narrow' 60% relative poverty threshold: 'there must be some kind of change in their life, or they will risk slipping back' (2012a). For Cameron's Conservatives, the source of income matters. Duncan Smith holds a longstanding belief that 'while income is important, we should be clear that the source of that income can have very different effects' (2012a). Specifically: 'whether a person is working or in receipt of benefits matters, for the absence of work and subsequent benefit dependency are themselves a form of social exclusion' (SJPG, 2006b: 18).

New Labour's spending on welfare is therefore criticised on the basis that 'they didn't see the need to accompany real growth in support with a sense of getting people into work' (Guto Bebb MP, private interview). Perceived weak work incentives in the welfare system and a lack of conditionality, combined with more extensive welfare support, had allowed 'cultures of dependency' to develop through which poverty is transmitted inter-generationally. Conversely, if parents work this 'decreases the likelihood of future generations living in poverty and dependent on benefits' and also 'has the potential to increase their wage levels' (SJPG, 2007a: 6). Duncan Smith linked this to the problem of poor social mobility amongst children born into poverty, claiming: 'we're trying to look at what are the causes of breakdown: not just money, but also the way that people live their lives' (2006). Similarly, Grayling told the House: 'children are already having their life chances and opportunities damaged by growing up in households and communities in which no one is working. That is what we are seeking to change' (HC Hansard, 1 February 2012a). In this understanding, poverty ceases to be caused by either low income (an absolute conception) or economic inequality (a relative conception): rather, dependency on the state is the root of the problem. As such, despite early moves to indicate a departure from Thatcherite perspectives, there was much in the detail for Thatcherite Conservatives to support. This allowed the leadership to maintain ideological authenticity, while simultaneously burnishing the 'compassionate' credentials that it had focused on developing in opposition.

The idea that tackling welfare dependency is the key to managing poverty has significant implications for the Conservative perception of the role of the welfare system. Dependency on the state is, in itself, a form of poverty in the Conservative understanding. An acceptable system, therefore, is not necessarily one that adequately supports those who depend on it relative to the rest of society. Rather, it is one that is structured in such a way that it enables or pushes claimants away from its support as quickly and sustainably as possible. These two objectives – of supporting and enabling – would not be mutually exclusive, were it not for the Conservative perspective that generous support 'traps' claimants within the system and thereby perpetuates 'dependency poverty'. This idea has been widely articulated by the leadership. Duncan Smith's assertions that Conservative reforms would bring about 'the end of welfare as a trap' and enable people to 'get out of the web of dependency' (2011a) are similar to comments by Cameron (2012), Osborne (HC Hansard, 26 March 2014) and Grayling (2010a). It is also widely shared across the PCP, as examples from the debates around the Welfare Reform Act (2012) and

Welfare Benefits Up-rating Bill (2013) (HC Hansard, 9 March 2011 and 8 January 2013a) and the statements of Conservative MPs, including Stuart Andrew, Guto Bebb, Robert Buckland, Philip Davies and Neil Carmichael (private interviews), illustrate.

The view of welfare as a poverty trap is not confined to one ideological wing of the Party, even though it might be more easily identified with the Thatcherite tendency. Andrew, Buckland and Carmichael, for example, all self-identify as more centrist Conservatives.[16] This illustrates how widespread the view of welfare provision as something to be avoided is across the Party, although the language it is expressed in differs (Buckland spoke about 'the enabling agenda' which would contribute to 'getting people off dependency', while Davies was concerned that the welfare state had 'created an underclass of people who were never going to be in work' [private interviews]). Wider attitudinal research on the Conservative Party under Cameron supports the contention that this perspective on the role of the welfare state is widespread. Post-2005 Conservative MPs are more likely than their predecessors to believe that the state has an active role to play in ending dependency (Bochel and Defty, 2007: 7-9); however, the 2010 cohort in particular appear to often believe that 'too much' welfare stifles individual responsibility and initiative, encouraging unnecessarily dependent behaviour (Bochel and Defty, 2012). As Buckland observed (private interview):

> It's interesting, because [Iain Duncan Smith] is perhaps more associated with a more right-wing tradition. It reminds me why, as Conservatives, we've probably got more in common than we've got against each other, which is why people like me can readily embrace what he's doing and see it as part of a wider Tory tradition about not trying to do things for or to people, but trying to do things with people.

This analysis of poverty and its causes is a version of the right-wing welfare dependency argument (Murray, 1984). Its clearest ideological heritage in Britain lies in the Thatcher government. Being out of work in this analysis is blamed on some level of individual choice. There are two main ways of understanding this. Firstly, as a deliberate decision to rely on welfare instead of working, suggesting moral turpitude: one senior backbencher who had served

[16] Heppell's (2013: 354) classification suggests that this self-identification is not out of step with the perspectives of the MPs concerned: Buckland is classified as 'agnostic' on social issues, while Carmichael and Andrew are both 'liberals'.

under Thatcher felt, for example, that 'there is clearly fraud, and these people know much better how to play the system than people like you and me'. Claimants were 'taking advantage of a system that is far too benign' (private interview). Alternatively, in a more rational understanding, people might have become trapped due to generous benefit levels and unclear returns from working. As Grayling explained to the House: 'If we are paying for people to live in a part of town that they could not afford to live in if they were in work, we are trapping them in a way that will prevent them from getting back to work' (HC Hansard, 1 February 2012a). Despite these differences, the fundamental claim that poverty is not caused by absolute low income or inequality, but by dependency on the state, is similar in both cases. Being out of work, or not working enough hours, is equated with a choice that has been enabled by the system itself, rather than being a symptom of broader social disadvantage. In such an argument, the welfare state is viewed as more hindrance than help.

The rejection of an exclusive conception of poverty as absolute sets the Conservatives under Cameron's leadership somewhat apart from Thatcherism. However, it does not follow from this that the Party is returning to One Nation Conservatism. The Conservatives have begun to elucidate a concept of 'relative poverty' which minimises the role of income and economic inequality. However, economic inequality underpins conventional conceptions of relative poverty (Townsend, 1979: 31), including that of One Nation Conservatives. The Conservatives appear to believe that this should be heavily supplemented, at least, with indicators based on lifestyle 'choices' understood in either moral or rational terms. It is therefore more accurate to say that the Party is attempting to move onto new ground. However, the ideas driving this redefinition, including the welfare dependency thesis and the idea of welfare as a trap, owe their political heritage to Thatcherism. Such arguments perceive an over-extended state mitigating against people making the right choices at an individual level. Through these arguments, two closely related further key concepts are brought into play: 'responsibility' and 'compassion'.

4.3 Responsibility

The previous section outlined the Conservative belief that dependency on the state is a form of poverty. This section considers Conservative ideas on the causes of this dependency more closely. It is proposed that an extensive welfare system in which the state takes the role of a provider of both services and incomes undermines personal and social responsibility. This lack

of responsibility then leads people to remain dependent on the state, rather than supporting themselves and their communities. In turn, the proper role of the state is re-framed as an authority figure, enforcing responsible behaviour.

The idea that a lack of responsibility is at the root of Britain's problems is outlined in the Conservative narrative of the 'broken' or 'atomised' society (Cameron, 2009a). In his first speech as leader, Cameron identified a number of symptoms of the broken society, including welfare dependency (2005b). He proposed 'two simple principles' that would underpin efforts to fix these problems: 'trusting people, and sharing responsibility'. 'Responsibility' was repeatedly invoked as a panacea for social ills over the following months (Cameron, 2006b; 2006c; 2006d; 2007a; 2007b). These speeches were precursors to the central theme of the 2010 general election campaign, the 'Big Society', and the emphasis on responsibility underpinning this has continued as the Party moved into government (Cameron, cited in Price, 2010; Cameron, 2011b; 2011c). Even as the Big Society theme has floundered, encouraging responsible behaviour through welfare reform has remained a central goal, largely because of its importance in ensuring fairness.

The literature devoted to fleshing out the Conservative conception of responsibility contains clear critiques of both the extension of the state under New Labour and the individualism of the Thatcher years. Examples of this are offered by Phillip Blond, founder of the centre-right think-tank ResPublica; Danny Krugar, Cameron's former policy advisor and Jesse Norman MP, elected in 2010. All three are critical of the effects of a large, centralised state; Norman's critique is the most succinct. Under New Labour, the state had 'a direct relationship with all British citizens and residents', such that 'almost all [would] contribute to taxation and a majority [would] receive some form of financial support' (2006: 10). British society was therefore 'over-wedded' to the state (2006: 17). This led to the development of an 'enterprise society' whereby the function of government is to achieve particular social objectives. In respect of welfare, this meant addressing poverty and inequality. In such an enterprise society, government can 'never rest easy, for nothing is ever as good as it could be, and so there will always be scope for state intervention to improve it' (2006: 38-9). The primary responsibility of citizens within such a state is to contribute to achieving the overall goal through paying taxes. Norman contends that this prioritisation of 'vertical' responsibility overwhelms the 'horizontal' connections between

people that sustain civil society. Practically, this leads to the 'crowding out' of civil society organisations (Corbett and Walker, 2013). The Conservative argument draws on the idea that these are not only more effective in providing welfare services (SJPG, 2007b), but essential in maintaining the sense of mutuality and social responsibility that underpins a strong, cohesive society.

For Blond and Krugar, individualism as well as the state shares some of the blame for the decline of civil society. Blond contends that it is modern liberal beliefs in the 'social primacy of the individual and their right to choose' which have contributed to a situation where civic and social responsibilities and obedience to social norms – including the decision to work – have become subordinate (2009: 76-77). He identifies Thatcherite economic beliefs within this: by 'endorsing an extreme individualism', Thatcherism is accused of having unwittingly 'undermined and destroyed the very associative traditions that are the only protection against the state' (2009: 126). For Krugar, while the Conservatives achieved some impressive results with the economy in the 1980s, the decade also saw a trend of 'social desertification', whereby 'hundreds' of local institutions, the family and civil society were eroded 'by the cult of individual freedom' (2007: 2-3). The lack of social responsibility is therefore understood as being as much a problem of individualism as it is a result of the expansive state, since the former has undermined the civil society organisations that protect against the latter. Norman interprets the Thatcherite social legacy somewhat differently. Thatcher's 'selective retrenchment' of the state is framed as a vital precursor to bringing about the Big Society and greater emphasis on personal and social responsibility, but Norman maintains that Britain was still under a 'statist consensus' under Thatcher and New Labour (Corbett and Walker, 2013: 457; Norman, 2006: 8-10). This implies that there was more to achieve in this respect than Thatcher managed.

Cameron has drawn heavily on some of these ideas in outlining the Party's conception of responsibility. He has suggested that the cause of the broken society is the welfare state. Speaking on the Big Society in 2009, he argued that up until around the late 1960s, the expansion of the welfare state had been 'not only well-intentioned…but generally successful'. However, even in this period, 'some state extensions helped to tackle poverty, [while] others were less effective' (2009b). What determined their success was the emphasis on personal responsibility and mutuality, as some reforms tackled poverty 'while encouraging responsibility

and local pride [while] at the same time, others undermined these virtues'. Skipping over the 1980s, Cameron then stated that Blair and Brown presided over the most significant extension of the welfare state since the post-war years. New Labour had dramatically increased welfare spending, but this had failed to have the intended effect on poverty and deprivation, illustrated by the Conservative critique of New Labour's income-based concept of relative poverty. This led Cameron to pose a number of questions concerning the state's role in tackling poverty and inequality:

> How is it possible for the state to spend so much money, to devote so much energy, to fighting poverty – only for poverty and inequality to win the fight? Within that broad question, however, lies a more nuanced and perhaps more interesting one. Not so much: 'why has the state failed to tackle poverty?' but: 'why has the state more recently failed to tackle poverty?' We know that for a long period of time, up until the late 1960s, the state was broadly effective at tackling poverty and reducing inequality. So why did the state start becoming broadly ineffective? (2009)

The answer is that an extended state had undermined the sense of responsibility felt by individuals to support themselves, their families and their communities. It thereby undermined the institutions of social support which were integral to society. Cameron highlighted the malign influence of a welfare state conceived in a time when 'there was an ethos, a culture to our country – of self-improvement, of mutuality, of responsibility'. This had given way to a 'culture of entitlement' to state support, in which there is 'less expectation to take responsibility…Because today the state is ever-present: either doing it for you, or telling you how to do it, or making sure you're doing it their way' (2009). The welfare state has therefore directly contributed to social breakdown and the development of a 'something for nothing' society in which individuals have little regard for their social responsibilities, including the moral responsibility to work.

Cameron therefore defined the Conservative conception of 'responsibility' in opposition to another implicit interpretation, which is similar to Norman's 'enterprise society'. The 'big state' that is the object of criticism is not self-funding. Its systems, including welfare provision, are partially funded by individual tax payments. The cruder end of Conservative rhetoric states that welfare recipients are not making a 'fair' contribution to this. However, as Norman notes, almost all citizens will contribute to the state though taxation and a high proportion will also receive

some sort of financial support in return through the welfare system (2006: 10). Paying taxes could therefore be understood as the fulfilment of responsibility in the relationship between the individual and the state. However, Cameron, following Blond, Krugar and Norman, also claims that this neglects the question of individuals' responsibilities towards each other; towards civil society. This is the central understanding of 'responsibility' as it applies to welfare within the Big Society (Kisby, 2010: 486).

It follows from this that the state needs to withdraw, creating space for civil society to flourish. This is a key theme of the Big Society. For Conservatives, the responsibility to pay taxes and receive support in return (a 'New Labour' conception) sits uneasily alongside the responsibility to support oneself and provide support to one another in the Big Society. Owing to the belief in welfare dependency inhibiting self-sufficiency, the state/individual and individual/society relationships must be conceived with a zero-sum mentality. The prioritisation of 'responsibility' as moral obligation leaves little room for state welfare provision, since if the state does not withdraw then this moral responsibility will continue to be undermined.

Given the attitude to the state inherent in this view, it is unsurprising that a number of analyses suggest that the Big Society narrative, with the conceptualisation of what 'responsibility' is within it, reflects the ideology of a Conservative Party that is still heavily influenced by Thatcherism (Corbett and Walker, 2013; Williams, 2012; Scott, 2011; Kisby, 2010; Smith, 2010). The concern with 'hollowing out' the state is not easily reconciled with One Nation Conservatism. There is evidence of drawing on different ideological strands within the Big Society narrative – for example, the Burkean conception of 'little platoons', as Norman suggests, in invoking a stronger role for civil society. As far as this applies to welfare, however, the emphasis has largely been on the 'vigorous values' of moral responsibility to work and self-sufficiency (Letwin, 1992), over an emphasis on community support and engagement. The narrative, not dissimilar to Thatcher's statement, is that individuals are responsible for managing their own welfare needs wherever possible: the cost of this should not fall to society to pick up.

In addition to this, there is also the question of the extent to which the Conservative Party has engaged with the criticisms of the effect of Thatcherite policies on responsibility and mutuality in British society, and hence in driving dependency on the welfare state, put forward on the

centre-right by Krugar and Blond (see above). Cameron has been generally unwilling to engage with these criticisms: for example, he simply avoided the issue in his 'Big Society' speech, cited at the beginning of this section, jumping from the late 1960s to 1997. Garnett (2009: 110-111) notes that Cameron has criticised Thatcher's supporters for having 'lost sight' of the effects that her economic policies were having on society. Yet this is not a criticism of Thatcherite ideas on society *per se*: it is a criticism of their application and of a failure to keep pace with change. The leadership's failure to engage with this aspect of the Thatcher legacy supports the idea that despite significant rhetorical differences, the Conservatives under Cameron are not so much rejecting Thatcher's approach to social policy, as much as asserting that 'things have moved on since Margaret Thatcher's "magnificent achievements"' (Bale, 2008: 283; see also Bale, 2009; Evans, 2008; 2010; Lee, 2009). The Party would preserve what it saw as the best of Thatcher's achievements – rescuing the economy and ushering in a free-market economic consensus – while also turning its attention to the social problems which Thatcherism (and New Labour) had failed to resolve. Crucially in the modern Conservative conception, as suggested in Cameron's Hugo Young speech (2009b) these were problems that existed *before* Thatcherism, not *because of*. The solution is a more careful and thorough application of Thatcherite ideas on how the state can promote self-sufficiency which had been somewhat neglected during the 1980s owing to the Thatcher governments' economic priorities. This application is discussed further in the following section, on 'compassion'. As such, in this conception, Cameron's party strongly echoes the concerns and prescriptions of the New Right.

4.4 Compassion

Perhaps more than any of the other three concepts, the Conservative use of the concept of 'compassion' within welfare policy is controversial. A criticism of the notions of responsibility and poverty outlined above is that they are 'essentially punitive' and '[betray] classic signs of "blaming the victim"' (Lister and Bennett, 2010: 102). The claim that the welfare state encourages irresponsibility means that individual claimants are also framed as irresponsible. Although some leading Conservatives, such as Duncan Smith, tend to prefer to imply that it is 'the system' that traps people in dependency, it is easy to equate this insufficient drive to remove oneself, and hence with personal failings. A similar criticism can be made of the narratives around fairness outlined below. George Osborne has aligned the Conservatives with 'the shift worker, leaving home in the dark hours of the early morning', contrasted with 'the closed blinds

of their next door neighbour sleeping off a life on benefits', again implying that laziness and individual choice is a factor. This is then used to legitimate increasingly conditional and coercive policies (Mabbett, 2013).

For some, these issues have proven difficult to reconcile with the idea of 'compassionate conservatism', which has been declared 'dead' more than once during Cameron's leadership. It is often cited as a casualty of the move into government and subsequent decision to elevate reducing public spending over all other priorities (Wright, 2012; Stewart, 2012; Clegg, cited in Mason, 2013), and some Conservative MPs have also expressed discomfort with the Party's rhetoric on welfare claimants (Buckland, private interview; Vickers, cited in Mason, 2012; Wollaston, cited in Eaton, 2013). This critique intensified in government, since a more instrumental approach to welfare and public spending appears to have overwhelmed some of the 'softer', more community-focused aspects of the Party's approach. These proved challenging to implement alongside substantial budget reductions, resulting in a stronger emphasis on individual responsibilities (Corbett and Walker, 2013; Williams, 2012). This reflects the challenges of shifting between opposition and government and the extent to which this may inhibit the implementation of less developed and embedded ideas. However, leading Conservatives have continued to assert that the Conservative welfare agenda is focused around a concept of compassion that is defined in opposition to Labour's (Cameron, 2011a; Duncan Smith, 2014; 2013; 2011b). As such it is claimed that this concept is congruent with the policies and goals of the Coalition's welfare reforms.

'Compassion' as a component of British Conservative welfare policy is relatively under-explored, although some of the broader literature on the ideological outlook of Cameron's party touches upon this (Hayton, 2012b; Beech, 2009; Driver, 2009; Dorey, 2007). There is somewhat more literature that looks at compassionate conservatism in America, of which welfare policy was a key part (Béland and Wadden, 2007). The criticisms made of American compassionate conservatism are very similar to those made of its British incarnation;[17] specifically, regarding whether 'compassionate conservatism' can be called 'compassionate' at all and, if so, how it can

[17] A comprehensive comparison between British and American compassionate Conservatism is outside of the scope of this chapter: however, discussions of the context and content of the American incarnation are provided by Ashbee (2000) and Teles (2011).

remain ‘conservative’ (Pilbeam, 2010). This provides a starting point for understanding what ‘compassion’ might mean to Conservatives. Pilbeam (2010: 252) suggests that there is a ‘world of difference’ between what compassion means in every day usage, and what it means within conservatism. ‘Compassionate conservatism’ can therefore be understood not as an attempt to tack a ‘conventional’ understanding of compassion onto conservatism, but as an attempt to redefine compassion such that it fits with other concepts in Conservative ideology. There are therefore two interrelated tasks here, which arise because of the way that concepts are understood relationally within ideologies. Conservatives must propose not only a ‘compassionate Conservatism’ that is concerned with issues not conventionally associated with Conservatives, but also define ‘Conservative compassion’ (Montgomerie, 2004: 9-14).

The Conservative concept of compassion is developed from the critique of New Labour’s poverty and social exclusion strategy. Conservatives contend that New Labour’s goals of resolving poverty and thereby improving social justice were not lacking compassion in themselves; the problem is that New Labour equated ‘compassion’ with ‘pouring money into projects so they are seen to be doing something’ (Duncan Smith 2012b; see also Osborne, 2010a). The suggestion is that this allowed New Labour to *seem* compassionate. For example, John Penrose suggested: ‘everyone had assumed [before the financial crisis] that the state had a monopoly on compassion and a monopoly on virtue’ (private interview). However this was not backed up by results, as the SJPG’s research has sought to illustrate. Pilbeam points out that Charles Murray argued that this was precisely why being ‘compassionate’ was a poor basis for public policy (see Murray, 1992). Within such a conception, ‘compassion equates to a relatively straightforward idea of giving, in the sense of bestowing more resources or more protections upon the poor and the needy’ (Pilbeam, 2010: 261). Usually, these resources are bestowed by the state, in line with an egalitarian conception of fairness. This sits uneasily with Conservatives who are suspicious of state intervention because it necessitates the acceptance of a more statist approach to provision. This throws up the prospect of the over-extended state disrupting the ‘natural’ social order. It is also very problematic in a time when cutting spending is a priority.

The key contribution of American compassionate conservatives to this debate is the suggestion that this assumption is based on a misreading of what ‘compassion’ is. The current dominant concept is ‘corrupt’ (Olasky, 1992: 5). Olasky, an advisor to George W. Bush, argued that

contemporary approaches to resolving poverty were split between arguing that 'the free market itself solves all problems of poverty' and a more conventional approach that emphasises government intervention. Neither is adequate, since both ignore the 'crucial role of truly compassionate individuals and groups in the long fight against poverty' (1992: 4). For Olasky, the roots of the concept of compassion are embodied in the values of church groups, whose better-off members provided 'hard-headed but warm-hearted' support to those in poverty, prior to the introduction of a modern welfare state with an emphasis on cash transfers (1992: 8). For these groups, compassion was not simply 'giving', but providing personal support or 'suffering with' those in poverty (Pilbeam, 2010). As such, while an emphasis on giving cash and egalitarianism paradoxically created a society in which the better-off are able to lead lives increasingly separated from those in poverty, an emphasis on this community aspect of providing poverty relief could lead to a more integrated society. This would then help to resolve issues resulting from social dislocation.

Norman insists that British compassionate Conservatism is 'entirely different from the compassionate conservatism of George W. Bush' (2006: 3). However, it is difficult not to see similarities in the ideas behind the two. One Conservative backbench MP suggested that within conservatism, compassion is 'not the compassion of pity, it's the compassion of fellow feeling and institutional identities. It's the feeling of being joined together in society', and: 'it focuses on the idea of empowering individuals and empowering institutions that lie between the state and the individual' (private interview). Cameron echoes Olasky's suspicion of the state's ability to provide any useful sort of compassion, criticising Gordon Brown's approach to poverty by stating that it was 'straight out of the big government textbook', relying too much on 'the state handing out means-tested benefits on a vast scale […] The state running programmes to get people into work […] The state developing ever more complex rules, processes and initiatives, but still leaving people and families behind' (2006e). He went on to criticise 'big bureaucracies' which 'terrify' people, without 'reaching out a helping hand' to them. The CSJ and Duncan Smith have strongly advocated the role of civil society and voluntary organisations delivering welfare services (SJPG, 2007b). This is justified through a similar line of reasoning to the American claim. It is via these groups that the 'human element' of compassion is reintroduced into the system. The emphasis on responsibility suggests that it is ultimately this human element that will 'mend our broken society' (Conservative Party, 2010: iii).

This concept of compassion has implications for welfare claimants. The critique of the welfare system leads easily down the 'welfare dependency' route, and the main potential policy implications are greater conditionality in the receipt of benefits, and limiting benefit payments. Both of these can be framed as 'compassionate' according to the Conservative understanding. This is firstly simply because 'if the state is the means we use to pay for our health, welfare and education, then we can expect it to take an interest in how we are doing' (Norman, 2006: 61). It is an example of how Conservatives seek to reassert the responsibilities of claimants in their relationships with the state. However, it is also because in this conception it is *not* compassionate to allow people to remain claiming benefits 'without any checks or balances' against it (Streeter, private interview). Encouraging (or pushing) claimants away from the welfare system is framed as a matter of social justice.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this part of the 'compassionate conservatism' narrative is popular with the right of the Party. For example, Davies stated that 'keeping people trapped on a benefit system that they can't get out of because if they do they're risking too much, is not compassionate in my opinion' (private interview). A fellow senior backbencher on the right emphasised that compassionate conservatism 'is a conservatism whose compassion is to understand the need, the desirability, of taking people off welfare. They can stand on their own two feet' (private interview). These perspectives have been echoed by those at the top of the Party: for example, Duncan Smith compared reforming welfare to struggling against slavery, speaking of helping claimants to 'break free' (cited in Holehouse, 2014), ensuring that no one is 'written off' to indefinite welfare dependency (Duncan Smith, 2011b).

There is significant overlap between the usage and understanding of concepts of 'responsibility' and 'compassion'. The idea that it is compassionate to get people to 'stand on their own two feet' relates to the positive outcomes associated with self-sufficiency, defined as responsible behaviour.. In this sense, through the broad view that indefinite state support is not positive or desirable, and through supporting an ideal of self-sufficiency and independence, 'compassion' also falls towards the Thatcherite end of the spectrum. However, compassion also implies a more active role for the both the state, and wider society, in moving people towards independence than is envisaged in a straightforward 'rolling back' approach. It is not assumed that the withdrawal

of the state will necessarily force people into independence. Rather, there is a place within this conception for a welfare system that places significant expectations and conditions on those who receive support from it. The emphasis on compassion could be understood as the more thoughtful application of Thatcherite ideas on the moral obligation towards self-sufficiency, as well as helping to further define the proper boundaries of what Conservatives believe that state should, and should not, provide. The individual freedom of claimants is viewed as subordinate to their responsibilities to fulfil their moral obligations to society, notably working and supporting themselves. The state therefore has an on-going role to play in ensuring that claimants are doing their best to meet these obligations. The role that the state should play is discussed further in the following section.

4.5 Fairness

'Real fairness' is the final key value underpinning the Conservative approach to welfare. Following 2008's *Unfair Britain* (Conservative Party, 2008a), fairness became a central theme in the 2010 Conservative manifesto. The Party claimed it would create 'a welfare system that is fair and firm' (Conservative Party, 2010: 16); that their economic policy would be 'founded on a determination that wealth and opportunity must be more fairly distributed', and that they 'would not allow the poorest people in Britain to pay for the mistakes of some of the richest' (Conservative Party, 2010: viii). A concern with 'fairness' was ubiquitous in the three major parties' 2010 manifestos: Labour promised 'a future fair for all' (Labour Party, 2010), while the Liberal Democrats pledged to introduce 'fair taxes', 'a fair chance for every child', 'a fair future; creating jobs by making Britain greener' and 'a fair deal by cleaning up politics' (Liberal Democrats, 2010). The Conservative concept of fairness can be understood in relation to its ideas on poverty, responsibility and compassion.

There are two main ways that the idea of 'fairness' in welfare delivery can be interpreted. Firstly, there is a needs-based conception, suggesting that the purpose of the welfare system is to support those who are unable to support themselves. A fair system is one which looks after vulnerable people, or those designated 'in need' of support. In such an understanding there may be an implicit concern with egalitarianism and relativity, encompassed in the idea that there is a level beneath which living standards should not be allowed to fall. There is a duty on the state to maintain this, and a duty on those who are capable of supporting themselves to do so. Secondly,

there is a desert-based conception where support from the state is contingent on building up entitlements, usually operationalised through a contribution-based system: for example, social security payments provide protection against unemployment. In this conception 'fairness' is based on earned entitlement (getting 'something for something') or being otherwise designated as entitled to support (for example, through disability). An unconditional needs-based approach is highly problematic from a welfare dependency perspective, because a central claim of this is that unconditional systems beget dependency through undermining self-reliance and responsibility. In contrast, a contribution-based approach initially looks like it might provide a good fit with Conservative ideas on welfare. It would reward and incentivise work as a responsible behaviour. However, there are major issues which mean that a fully contributory approach is incompatible with other key Conservative ideas on the proper size and form of the welfare state.

Conservatives define fairness principally in opposition to New Labour, whose conception is characterised as needs-based and concerned with achieving greater equality in terms of income (Conservative Party 2008a: 2). Conservatives argue that this measurement is too narrow. They found common ground with their coalition partners on this: Nick Clegg claimed that the Coalition's understanding of fairness is 'a more complex concept […] than has been prevalent in policy-making in recent years. According to the narrower model used by the previous government, greater fairness is measured by snapshot comparisons of income alone' (Clegg, 2011). The critique of fairness therefore begins from a similar place to the critique of New Labour's relative poverty measures. These are linked through the assertion that, even on this narrow definition, New Labour has not made substantial progress towards meeting its targets (Conservative Party, 2008a: 2-5), necessitating a change of approach. There are two lines of argument here. In the first, Conservatives contend that in focusing on ensuring 'fairness' for claimants (conceived in terms of boosting incomes), New Labour neglected to ensure that the system was also fair to those who fund it. In the second, Conservatives contend that the focus on incomes rather than more holistic measures to address dependency is unfair to claimants themselves. This links fairness with compassion. Together, these arguments make up the claim that Labour has only attempted to deliver a 'phony fairness', in comparison to the Conservatives' 'real fairness' (Cameron, 2011a).

Reflecting the first argument, Duncan Smith stated that there are two imperatives driving Conservative welfare reform: ensuring 'fairness for the jobseeker' as well as 'fairness for the taxpayer' (2011a). He stated: 'I will always fight for fairness for people who have fallen on hard times. I will always fight for fairness for the very vulnerable. But fairness must be a two-way street. I'm determined that people who pay their taxes into this welfare state get a fair deal too' (2010). Similarly, Grayling claimed that the Welfare Reform Act would 'deliver fairness to claimants, and the taxpayers who fund the system' (HC Hansard, 1 February 2012a), and linked fairness to the 'payment by results' aspect of the Work Programme, stating: 'not only will this be fairer to those receiving help, it will also be fairer to the taxpayer as it will be paid for by long-term results' (2010b). This argument is delivered through the narrative of 'something for nothing' for those who are dependent on welfare, and 'nothing for something' for those who fund them.

The rhetoric on the divide between 'benefit claimants' who receive 'something for nothing' and the 'taxpayers' or 'hardworking people' who fund them typically draws a sharp line between the two.[18] The Conservatives then position themselves on the side of 'the people who told [us] they were sick of going out to work knowing their neighbours were on benefits, but had no intention of getting a job' (Cameron, 2011a), or 'the family on average wages living in houses they can only just afford…[Who] see their taxes go to pay for an unemployed family living in a house costing £100,000 in rent' (Duncan Smith, 2010). Duncan Smith continued:

> Most people in this country don't wake up early in the dark and the cold, and head to their job in order for the state to take their money and waste it. They don't slump, exhausted in their chair after work, just to see their taxes spent on people who can work but won't.

Although this is undoubtedly an important element of the Party's electoral positioning (see following chapter), there are deeper ideas here which illuminate the concept of fairness, and the importance of responsibility in delivering this to taxpayers. Conservatives claim that those who do meet their responsibilities by working and supporting themselves are not adequately rewarded and recognised for this. In contrast, an unconditional needs-based conception of fairness has led

[18] In practice, this line is much less clear, as Hills (2015) illustrates.

to the state supporting those who have behaved irresponsibly. This encourages further irresponsible behaviour. As such, Cameron stated: 'for too long, we've lived in an upside down world where people who do the right thing, the responsible thing, are taxed and punished, whereas those who do the wrong thing are rewarded' (2011b). Delivering 'fairness for the taxpayer' is therefore equated not with egalitarianism, but with reward for effort. It is a desert-based concept, suggesting that support from the welfare state should not be considered an automatic entitlement, but something that must be earned through meeting social responsibilities.

The second line of argument focuses on delivering fairness to claimants. The Party has advocated moving towards a conception of fairness that is congruent with their understanding of poverty and compassion, claiming that fairness is not delivered through greater income transfers but through delivering greater support to those in need. The first consequence of this is the critique of the state programmes delivering support, which are charged with being inefficient and ineffective. This is then related to arguments around responsibility and compassion which suggest that 'top down' state programmes are inherently ill-suited to providing this support, so the solution is a greater transfer of powers to organisations outside of the state.

A second consequence is a critique of conditionality within the welfare system. This is where the 'active state' implied in the conception of compassion comes in. Conservatives have been keen to emphasise that they will continue to support claimants who are 'very vulnerable', 'in the greatest need' (Duncan Smith, 2010) or 'genuinely disabled' (Cameron, 2012a), but have claimed that the system is doing others a great disservice. New Labour's approach, it is suggested, allowed the 'hard to help […] to wither away' thus failing to 'help individuals make the most of their lives' (Grayling, 2010b), and the benefit system at present has left claimants 'effectively institutionalised' (Freud, 2013). The criticism of New Labour is therefore not as straightforward as it initially seemed: it is not a criticism of needs-based welfare as such, rather it is a criticism of unconditional, or insufficiently conditional, needs-based welfare. A sufficiently conditional approach, focused on providing intensive practical support for those 'in need' is acceptable, since it is framed as the most responsible and compassionate way of moving claimants out of dependency. This, in turn, would deliver fairness or 'social justice' to claimants, while also reducing the economic burden on the taxpayer.

It can therefore be seen that there are two conceptions of fairness operating within the Conservative Party. The first, 'fairness for taxpayers', suggests that fairness is based on desert. It is unfair to taxpayers to have to support those who are not contributing to the system, while receiving inadequate recompense themselves. This concept focuses on the cost of welfare, as well as the assertion of a moral responsibility to work. It seems to lead logically towards a more contribution-based system. The second, 'fairness for claimants', is focused more on the behavioural impact of the welfare system. This conception suggests that a needs-based approach could be viable as long as the welfare system is sufficiently conditional so as to promote a sense of mutuality. Support is dependent on claimants '[following] through on their side of the bargain' with regard to looking for work (Conservative Party, 2009: 12). This would help protect against, or discourage dependency.

However, there is a tension between advocating a more contributory *and* a more needs-based approach. As one group of new MPs, dubbed the 'New New Right' (Lakin, 2014) note in relation to a needs-based system, 'the more we support the poor, the harder it is to remain fair to those who have remained in work'. However, they also note that contributory systems, whilst seeming to address this imbalance, are both expensive and represent an undesirable extension of state welfare provision (Kwarteng et al., 2011: 84). Kayte Lawton, a Senior Research Fellow for the IPPR, noted that the Conservatives have 'a real split' between the majority 'traditional Conservative view of residualising and means-testing, and it's just for the vulnerable, and other people can make their own private arrangements' and 'a minority of people who think contributory benefits are important' (private interview). Labour Work and Pensions select committee member Sheila Gilmour similarly suspected that 'a lot of people in the Government, and a lot of the Government backbenchers, see [welfare] provision as being very much a safety net, very much being there for those who they would say are "most in need"' (private interview). Committee Chair Dame Anne Begg concurred with this view (private interview).

Some Conservatives have expressed support for a contributory approach. Penrose suggested that one of the main problems with the welfare system as it relates to both fairness and supporting responsibility is: 'we have effectively – and not just in the last Labour government, but over several generations – got away from anything to do with the contributory principle' (private interview). However, as the evidence above suggests, this seems to be very much a minority

view. In any case, it would require an extremely ambitious reform programme at a time when the Conservatives are already enacting a significant set of reforms that emphasise not contribution, but need. In government therefore the leadership has taken a needs-based approach to ensuring fairness, simultaneously increasing conditionality and seeking to limit who is perceived as being 'in need'. Explaining how the leadership has arrived at this resolution requires considering all four of the key ideas driving policy in relation to one another, while also bearing in mind the practicalities of institutional reform.

4.6 The same old Tories?

Interpretations of the relationship between the ideology of Cameron's Conservative Party and past Conservative traditions vary. One possibility is that Cameron's leadership represents a sharp break with Thatcherism and, perhaps, with conservatism itself. For Beech (2011: 268; 2015), the approach to social issues by the Conservatives under Cameron 'can be accurately summarized as a social liberal outlook', reflecting a departure from social conservatism. Given that economic liberalism is a feature of Thatcherism, this would leave the Party 'conservative' in name only. Dorey (2007: 139) partially concurs: Cameron aimed to rebrand the Party as 'more socially liberal and inclusive in its ideological orientation and policies', although a 'conservative' outlook is maintained through a focus on 'compassionate', 'progressive' or 'liberal' conservatism. Moreover, Dorey offers a number of areas in which Cameron apologised for Thatcher's policies, including using Scottish citizens as 'guinea pigs' for the Poll Tax and the treatment of public sector workers, as well as examples of rhetorical departures. Cameron's remark that 'there is such a thing as society; it's just not the same thing as the state' is a notable example, which is interpreted as rejecting Thatcher's infamous statement (2007: 142-145). Garnett (2009) similarly detects in Cameron's party some regret for the effects of Thatcherism. Bale (2008) and Evans (2009; 2008) further suggest that Cameron attempted to move on from Thatcherism, without explicitly repudiating it. In all of these accounts, there is a suggestion that, in some way, Cameron sought to 'draw a line' (whether ideologically substantive or not) under the Thatcher years.

Some of Cameron's backbenchers have agreed with this broad characterisation. Robert Buckland, Vice-President of the Tory Reform Group which seeks to promote the values of One Nation Conservatism within the Party, stated that he believes that the leadership and 'most of the

cabinet' share a commitment to One Nation ideals.[19] Cameron's leadership, he suggested, 'allowed the Conservative Party to return to one of the strongest themes on which it evolved, which was to elevate the condition of the people […] We're going back to that rich theme within the Party' (private interview). Andrew Tyrie (2006) speculated that One Nation Conservatism might be recast under Cameron, given his early indications of the direction in which he wanted to lead the Party. Kwasi Kwarteng referred to the association between One Nation Conservatism, pragmatism and the acceptance of a conception of social hierarchy in legitimating political leaders, chiming with Dorey's conception of One Nation and stating that Cameron is 'very much an old Tory pragmatist, by his schooling and his background. I think frankly, in terms of his outlook, he's very much part of that old established class' (private interview). Outside of the parliamentary party, Blond (2012) suggested that in 2005 it looked like Cameron would move the Conservatives away from the 'reductive market liberalism' that he suggested had characterised Thatcherite policy, towards a 'new one nation approach to Britain's problems'.

However, the leadership has also sought to emphasise its Thatcherite credentials. In response to criticism from Lord Tebbit that the Conservatives under Cameron were abandoning Thatcherism, George Osborne stated that 'of course we are successors of the Thatcher inheritance'. He qualified this by claiming that 'I don't think in the 21st century you can win a general election simply by playing the old tunes of the 1980s…Margaret Thatcher had the answers for her time; David Cameron has the answers for his time' (cited in Sylvester and Thomson, 2007). Cameron expressed an ambition to be 'as radical a social reformer as Margaret Thatcher was an economic reformer', pledging to 'mend Britain's broken society' just as Thatcher had mended the 'broken economy' in the 1980s (quoted in Jones, 2008). While the leadership was undoubtedly mindful of the need to retain the support of ideologically Thatcherite members and supporters, there seems to be more than political expediency at play here. As discussed, both the problems that Cameron's Conservatives (and Cameron himself) have identified with regard to welfare and the state, and the proposed solutions, owed much to the New Right. Given Cameron's own political background (Evans, 2010) and his conviction that the Conservatives had won the 'battle of ideas'

[19] Beech (2009: 21) refutes this, arguing that 'despite the continued activities of the Tory Reform Group, One Nation Conservatism is not a force in the parliamentary Conservative Party'.

during the 1980s, exemplified in the existence of New Labour (see Chapter 5), it would have been a strange move to then seek to dispense with those ideas entirely.

In some respects, the Conservative approach to welfare appears to draw more on New Labour's legacy than on Thatcherism. As Chapter 1 makes clear, New Labour's approach was not, in practice, wholly focused on income transfer without any conditions attached. Degrees of conditionality in the receipt of welfare and more 'holistic' programmes aimed at reducing social exclusion were introduced during New Labour's time in office. In turn, a number of Coalition reforms build on these, particularly with regard to 'welfare to work' (Deacon and Patrick, 2011). This reflects the extent to which party policies and approaches are shaped by contemporary trajectories and understandings as well as more fundamental beliefs, exhibiting a level of path-dependency. Supporting this, aspects of New Labour's approach also drew substantially on Thatcherism. Those that did have largely remained in place since the Conservatives have moved back into government, albeit often in more intensified forms: for example, in the emphasis on engagement in paid work as an ideal and a moral obligation. Those that did not, such as a concern with redistribution (however veiled under New Labour) have been attacked by the Conservatives. This is on the basis that these aspects keep people in poverty, discourage responsible behaviour, and thereby perpetuate a system that is unfair, uncompassionate, and damaging to society. Most significantly, New Labour continued to envisage a significant on-going role for the state in supporting the delivery of welfare policy and relieving poverty through income transfers, even as there was an increased reliance on private sector provision of services. Reflecting a deep hostility towards such intervention, the Conservative Party has argued strongly against this.

In Freeden's terms, therefore, the Conservative 'mirror' continues to pick up the supposedly statist ideological character of the opposition as the main threat to social order. As such, the Conservative approach to welfare policy is focused on this. Hostility to the interventionist state is what links together all four of the concepts discussed in this chapter. The central claim in contemporary Conservative welfare ideology is that dependence on the state is a form of poverty. Resolving this, by moving claimants from 'dependence' to 'independence', is the main policy goal. The key problem for governments to address is therefore not income poverty, but welfare dependency. This is presented in opposition to Labour who, Conservatives argue, were happy to

make claimants more and more reliant on the state in the pursuit of equality (a core concept in democratic socialism) and to be seen to be doing something. However much the Conservative leadership claimed in the early years to be concerned with relative poverty, this should not be mistaken for an egalitarian approach to welfare. The aim is to move as many people as possible off dependency on the state. While this is to be achieved partially by 'making work pay', as detailed in Chapter 6, this is intended as an incentive rather than a device to ensure equality.

Ending dependency is the key goal because Conservatives propose that it is dependency itself that has led to social breakdown. Generous welfare systems encourage individuals to look to the state, rather than to each other, their families, friends and communities, in times of difficulty. This contributes to a breakdown of personal and social responsibility. Individuals do not expect support from their communities, so communities become less accustomed to providing that support. Social ties are then weakened. Implied within this is the suggestion that without the state, there would be a more organic society providing this support: what Duncan Smith (2001) and the SJPG (2006b: 14) have referred to as 'the welfare society'. Owing to this breakdown, reliance on the state becomes more normalised and more extensive. This becomes a cycle, during which other organisations such as voluntary and civil society organisations are 'crowded out' through widespread dependence on the state. As such, along with the decline in responsibility comes a failure of compassion: because they do not use these organisations, people are less likely to join them, and so what Conservatives claim as 'real compassion' suffers a decline. Despite all of New Labour's best intentions, Conservatives claim that the extension of the welfare state has led to these negative consequences. The final claim is that this is not fair to anyone: those 'trapped' within the system or those who fulfil their obligation towards self-sufficiency who, in a system that the Conservatives portray as obsessed with income transfers, have to pay for them.

This is an illustration of an attempt to portray the social change brought about by the welfare state as un-natural and enforced, rather than 'safe' as conservatism allows for. In many respects, this is not dissimilar to Thatcherism. Having identified the welfare state as a key threat to social order (and later, economic prosperity), the Conservative Party then puts forward an acceptable alternative. This alternative (the 'welfare society' or 'Big Society') is the extra-human device that the Conservative Party uses to legitimate its goal of rolling back state welfare provision. The

narration of social breakdown owing to an overextended welfare state contains within it a desire to return to an implicitly tried-and-tested model of community provision that has been overwhelmed by the state itself. It is only through the state's withdrawal that the Big Society can flourish, halting the process of social and economic decline.

Interestingly, this might imply a shift away from the individualist rhetoric that characterised Thatcherism and an attempt to reintroduce something of a collectivist conception of society, via an emphasis on mutuality (Ellis, 2009). Freeden proposes that Thatcherite individualism was a reaction against the perceived collectivism that characterised One Nation Conservatism's conception of society and the role of government in relation to this. Thus collectivism was pushed away from adjacent concept status, and individualism brought inwards (1996: 388). If it can be accepted that New Labour drew substantially on Thatcherism in its approach to welfare policy, then it might be proposed that collectivism is no longer a threat. Instead, the atomisation of society has become a key problem for social order. This appears to have opened up a practical space for the promotion of broader social obligations within Conservatism, providing a route through which Thatcherite ideas on self-sufficiency might be developed.

The hostility of the current Conservative leadership towards the interventionist welfare state severely limits the options open to it in developing welfare policy. As discussed in the final section on fairness, a minority of Conservatives have expressed an interest in a more contributory system. However, such a system is incompatible with the ideology of the leadership and much of the PCP. Within an outlook that is so convinced in its opposition to the expansive state, there is no room for expanding the welfare state further through an extension of social insurance. This would also extend dependency. Therefore, the broader social problems associated with individuals looking to the state for support would continue. It would also be a difficult sell electorally and, as explored in Chapter 5, the perception of failure to win the 2010 election outright combined with the financial pressures that the Coalition faced seemed to leave the Conservatives less disposed to experiment with innovative welfare policies. The already limited support for the idea within the Party combined with these factors, will have served to render implementing a more contributory system a very unlikely possibility, and the direction of the Coalition's reforms will further entrench this. Instead the Conservatives have opted for Universal Credit which, although encompassing a variety of means-tested benefits, is less crude

than a simple needs-based approach. Instead, it attempts to reward claimants for moving into work or increasing their hours, thus rewarding responsible behaviour whilst also reflecting a somewhat novel aspect of rational (as opposed to purely moral) thinking on the causes of dependency.

However, ensuring that the system is fair to those who 'play by the rules' whilst also keeping a lid on spending is challenging. The Party has attempted to make the system 'fairer' though both extending the sanctions regime attached to several working-age benefits, tightening up eligibility, and introducing various caps and other limitations (see Chapters 6 and 7). Essentially, the focus has been on penalising those who are deemed to be receiving 'something for nothing', rather than providing extra rewards to those who are getting 'nothing for something'. This also plays into the concept of compassion, since an active state which pushes claimants to support themselves is framed as a compassionate state. While this may be partly a result of spending restrictions, it is also reflective of the Party's determination to avoid increasing dependency. Given this set of priorities, it is difficult to see what else the Party could have advocated. Considering the extent to which Thatcherite attitudes to the state appear to be embedded in the PCP, it is equally difficult to see how the approach might develop in a different direction in future.

Finally, although the policy impact of the financial crisis will be examined in the following chapters, it is worth considering here whether this can be said to have had an impact on the Party's ideas on welfare provision. The emphasis on the Big Society has waned since the 2010 election. Instead, the dominant narrative has been the need to cut the spending deficit, with the crisis framed as one of public spending. Cuts to the DWP's budget were inevitable. For example, Stuart Andrew felt that changes were 'absolutely long overdue: we haven't got the money to carry on the way that we have been, and that's a big problem' (private interview). MPs have been keen to emphasise that these cuts are not solely a result of the changed financial context. Kwarteng claimed that 'we had a problem with spending even before the crisis. For us at the end of that period in 2007 to essentially sign up to Labour's spending plans for another four years, I thought that was a mistake' (private interview). The financial crisis 'sharpened' and 'gave great emergency' to the need for welfare reform (Penrose, private interview). However, the ideas and arguments underpinning this have been remarkably consistent throughout.

The concepts discussed in this chapter together provide a broad rationale for a long-term Conservative approach to welfare based around the moral turpitude encouraged by, and the unjust consequences of a particular type of welfare system that is identified with New Labour. However the arguments used to immediately prioritise cutting welfare spending are closely related to these. On poverty, cutting the value of or entitlement to benefits saves money, but it should also encourage independence and reduce the attractiveness of welfare dependency. For example, Kwarteng's claim regarding problematic spending is extended in *Britannia Unchained*, where the authors claim that high spending undermines both the principle of 'sound money' *and* the importance of hard work and belief in delayed gratification (Kwarteng et al., 2010: 68-85). On responsibility, government spending is presented as irresponsible in itself. Duncan Smith accused Labour of spending money 'like drunks on a Friday night' in the belief that spending alone could resolve society's ills (HC Hansard, 14 June 2010). This is something that the Conservatives were arguing against well before the crisis (although it did not prevent them voting to uphold Labour's spending plans in 2007, as noted above). On fairness, ideas on need and 'something for nothing' resurface in justifying cuts. The recession drew attention to the idea that, as one 2010 intake backbencher explained: 'a lot more people were becoming eligible for benefits, at a time when benefits were not being targeted on those that needed them but were increasingly paid to people who did not need them' (private interview); welfare started to 'breed resentment' because 'when your household income is being squeezed you do notice where other money is going' (Andrew, private interview). On compassion, the need to cut spending simply added extra urgency to the existing impetus. This forced the Party to confront the idea that 'there's no money to be compassionate with, so we've got to find other ways to be compassionate [...] There are many ways to be compassionate other than spending large wodges of taxpayers' dosh' (Penrose, private interview).

Despite the congruency of arguments used to justify both cuts and longer-term reform, there are clearly some differences of opinion within the Party regarding the balance of these priorities in practice. McKay and Rowlingson (2011) identify a tension between those who view deficit reduction as the primary motive for welfare reform, and those who view lower spending as a longer-term consequence of welfare reform. The former group includes MPs such as Kwarteng, who suggested that Universal Credit 'could be a problem' because it would not bring an

immediate fiscal saving (private interview). Unsurprisingly, as civil servants attested to, this is the main motivation of the Treasury. The former group is more focused around Duncan Smith's approach at the DWP. Despite this tension, the 'enemy' of both groups remains the same: it is the expansion of the state and its effect on individual behaviour, society, and the economy. This common enemy is essential in explaining the consistency in approach since 2005, and the lack of ideological variation from Thatcherite ideas within the PCP and its leadership. Owing to this, the 'cutters' versus 'reformers' characterisation of the Conservative Party's approach to welfare under Cameron reflects not so much a schism within the Party as a fairly minor crack. Both groups agree on the need for some cuts: the 'reformers', however, supplement this with a concern with how the system could dis-incentivise the 'choice' of not working, while 'cutters' focus on moral explanations for dependency. There is a difference here but it is not a major one in ideological terms, and the emphasis on different understandings is likely to reflect different priorities and contextual pressures. Ultimately, both groups are moving towards a similar vision of the relationship between state, society and individual.

4.7 Conclusion

Chapter 3 discussed the utility of looking at what the Conservative Party perceives to be the principal threats to social order as a means of understanding the shifts in its outlook and policies. It suggested that the key difference between One Nation Conservatism and Thatcherite Conservatism is the source of the perceived threat, and that this has a significant impact on conservatism's ideological structure and Conservative political strategy. One Nation Conservatives were more accepting of the idea of a large and active state to rebuild the nation's infrastructure and maintain order following World War II, and were able to effectively incorporate this into to Party's electoral appeal. By the time the first Thatcher government came to power it was this expansive state itself that had come to be considered the 'enemy', since its repeated failures in meeting its ever-growing obligations threatened to undermine its authoritative role in maintaining order (Freeden, 1996: 388; King, 1975). One Nation Conservatives therefore accepted expansion insofar as it was perceived to be instrumental in managing change in the post-war years. The welfare state was a means of rendering change in this period 'safe', preventing the top and bottom of society from becoming too dislocated, thus playing an important role mitigating against social disorder. When it was perceived that the state was becoming over-extended and threatened to drag the country into collapse, the Conservative

Party began to move towards what became known as Thatcherism. Supporting the state had become strategically disadvantageous. Because they had never been fully ideologically committed to it in the first instance, Conservatives were well placed to shift away from One Nation ideas. Concurrently, the effect of the extended state on individual morality began to be emphasised.

In relation to the theoretical framework guiding this thesis, Freeden suggests that such perceived 'enemies' (as the interventionist state constitutes) are a central part of the explanation for why the Conservative Party shifts and changes ideologically. This in turn indicates that perceptions of such enemies are a crucial element of the strategically selective context proposed in the SRA. The character of these serves to shut down or enable particular approaches and outlooks and, when the Party moved into government, the policy options that relate to these. This chapter has suggested that the main actors in the explicit process of developing a strategy are those at the top of the Party, specifically in the DWP and the leadership. However, in examining the bases of support for particular ideas within the PCP more broadly, it has also drawn attention to how this wider group of actors can play a role in legitimating or de-legitimating change, particularly in interpreting the decisions of the leadership in a way that is amenable to their concerns and perspectives as conservatives. Central to this process has been the perception of the interventionist state as 'the enemy', which has been shown to act as a powerful structural constraint on Conservative approaches to welfare. What is perhaps most striking about this is the way that a One Nation emphasis on the state has been pushed out of the Party, to the extent that there is now little in the way of disagreement about the path the Conservatives should take in relation to this significant policy area. This suggests that path dependency is an important factor in ideological development as well as policy change. This is to be expected, since the SRA suggests that policy change is preceded by ideological change. However, it supports the need identified in Chapter 2 to pay greater attention to ideological change itself, exploring how some ideas acquire enough resonance to drive change while others are more likely to be downplayed. Institutional bases of support are an important factor in this.

What is illustrated by Conservative ideas on the concepts discussed in this chapter is that in some respects little has changed in the Conservative Party since the 1980s. In Freeden's terms, the principal 'enemy' or threat to social order is still the interventionist state, as it was for

Thatcherites, and supporting this is seen as an ideological and strategic liability. This is consistent whether applied to the early years of Cameron's leadership in opposition, where an overextended welfare state was accused of having 'broken' society, or the Party's time in Government where public spending has been framed as the cause of the economic instability. Antipathy to the expansion of the state owing to the negative social and economic consequences of this is what links concepts of poverty, responsibility, fairness and compassion together, and it is this which has determined the trajectory of the Party's approach to welfare, discussed in the following chapters. The welfare state is no longer seen as something that could bring about positive outcomes in this area; generous benefits and state-led welfare provision are viewed as largely negative by 'centrist' Conservatives and right-wingers alike. As far as welfare is concerned, One Nation Conservatism no longer offers a significant alternative view of the state within the PCP.

There is evidence of the development of ideas within the PCP on the role of civil society, and how this might offer an alternative to state provision while almost demonstrating how the Conservatives have 'moved on' from Thatcherism. The leadership has struggled to convert these into a workable policy agenda, despite seemingly genuine interest in the idea from both Cameron and Duncan Smith. Owing to the overwhelming emphasis on sound finances following the move into government, the result has been the somewhat fanciful proposition that if the state withdraws from providing support, civil society organisations will simply move in to take over its role. These appear to draw on a Burkean tradition, and this strand might be described as the accommodation of One Nation ideas within the constraints of Thatcherite anti-statism. Equally, however, it could be seen as the development of Thatcherite social policy, which emphasised self-sufficiency and the importance of family support as well as the moral obligation to work.

Thatcher's social policy was under-developed owing to the focus on economic matters, and there was plenty of room for Cameron's Conservatives to expand on this. This further underscores the difficulty, and inadvisability, of attempting to draw a clear divide between Thatcherism and One Nation. Although the attitude to the welfare state differs markedly at different points within each tradition, there are common themes, notably around the effect of the welfare system on individual morality and social cohesion, running through both (and into Cameron's leadership) concerning order and managing change. This emphasis is ultimately what gathers all three

examples (Thatcherism, One Nation and ‘Cameronism’) within the conservative ideological family.

At first glance, the claim that Conservative welfare policy is driven by principles of fairness, responsibility and compassion seems somewhat trite. It would be a strange move for a Party to claim that it wanted to introduce a system that was unfair, lacking in compassion and supportive of irresponsible behaviour. This chapter has sought to explain the Conservative decontestation of these concepts under David Cameron’s leadership, as a basis for understanding the strategic decision-making processes that follow on from these. It is proposed that the Party has constructed a reasonably ideologically coherent agenda for welfare based around these four principles, as long as the decontestation of each concept is accepted. However, translating ideas in practice is challenging. The goal of constructing an approach to welfare as a discreet policy area does not stand separately from other strategic priorities within political life. One important influence on this is the place of the policy area within electoral strategy, which may require a significantly different approach from the more policy-focused aspect, in turn impacting on ideas around this and altering the overall direction of party strategy and dominant ideology. This is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 5
Hardworking people and benefit dependents: Welfare and electoral strategy

> Where is the fairness, we ask, for the shift-worker, leaving home in the dark hours of the early morning, who looks up at the closed blinds of their next door neighbour sleeping off a life on benefits? When we say we're all in this together, we speak for that worker. We speak for all those who want to work hard and get on.
>
> George Osborne (2012a)

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter considered the ideological character of David Cameron's Conservative Party through exploring four central concepts that underpin its approach to welfare. It suggested that despite the somewhat increased prominence of a more comprehensive and nuanced approach to social policy under the 'modernisation' banner, in many ways the party has failed to move on from the core features of Thatcherite Conservatism. This is particularly notable with regard to moralistic explanations of poverty, construed as 'welfare dependency'. This continues to exert a strong effect on the Party's thinking on welfare, with consequences for the sorts of policies and approaches that it is willing and ideologically able to adopt. Policy, however, is not solely a matter of resolving the problems associated with a particular policy area: it also has a more instrumental value, with policies and issues framed in such a way that they convey a particular message about the party and its priorities. This leads us towards looking at electoral strategy: the question of how the Conservative Party has deployed its ideological perspectives on welfare policy in enhancing its electoral appeal, both in opposition and in government.

A premise of this chapter (and the subsequent two) is that while in some ways Liberal Democrat and Conservative approaches to welfare are quite similar, Coalition welfare policy has been led by the Conservatives. The capacity of the Liberal Democrats to exert influence on this area has been quite limited, and as the senior coalition partner the Conservative Party is well placed to use this to its own advantage (McEnhill, 2015). It is also important to note that several major announcements on this area have been made not by the DWP Ministerial team, but by the Chancellor. This not only emphasises the extent to which reform has become enmeshed with

austerity, but also suggests the perceived strategic importance of the policy area given that George Osborne was Cameron's Head of Strategy in the 2010 and 2015 elections. It is significant that these reforms have been 'framed' initially by the individual within the PCP who is ultimately responsible for expanding its electoral appeal.

A central concern of the chapter is establishing why and how welfare policy went from being a peripheral issue in a broader campaign to re-invigorate the Conservative Party's brand in the general election of 2010, to constituting a key battleground in its own right in 2015. The chapter suggests that there are two main events informing this shift, thus contributing to explaining the direction that the agenda has taken. These are the economic downturn following the banking crisis in late 2007 and the result of the 2010 general election. Importantly, it is not the objective election result itself which led to change: 2010 could be classified either as a 'victory' for the Conservatives in entering government as part of a Coalition, or a partial defeat in the failure to win a majority. Rather as the SRA leads us to understand, the way that Conservatives interpreted the result is of central importance. A significant part of the PCP interpreted the 2010 result as indicative of Conservative electoral weaknesses going into the election that were primarily focused on 'modernisation', rather than as an indication that the Party had failed to change enough (Bale, 2010). Similarly the crisis was interpreted and narrated as one of public spending and a bloated state requiring severe spending cuts, which dovetailed with moral arguments for cutting the DWP's budget. This was far from the only possible interpretation but reflected a determination not to 'waste a good crisis' (Penrose, private interview) in pursing change.

The increased centrality of welfare therefore reflects a process of strategic learning within changing context, and these events feed into the attempt to translate ideas developed in opposition into practice within the context of coalition government. Overall, the Conservatives have tended to fall back on the more moralistic aspects of their thinking on welfare with regard to individual claimants, lessening the more society-focused aspects that were developing in opposition. This reflects the ease with which the former is integrated with electorate perspectives on the welfare system, and the difficulty of implementing 'newer', more innovative ideas within this strategically selective context.

In the short-term, the Conservative Party's strategic use of welfare policy appears undeniably effective. Polling shows that welfare reform is one of the Coalition's most popular agendas. This is particularly marked amongst working and lower-middle class voters in the North and the Scotland, where the Conservative Party is electorally weak. The Party has effectively gauged the public mood on welfare and identified that this may be one area where 'detoxification' of the Conservative brand is not needed. Further, the continued hardening of attitudes towards some benefit claimants (particularly the unemployed) since the Coalition came in may suggest that rather than simply reflecting public opinion on this topic, the Conservative Party is helping to shape perspectives on the effectiveness of the welfare system and the perceived futility of welfare spending. This contributes to a trajectory of ideational and policy development emphasising harsher approaches to some of those who draw on welfare support. Additional evidence that the Conservatives were setting the agenda on welfare mid-way through the Coalition's first term can be found by looking at the Labour response. This has often been to mimic that language of the Conservatives on welfare, leading to pledges to be *more* 'tough' on claimants than the Conservatives (Reeves, quoted in Helm, 2013). Consequentially, Conservative MPs rightly saw the approach to welfare policy as one of the Party's greatest electoral strengths heading into 2015, and may feel vindicated by the election result.

In concluding remarks the chapter introduces some doubts regarding the extent to which such a position is sustainable in the longer term. Its effectiveness as an element of strategy depends not just on its immediate electoral appeal, but on the extent to which it can contribute to shaping and reinforcing wider societal perspectives in such a way that it reduces expectations of welfare support. As subsequent chapters explore, this requires that many less well-off voters, who are unlikely to recognise themselves in the portrayal of the undeserving 'welfare dependent' that the Conservatives have used to justify cuts, also accept that their entitlements will be lower. The combination of welfare reform with cuts to public spending will end up adversely affecting these voters, whom the Conservative Party needs to reach out to if it is to win a second majority (see Chapter 7). Longer term, therefore, the strategic use of 'welfare as waste' relies on a number of assumptions. It draws on a lack of knowledge amongst the electorate about the benefit system and sources of spending, which might become increasingly untenable as the cuts begin to take their full effect. Beyond this, continued support requires an understanding of, and agreement with, aspects of Conservative ideology regarding the extended state that go beyond a perception

of the need to cut spending to 'undeserving' categories of claimants and towards an acceptance of *one's own* income falling, at least in the short to medium-term. In other words, success relates to the extent to which the Conservatives can achieve ideological hegemony in this area. As cuts to in-work benefits begin to be felt during the 2015 to 2020 parliament, the Party may find itself struggling on this dimension.

5.2 The long shadow of Thatcherism: 1997-2005

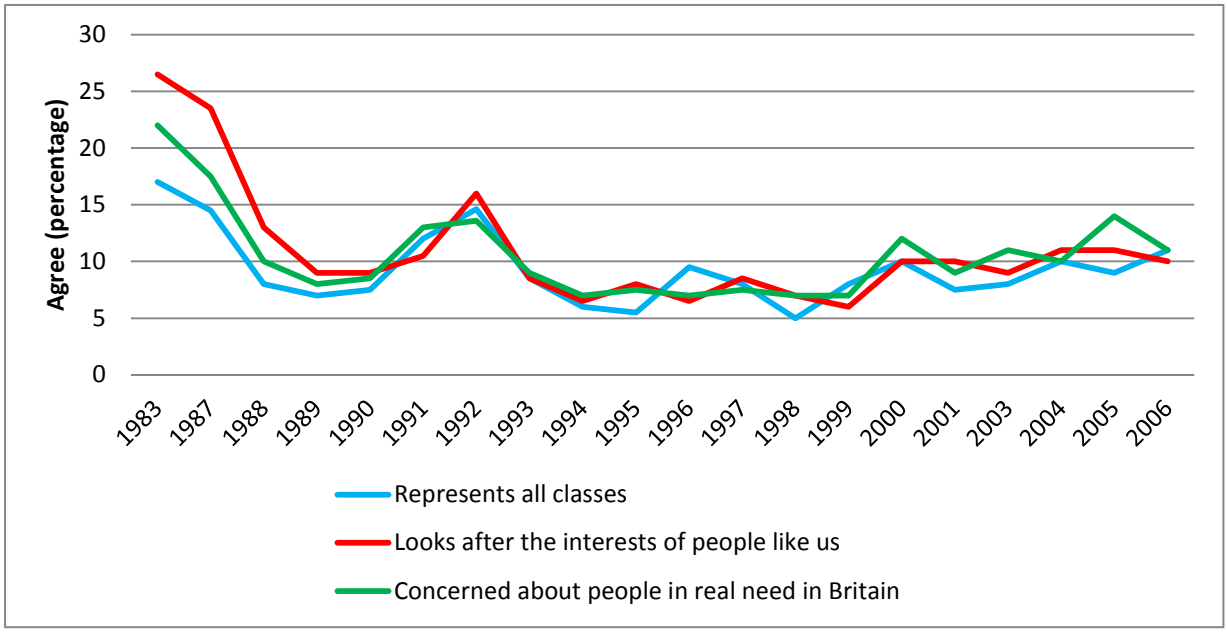
Historically, the Conservative Party's ability to adjust its electoral and governing strategy to the conditions of the time and quickly regain power after losing elections has been one of its strongest qualities. However, the 1997 general election saw the Conservatives poll 9.6 million votes, gathering 30.7 per cent of the total vote and winning just 165 seats. This was its lowest number of individual votes since 1929, its lowest vote share since 1832, and its lowest number of seats since 1906 (Lee, 2009: 3). In 2001, the Conservatives received fewer votes – 8.36 million – on a lower turnout, increasing its vote share to 31.7 per cent but only winning one additional seat. In 2005, the Conservatives won 198 seats with 32.4 per cent of the vote, although it garnered slightly fewer individual votes than in 1997, at 8.78 million. Additionally, the Party's electoral base became strongly regionalised. In 1997 it lost its six remaining seats in Wales, winning back just three in 2005. In Scotland, its electoral decline since the 1960s continued. The party lost all of its seats in 1997, and regained just one over the following thirteen years (Tetteh, 2008). The 'north-south divide' of seats for the two main parties reflects a continuation of a trend evident since the 1983 general election, with the Conservatives particularly poorly represented amongst C2DE (lower middle and working class) voters in the urban North of England and Scotland (Johnston et al., 2001: 205).

Further, the Conservatives were perceived as a sectional party. Shortly before Cameron took the leadership, one poll identified that the group which the Conservative Party was seen as least likely to represent and act in the interests of was 'the poor', followed by 'the working class' and 'Trade Unionists'. In contrast, it was seen as most likely to represent 'the rich' and 'big business' (YouGov, 2005, cited in Quinn, 2008: 191). This also reflected a continuation of a trend developing since the 1980s: the Conservative Party was seen to mostly represent people who were like itself, as Figure 5.1 (below) shows. Voters perceived the PCP as quite different in character and constitution from the majority of the nation, and often prone to hostility (or at the

very least, disinterest) towards those from different backgrounds (Ashcroft, 2012: 25-28; Quinn, 2008: 191-193).

Labour tended to be perceived more positively on these points, although not excessively so (Ipsos MORI, 2014b). New Labour's victory in 1997 can be partially attributed to the context in which the election was fought, and the conventional wisdom that it is not oppositions that win elections, but governments that lose them. Labour faced a long-serving, beleaguered Conservative government (Heppell, 2008b). John Major had presided over the ERM economic crisis in 1992, and the ensuing recession. The economy was improving in 1997, but ultimately it was New Labour that reaped the rewards of this in terms of scope for increased public spending and rising living conditions for the majority of citizens (Pattie, 2001). It cannot be ignored that as far as theories of issue voting hold true, the Conservatives had fallen behind Labour in terms of voter perceptions on the key issue of the economy following the ERM crisis, and remained there for several years despite fluctuations in perceptions of Labour's competency (see Figure 5.2) Major was widely portrayed as weak and ineffectual (not least by Conservative MPs themselves, in comparison with Margaret Thatcher), and led a party that had been dogged by allegations of sleaze and impropriety (Bale, 2010: 48-61).

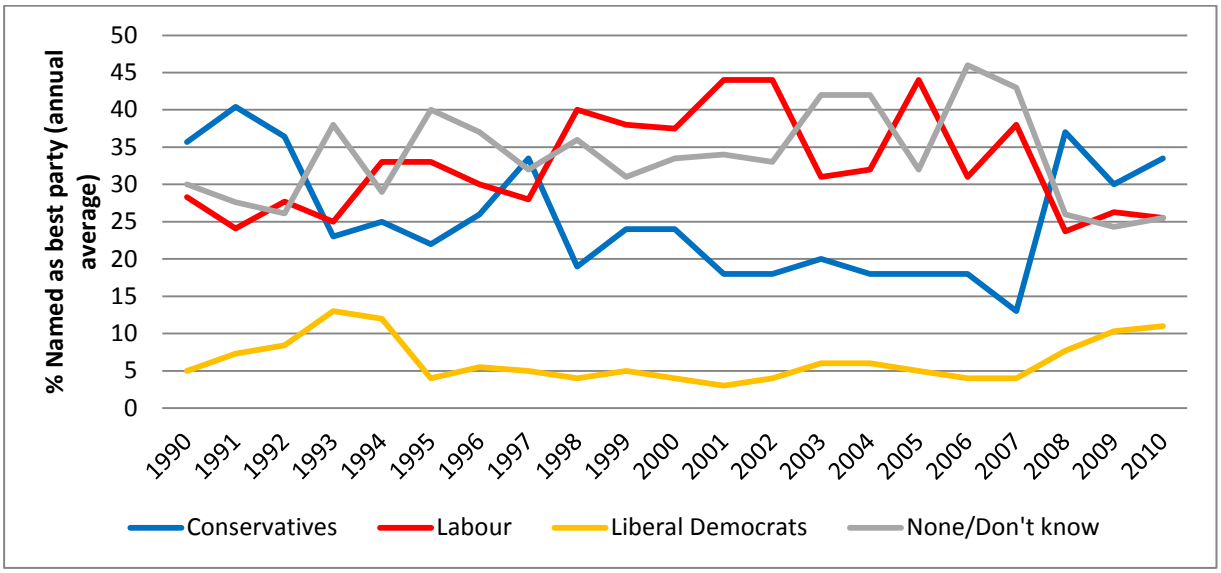
Chart 5.1: Conservative Party image, 1983-2006



Source: Ipsos MORI, 2014a

Yet looking beyond this, the failure to respond effectively to New Labour after the election indicated a more fundamental problem with the Conservative Party's electoral strategy in opposition. Theresa May's 2002 speech to the party conference encapsulated the most fundamental of these problems: the Conservatives were seen by too many as 'the nasty party'. She suggested that its fortunes would only be revived by 'avoiding behaviour and attitudes that play into the hands of our opponents: no more glib moralising, no more hypocritical finger-wagging'. The Party needed to represent 'the whole of Britain, not merely some mythical place called "Middle England", and it needed to speak to voter concerns regarding protecting public services and vulnerable people (May, 2002). The observation that voters rejected policies that they otherwise would have supported when they were revealed to be Conservative policies (Green, 2010: 669) reinforced the central contentions of May's speech. Some within the Party recognised the need to change far earlier than others. Early attempts at ideational and rhetorical renewal appeared in David Willett's vision of 'civic Conservatism' (1994). Later, Gary Streeter MP published an edited volume on 'compassionate Conservatism' (2002) with contributions from a number of sitting MPs, including Duncan Smith and Oliver Letwin. This was driven by the recognition that that as early as 1992, voter concerns over the party's ability to represent the full range of social classes provided an explanation for support switching from the Conservatives to New Labour: perhaps even more so than economic perceptions and considerations of the Thatcher and Major governments' records (Evans, 1999: 150).

Chart 5.2: Best party on the economy, 1990 – 2010



Source: Ipsos MORI, 2014c

There were attempts by Cameron's predecessors to turn the Party in a more electorally fruitful direction. Michael Howard's leadership has been characterised as a last-ditch attempt to hold together a deeply divided party (Bale, 2010: 195), which in itself is clearly important: concurrently, however, there was little, if any movement away from a traditional Thatcherite position (Hayton, 2012a: 55-56). Hague and Duncan Smith had both attempted to overhaul the Party's image. However, Hague showed 'little enthusiasm for or understanding of' modernisation as an element of strategy (Bale 2010: 20), and attempts to shape a more inclusive Party image were abandoned when they did not lead to immediate gains in the polls (Driver 2009: 85). Duncan Smith's belief in the need to refashion the Conservatives as a party committed to social justice was more strongly felt, later finding expression through founding the Centre for Social Justice and contributing to shaping the welfare reform agenda. However, Duncan Smith's success in bringing the party along with him was limited by his own poor leadership skills (Hayton and Heppell, 2010) and he was replaced in 2003, having never fought an election. The PCP as a whole struggled to learn from successive electoral defeats, with ideology constituting a significant barrier to this (Hayton, 2012a). There was a wide perception in the PCP that the electorate had been 'tricked' by New Labour: all that was needed was for Conservatives to hold out on their beliefs, and eventually support would return (Bale, 2010: 72-73). Thus election campaigns in 2001 and 2005 were largely negative, based on issues that the Conservatives 'owned' including law and order and immigration. This was a rather timid and limiting core-vote electoral strategy that precluded the opportunity to reach out to disillusioned former and potential new Conservative voters, as New Labour had successfully done in 1997 (Green, 2010).

When Howard announced his intention to stand down in 2005, it had become apparent that the Party faced greater difficulties than could be remedied by providing a fresh face as leader. Hague, Duncan Smith and Howard had all faced apparently intractable problems regarding the Party's image amongst voters, and in convincing sceptical Members of the need for, and electoral value of change (Hayton, 2012a; Cowley and Green, 2005: 12). Analyses of Conservative voting behaviour in leadership elections between 1975 and 2001 suggest that ideology played a key role in the selection of leaders and, post-Thatcher, the winning candidates were always those who were identified with Thatcherite ideology (Heppell and Hill, 2008; 2010; Cowley and Garry, 1998; Cowley, 1997). Cameron, elected on a platform of needing to 'change

and modernise our culture and attitudes and identity' (2005a) appeared to transcend such ideological divisions. Despite being situated on the party's socially liberal wing (as opposed to the Thatcherite socially conservative wing), he attracted support from both wings of the Party. Ideologically the PCP did remain largely committed to Thatcherism (Heppell, 2013). However, Cameron's election as leader suggested that 'in 2005, electability mattered more than ideological acceptability' (Heppell and Hill, 2009: 399).

5.3 Responding to New Labour: modernisation and 'detoxification' under Cameron

On winning the leadership, Cameron contended that Conservative fortunes could only be revived through offering 'a modern and compassionate conservatism which is right for our times and our country' (2005b). This signalled an accommodation with some of the 'modernising' ideas that had been developing within and around the PCP. The contention that the Conservatives needed to 'change to win' is best viewed as the culmination of a process rather than a new direction for the party, analogous to Blair taking the Labour leadership following the struggles of the 1980s. However, New Labour's strategy involved ideological adaptation to the Thatcher inheritance, and this resulted in a substantive change in its policy programme. As Quinn (2008) has shown, Conservative policies were not extremely right-wing in opposition after 1997: they were close to New Labour on many issues. This is true of welfare in particular, reflecting the Thatcherite influence on New Labour (Hayton and McEnhill, 2014; Hayton, 2012b). However, the Conservatives were *perceived* as 'fairly right wing' by a majority of voters, who placed themselves (and Tony Blair) in the centre of the political spectrum (Quinn, 2008: 180-181). This confirmed that the major problem for the Conservatives was their public image, which Cameron aimed to remedy by focusing on issues not traditionally associated with Conservatism, allowing it to project a softer, more inclusive identity (Heppell, 2014; Dorey, 2007).

Cameron's awareness of the ubiquity of a Thatcherite influence on British public policy led him to claim that far from having lost the 'battle of ideas', the Conservatives had actually won, illustrated by the existence of New Labour. He set out this thesis during a speech at the Centre for Policy Studies (2006e):

> Tony Blair's victory in [1997] created a problem for the Conservative Party. It was not the same sort of problem that Old Labour had faced. It was not a problem that arose from

> the failure of our ideas. It was, on the contrary, a problem that arose from the triumph of our ideas. There was in truth nothing fundamentally new about the New Labour analysis except that the party offering it was Labour.

Cameron claimed that both Thatcher and Major had become increasingly concerned that a section of society had become excluded from economic prosperity, and had attempted 'to tackle the problems of an underclass of people left behind'. New Labour agreed with the Conservatives on this broad goal and Blair had effectively articulated a focus on 'social justice and economic efficiency', placing this at the centre of New Labour's governing programme. Therefore the ideological and electoral dilemma for the Conservatives was that the old 'enemy' of state socialism had disappeared, replaced with an opposition that was much more like the Conservative Party itself (even if New Labour was still perceived as far too 'statist' in its methods). In response, rather than 'highlighting the different prescriptions that arose from our different values and principles, we ended up focusing on those areas where we didn't agree' (2006e). The Conservatives emphasised their right-wing credentials on core issues such as tax cuts, a tough approach to law and order, immigration and Europe. Cameron strongly articulated that this had been a strategic error in terms of how it came across to the electorate. This was evident in the three election defeats that the party suffered. Of these, Howard's, which was fought on a traditionally Thatcherite platform against a Labour opposition that was not as strong as it had once been, brought perhaps the clearest indication of the tactical and strategic paucity of such an approach (Seldon and Snowden, 2005). Thus some re-evaluation was required.

Those who felt that these core policy areas were important often rated Conservative competency on them highly, particularly as Labour's time in power wore on (Ipsos MORI, 2014d; 2014e; 2014f; 2014g). However, between 1997 and 2006 – with the exception of immigration and asylum - they were not usually as salient as issues such as public services, on which Labour held a lead (see Figure 5.3). Additionally, although Labour also emphasised their 'tough' credentials on some of the more salient of these issues (notably crime, law and order and immigration), this was set against a broader perception of the party as caring and concerned with social justice: lacking this, the Conservatives 'risked appearing merely angry' (Quinn, 2008: 192). Thus, after outlining New Labour's record in government, Cameron concluded that: '"social justice and economic efficiency" are the common ground of British politics. We have to find the means of succeeding where the government has failed' (2006e). The task was to first convince voters that

the Conservatives shared these goals, and then to go about highlighting an appealing Conservative alternative to reaching them.

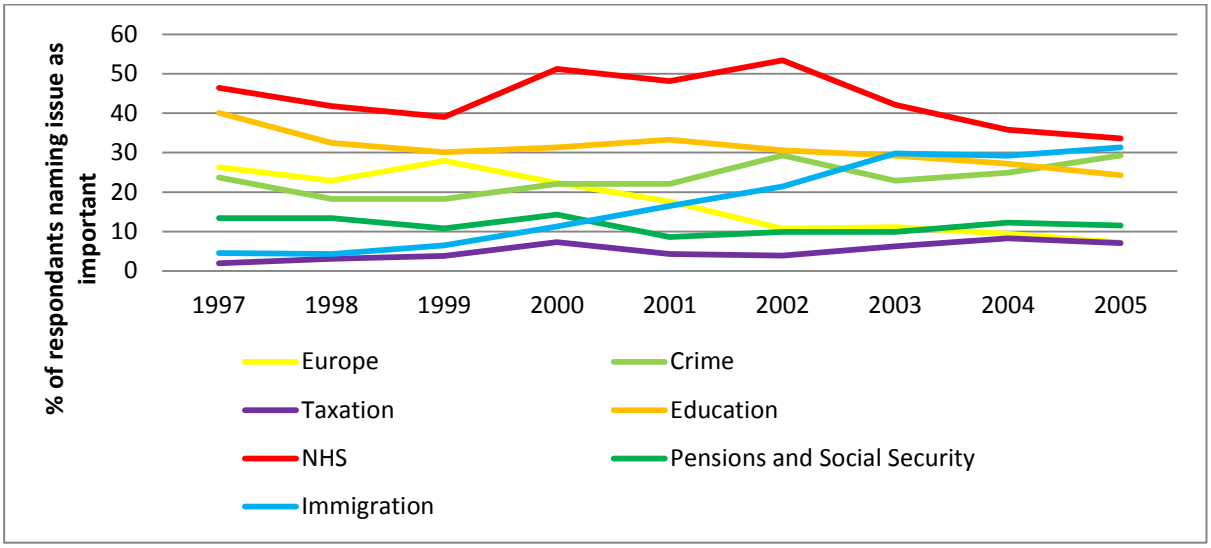
Resolving the issue of the Party's relationship with Thatcherism was pivotal to the process of change and 'detoxification'. For the modernisers, 'Thatcherite social conservatism created a negative image which reinforced an impression that [Conservatives] were socially intolerant' (Heppell, 2013: 341). The question of whether detoxification constituted an ideological shift within Cameron's Conservative Party has been addressed in the previous chapter, suggesting that modernisation has not fundamentally challenged the Thatcherite inheritance. Here, the focus is how this process fed into the Party's electoral appeal: essentially, how a convincing impression of change could be conveyed in the absence of substantive ideological change. This necessitated a careful balancing act. In 'preparing the ground' for renewal, the leadership made 'a concerted attempt to shift public perceptions of the Tories' via 'a set of often symbolic rhetorical and policy shifts' (Kenny, 2009, cited in Bochel, 2011: 9). Cameron's early speeches as leader can be read as an attempt to distance the Party from its Thatcherite past, which some Conservatives saw as problematic. For example, Lord Tebbit warned that 'attacks on Thatcherism echoing those from New Labour...are not likely to endear Mr Cameron to his grass roots' (2006; see also Chapter 1). However, such voices were largely silenced at the time due to the immediate boost that Cameron's leadership provided in polls that had stubbornly refused to budge for his predecessors, even if he remained somewhat more popular than the party as a whole (Ipsos MORI, 2013).

As outlined in the previous chapter, Cameron's early leadership was characterised by renewed focus on non-traditional Conservative policy areas, one of which was 'society'. Considered in relation to electoral strategy, this was an attempt to re-position the party in order to renew its appeal, which was carried out within the constraints imposed by previous ideological blueprints: notably Thatcherism, but also with some reference to the older One Nation strand as means of authenticating the position (Buckler and Dolowitz, 2012). Cameron's strategy was not so much to apologise for Thatcherism as to suggest that 'that was then, and this is now' (Bale, 2009: 227; Evans, 2010; 2008). What worked in the 1980s, prioritising economic recovery against a divided, increasingly left-wing opposition would not work in 2005 against a government operating in an apparently successful economic context, which had accepted many of the tenets of Thatcherism

and yet managed to use the Conservative Party's 'uncaring' image against it. Instead, the apparent resolution of the economic argument opened up the space within which the Conservatives could begin to develop a fuller approach to social issues. This took the form of an extension of Thatcherite ideas, rather than their repudiation.

There are two main factors in understanding the decision to focus on social issues and critiquing New Labour's social policies. The first relates to modernisation, or the relevance of the Conservative Party to contemporary society. The Conservatives lagged behind Labour in almost all areas of social policy whilst in opposition, although Labour's lead in most areas narrowed as their time in power went on. As Gary Streeter put it: 'I just felt that my party was unelectable. We really needed to transform ourselves in social policy' (private interview). Lacking a wider narrative, the Party's previous attempts to address this had seemed hollow. Robert Buckland commented that: 'social issues had been not quite side-lined, but mentally side-lined by the party into the "too difficult" bracket. They were seen very much as questions of politics rather than policy: if we do a certain thing on welfare, then that will furnish our centrist credentials' (private interview). Similarly, Conor Burns claimed that 'in all my years knocking on doors' the complaint he had heard most from voters was that 'they weren't voting Conservative because they didn't think that we had a lot of credible policies in those years' (private interview).

Chart 5.3: Issue saliency, 1997-2005



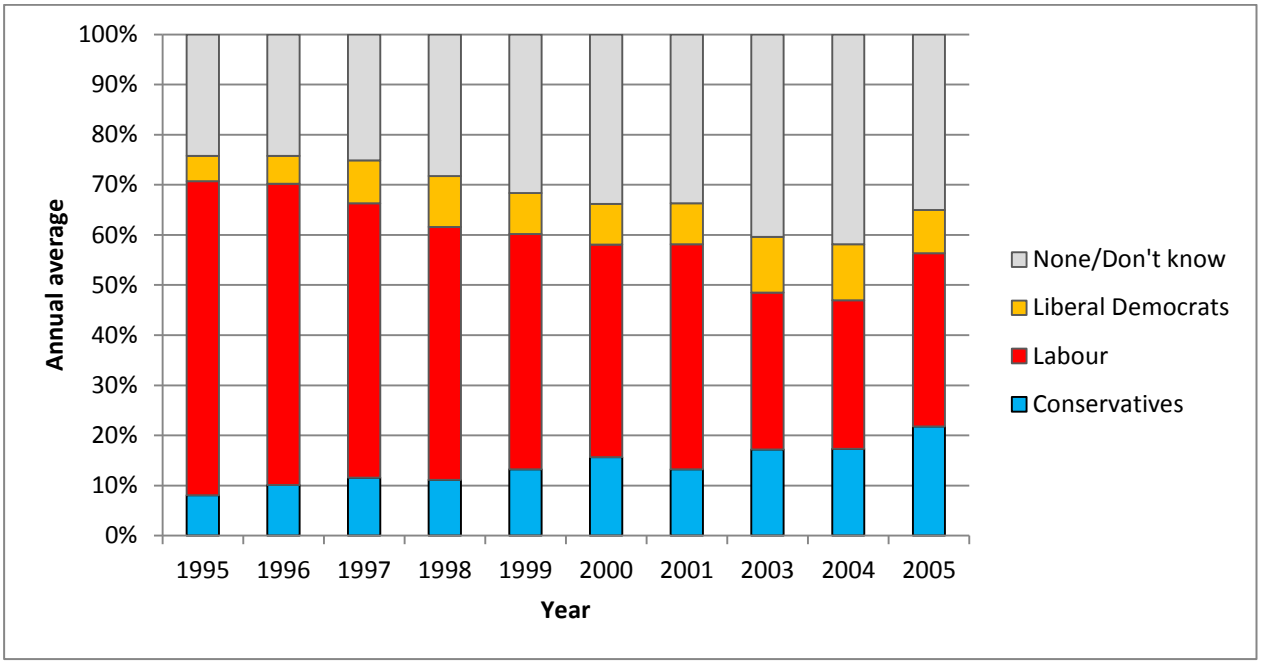
Source: Ipsos MORI, 2014h

At this point, welfare policy was not the main focus of the Conservative critique. Pensions and social security were a reasonable low saliency issue during New Labour's time in government – although, it should be noted, not as low saliency as some of the issues that the Conservatives had chosen to concentrate on, such as tax cuts (see Figure 5.3). However as John Penrose commented, although welfare had 'historically not been very important' it did have some saliency 'insofar as it goes to underline brand values and preconceptions about the different parties' (private interview). As such despite its broader lack of saliency, welfare policy and the issues connected to it, notably poverty, formed part of the attempt to construct a substantive policy agenda around social issues. This fed into the overarching narrative of the purpose of modern Conservatism, which had seemed to be missing from the Party's previous years in opposition in favour of a narrower and inconsistent focus on individual issues (Taylor, 2005). Drawing on the work of the CSJ and the SJPG, this was a narrative about poverty, social justice and social mobility, utilising some of the inclusive language of New Labour but proposing more distinctively Conservative solutions to the elements of reform that the Party disagreed with.

The second factor in explaining the focus on social policy concerns a more negative impetus, based on the state of the economy. Labour's lead on voter perceptions of economic competency during the 2005 election was 18.2 percentage points. While not nearly as high as it had been in previous years, this was nonetheless a considerable lead. Green and Hobolt (2008: 464-465) point out that the economy was a low-saliency issue in 2005: only 5.7 per cent of respondents named it as the most important issue facing the country. However, they suggest that 'the low salience rating may underestimate the wider significance of the economy to the vote choice' and elsewhere the evidence on the importance of evaluations of the prospective and respective economy in influencing voter choice is extensive (Clarke et al., 2004). Cowley and Green (2005) suggest that Labour's fairly consistent lead on this issue caused the Conservatives to tacitly acknowledge that they could not win the 2005 general election. Instead, the Party positioned itself almost as a protest vote through which voters could 'send a message' to an increasingly unpopular Prime Minister. As can be seen in Chart 5.2, above, Labour was quite consistently identified as the party most capable of managing the economy after perceptions of Conservative competency dropped in 1992. Moreover, even when Labour's ratings suffered a decline, the Conservatives appeared unable to capitalise on this.

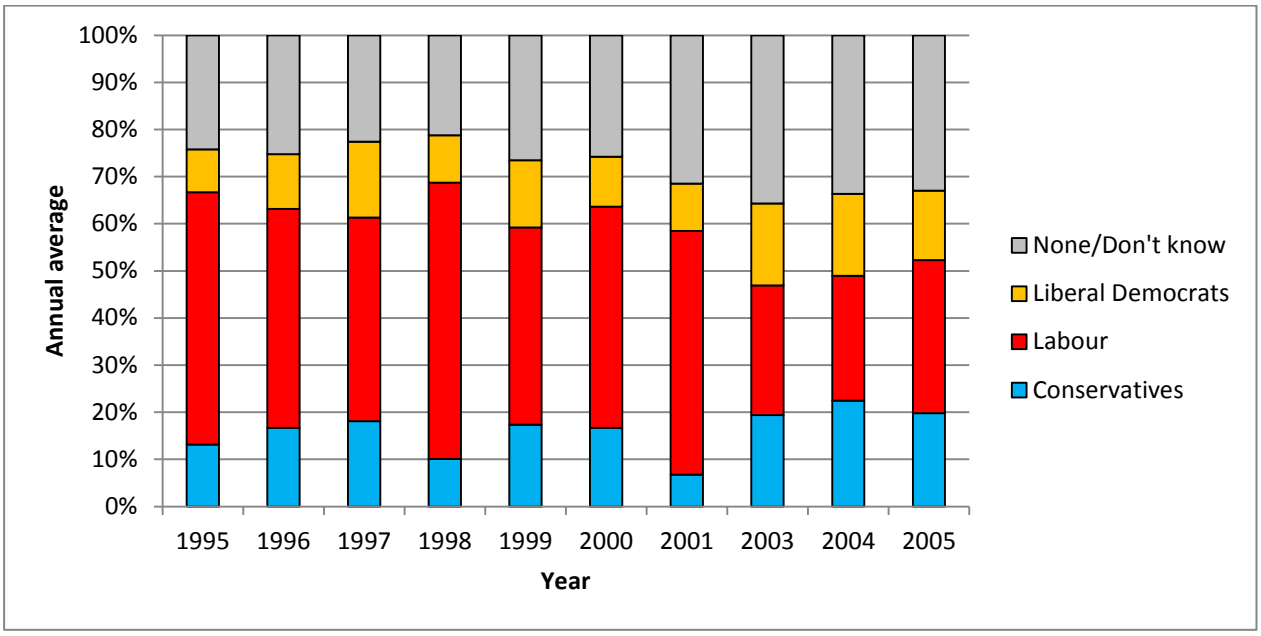
On social issues, Labour was correctly perceived as more vulnerable. Charts 5.4 and 5.5 show perceptions of competency on two key social policy areas: heath, and education (comparable figures for social security as a whole are not available for this period). Labour lost ground on these key areas between 1997 and 2005. On health, Labour's lead fell from a high of 54 points in 1995, to an average of 12.5 points in 2005 (Ipsos MORI, 2014i). On education, Labour led by 48 points in 1998; by 2004 this had been cut to four points, although it subsequently temporarily recovered somewhat (Ipsos MORI, 2014j). There was a pattern of sustained decline in the electorate's faith in Labour to deliver on social issues. As such, the decision to concentrate on these could be viewed as much in terms of electoral manoeuvring, as in terms of the pursuit of more substantive policy goals. In comparison to the failure to make up much ground on Labour's economic competency ratings in opposition, the Conservatives did appear to be making some limited gains on social policy. In addition, as Figure 5.3 shows, some of the issues in this area were highly salient. As such, the case for focusing on social policy, particularly in light of the weaknesses of the core vote strategy and the need to remedy the 'nasty party' image problem, was far stronger when Cameron took the leadership than it had been in previous years.

Chart 5.4: Best party on Health (all naming issue as important), 1995-2005



Source: Ipsos MORI, 2014i. Nb. Data not available for 2002.

Chart 5.5: Best party on Education (all naming issue as important), 1995-2005



Source: Ipsos MORI, 2014j. Nb. Data not available for 2002.

5.4 Broken Britain to the 'Big Society'? The 2010 election

In the 2010 general election, the Conservative Party failed to win enough seats to form a majority government. Cameron increased the vote share by 3.8 per cent, to 36.1 per cent of the total votes cast, and won 97 extra seats. The coalition government formed with the Liberal Democrats reflected the ideological overlap on economic issues, at least, between the Conservatives, and Nick Clegg's 'Orange Book' Liberal Democrats. Whether this overlap extended to social policy with respect to Conservative modernisation on the topic is more debatable. This depends on the extent to which Conservative social policies are perceived as embodying a socially liberal outlook (Beech, 2015; 2011) or, in the position taken here, still confirming broadly to Thatcherite social conservatism (Hayton and McEnhill, 2015; Lakin, 2013).

The failure to win an overall majority resulted in calls from some parts of the Party to abandon the 'centre ground', putting 'clear blue water' between itself and Labour, later becoming louder in response to (not unfounded) fears that UKIP was encroaching on more socially conservative supporters (Webb and Bale, 2014a). Cameron resisted calls to do so in the earlier years of his leadership (Hennessy, 2010). However, the Conservative Party's electoral positioning has

undergone some significant changes in government in relation to the weaknesses identified in its 2010 general election strategy. One of the most striking of these changes is the promotion of welfare policy, from a peripheral issue to the broader narrative of social change to a key policy area in its own right, used as a vehicle for expressing Conservative perspectives and ideas about the relationship between state, society and individual. Here, it is possible to identify a shift towards more clearly Thatcherite-inspired rhetoric, although many of the ideas underpinning the approach have remained quite consistent in light of this. This section suggests that this is the result of both the practical failings of the pre-election Big Society narrative, and the perceived viability of such an approach in terms of electoral gains once the opportunity to convert ideas into real policy presented itself.

In opposition, Cameron had introduced the narrative of Britain's 'broken society': 'the linked problems that blight so many of our communities' (Cameron, 2005b), including family breakdown, drug and alcohol addiction, worklessness, educational failure and personal debt. The leadership worked from the critique of New Labour's social exclusion policies developed by the SJPG. They proposed measures that they claimed would facilitate an increase in personal responsibility leading to a more 'responsible society', and a shift away from reliance on the welfare state towards a 'welfare society' with the family as the key unit of social support (SJPG, 2007a). Linked to this, there would also be a greater emphasis and reliance on the voluntary sector and social enterprises to facilitate moving away from reliance on state-led programmes (SJPG, 2007b). In 2009, Cameron coined the phrase 'Big Society' to summarise this, claiming that this could replace 'big government' (2009b). This became the central theme of the Conservative election campaign, with the 2010 manifesto claiming that 'we need fundamental change: from big government that presumes to know best, to Big Society that trusts in the people for ideas and innovation' (Conservative Party, 2010: viii). In ideational terms, the Big Society was an expression of both responsibility and, connected to this, compassion. However, the difficulties experienced in communicating the idea are illustrative of the challenges in using rather abstract ideological notions as the foundation of electoral strategy. The Big Society was not articulated in such a way that it appeared relevant to voters' present situations: while the concepts themselves were not necessarily discordant with wider public views, the way in which they were presented was broadly ineffective.

As an element of strategy, the Big Society struggled to gain traction with voters. The Party's main appeal in 2010 was David Cameron himself. He was consistently shown to be more 'liked' than his Party but, in what was widely perceived as a game-changing moment during the 2010 campaign following the leadership debates, not as much of a draw as Nick Clegg was for the Liberal Democrats (Green, 2010). A report by the influential Conservative Home website on the reasons for the Conservative Party's failure to win a majority in 2010 complained that the Big Society 'wasn't even poll-tested until the middle of April. When it was tested it received a thumbs down'. However, more fundamentally: 'the Big Society is a big idea requiring much explanation - and in any event isn't a voter-friendly "retail offer"' (Conservative Home, 2010: 13).

This meant that while some voters liked the ideas when they were explained to them, few felt that their understanding of the concept was strong (YouGov/The Sun, 2011). Others felt that it was little more than a 'stunt' deployed to win an election, or worse, a cover for the spending cuts that would emerge after the election (Lindsey and Bulloch, 2013: 8-9). The Conservative Home report indicates that Cameron's Director of Strategy, Steve Hilton, had pressed the leadership to place 'more weight on the Big Society than a testing election campaign could bear', particularly given the relatively novel ideas contained within the narrative (2010: 13). Defending the idea, Hilton 'thought it was ridiculous to test such a fundamental party belief', telling colleagues that 'it is what the Party is about, it is what you believe' (cited in Kavanagh and Cowley, 2010: 260). However, 71 per cent of the 109 Conservative candidates interviewed agreed with Conservative Home's conclusion that 'the Big Society agenda is an exciting governing philosophy but it should never have been put at the heart of the Tory election campaign' (Conservative Home, 2010: 36). Some MPs suggested that, instead, the focus on the economy should have been much stronger after 2008 (private interviews). However, Conservative Home notes that this focus was not achieved until George Osborne moved into Conservative Campaign Headquarters (2010: 7).

Conservative Home's editor, Tim Montgomerie, also criticised the Party for running a campaign that was 'much grander than specific. We had, for example, lots on the Big Society but few retail policy pledges' (2011). Perhaps as a result of this vagueness, the Party was seen as opportunistic and prone to 'jumping on bandwagons' (Kavanagh and Cowley, 2010: 259) Lord Ashcroft identified similar flaws. He claimed that 'going into the election, many voters had little clear idea

of what we stood for or what we intended to do in government' (quoted in Alderson, 2010). Connected to this lack of comprehension about what the Party would do in government were doubts about the extent to which the re-branding exercise had been successful, or worthwhile given the election result. The Party was still widely disliked or not trusted by a number of groups, including public sector workers and ethnic minorities and the urban poor, particularly in London and the North of England. It was still perceived as a sectional party, more likely to act in the interests of the well-off (Ashcroft, 2010; 2012), and its vote remained strongly regionalised, failing to add to its sole MP in Scotland.

Welfare policy was an important issue in the 2015 general election. This was quite a change from 2010, where it barely featured explicitly in any of the parties' manifestos. To some extent, reforming the welfare state has been seen by the Conservatives as a means of demonstrating their competency and ability to follow through on plans in government. Whilst pointing out that there is a broader purpose to reform than contributing to election strategy, Philip Davies MP suggested in 2012 that it might fit into Conservative electoral strategy in this way. He stated: '[Iain Duncan Smith] is probably one of a small band of Ministers who is deemed to be a success in his job. Given that, selling the changes that we've made in the DWP will be one of the things that the Government points to when it's saying what a good job it's done over the last five years' (private interview). Duncan Smith's detailed policy work prior to being appointed Secretary of State and longer-term ambitions with regard to Universal Credit were seen as helpful by MPs, in that this could be an example of a Conservative minister leading and (hopefully) implementing a new policy effectively. This could add to the perception of party competency and, if the Conservatives could market Universal Credit effectively, provide evidence for the notion that the Party was concerned with supporting lower-paid and more vulnerable people. However, there are many caveats to this usage, and the difficulty of implementing Universal Credit may render this less of a viable strategy than it might once have appeared to be.

Arguably of much more electoral utility to the Party has been the raft of legislation that was announced and developed *after* the election, leading up to 2013: what Guto Bebb MP referred to as 'the crude part of the spectrum in terms of the actual policies' (private interview), discussed in Chapter 7 of this thesis. This includes the benefit cap and up-rating measures, as well as adjustments to housing benefit for social housing tenants. Beyond this, there have also been

proposals to cut or limit housing benefit and Jobseeker's Allowance for under 25s or under 21s, and the limited introduction of stringent 'work for the dole' schemes. These policies began to emerge after the Emergency Budget in 2010, where Osborne claimed that 'we need to put the whole welfare system on a more sustainable and affordable footing'. They have been linked to both the austerity and welfare reform agendas, as discussed in the subsequent policy chapters. They tend to reflect a less ambitious programme ideologically than is contained with the Big Society, falling back on moralising and retrenchment as the central policy instrument supporting this.

Unusually, despite these initiatives relating primarily to the DWP, it has often been the Chancellor who has announced them. Phillip Blond claimed that this is the result of a 'long warfare between people like Steve Hilton and myself, and the Treasury', in which after the general election 'Osborne achieved ascendency very quickly' (private interview). It is significant that Osborne is also Cameron's Head of Strategy: if Osborne rather than Duncan Smith is announcing the policies then he also has the opportunity to determine the initial 'framing' of them, lending credence to the idea that as well as falling into welfare reform these are intended to form key elements of the Party's electoral appeal. The following sections explore the themes and messages used to justify and sell these policies to the electorate, and how the use of these seeks to address the weaknesses identified in the Conservative Party's 2010 campaign.

5.5 Welfare and public spending: 'Labour's debt crisis'

In 2007, the Conservative Party pledged to maintain Labour's spending for three years should they win a majority in an upcoming election. This tied into detoxification: the pledge was intended to quell voter fears that the Conservatives could not be trusted with the public services and would simply cut them, particularly given their emerging critique of 'big government'. Osborne claimed that as a result: 'the charge from our opponents that we will cut services becomes transparently false' (quoted in BBC News, 2007). Support for the pledge was far from unanimous, particularly in light of the financial crisis in late 2007 and the prospect of recession. Polling by Conservative Home revealed that 64 per cent of Conservative grassroots members felt that the pledge was a poor decision (2008). Kwasi Kwarteng MP commented that: 'I was very despondent when we signed up to Labour's spending when you could see that from 2003 to 2006 the economy was growing every year, quite strongly…And yet we were running deficits of three

per cent. That was utterly irresponsible' (private interview). Whilst Kwarteng framed his remarks in terms of fiscal policy, John Redwood, who led Cameron's Policy Review Group on Economic Competitiveness took a more electorally focused stance on the issue. He claimed that: 'we have reached the limits and in my view we have got to make economies…The British people are well ahead of the politicians on this and know that the money is not being spent wisely' (quoted in Kite, 2008).

The pledge was dropped in late 2008. This marked a shift in Conservative economic policy, and the introduction of a new element of electoral strategy that moved beyond the need to detoxify the Conservative brand. The financial crisis of September 2007 and the ensuing economic downturn is important in understanding this. The crisis left Labour far more vulnerable on the issue of economic competency, with voter faith in their ability to manage the economy effectively declining as the 2010 election approached (see Chart 5.2, above). The Conservative strategy was to narrate the economic difficulties, which resulted in a soaring government deficit, as a consequence of Labour's (specifically Gordon Brown's) public spending. Cameron claimed that during the years of growth, Labour had 'failed to fix the roof when the sun was shining', thus Brown had created a 'debt crisis' that had left Britain 'running on empty' (quoted in Russell, 2008). Spending would need to be pared back because 'we need to recognise that we cannot go on the way we are' (Cameron, quoted in BBC News, 2008). The Conservative manifesto in 2010 downplayed the need for austerity, framing savings in terms of improved efficiency and better outcomes (Conservative Party 2010: 5). The imperative of saving money was presented as a 'needs must' argument: it was supposedly the only way that the British economy could be repaired. However, the nature of the critique of Labour was highly ideological. It focused on the damaging effects of high public spending - not only on the economy but in undermining society through 'throwing money' at problems – and advocated greater reliance on the private and voluntary sectors as a solution, as outlined in the previous chapter. This was tied to a more practical critique, presenting spending as wasteful since good outcomes were not being achieved. This argument gathered pace in government, as the extent of budget reductions became clearer in the 2010 Emergency Budget.

Simply attacking Labour's economic record had not proven particularly electorally fruitful for the Conservatives prior to 2010, resulting in the perception that a failure to construct an

economic narrative that resonated with voters had been a factor in the failure to win a majority (Conservative Home, 2010: 12). Although voters felt increasingly negative about their own economic prospects (YouGov/Daily Telegraph, 2009) they remained unconvinced that the Conservatives would have done a better job than Labour in handling the crisis – or that they would have done anything differently. Right up until the election, almost a third believed that *neither* party was well equipped to handle the economy effectively (Ashcroft, 2010: 38-9). Although the need for cuts was broadly accepted, voters seemed unsure of what this would mean in practice and had little awareness of the scale of the deficit. Drawing on polling evidence, Ashcroft argued that that many people could not comprehend the sums involved. As such, they were 'prone to overestimate the potential savings to be made from cutting things they disapproved of'. Specifically, Ashcroft identified 'clamping down on MPs' expenses'; 'banning bonuses in newly state-owned banks'; 'sorting out the ubiquitous public sector waste', and 'dealing with scroungers' as preferred solutions (2010: 39-41).

In no policy area has the argument for cuts based on the wastefulness and inefficacy of public spending been as marked as it has been for welfare. The DWP is the highest spending department in government (HM Treasury, 2013a: 21). In any attempt to reduce spending it would have been a target for cuts. However this, combined with the fact that the Conservatives had spent several years building up a critique of Labour's supposedly wasteful and ineffective approach to welfare quite apart from the pressures of the economic downturn, has meant that a critique of welfare spending has formed a central part of Conservative electoral strategy since 2010. This combines with the public preference for 'dealing with scroungers' and the perception that fraud is widespread (Clery, Lee and Kunz, 2013), providing a clear means of illustrating Conservative ideas on the negative effects of an extended state.

The concept of welfare dependency remains important in Conservative welfare ideology whether it is utilised in the 'modern' sense of the welfare system itself 'trapping' people in dependency (and therefore in poverty), or in the more aggressive moral rhetoric of 'scroungers' who are playing the system and show no interest in moving into work. Contradicting the DWPs official figures, which suggest that the amount of money lost to fraud is quite low (DWP, 2014a: 2), a number of Conservative MPs have indicated their belief that there are significant numbers of claimants who are 'playing the system' to some extent. The former Minister for Employment,

Chris Grayling, twice referred to unemployed people who 'mostly sit at home playing computer games all day' (2012a; 2007). Philip Davies MP was concerned to 'sort out the ones who genuinely should be on Incapacity Benefit from those who are swinging the lead in order to get more benefits and less scrutiny of their activities' (private interview). A senior backbencher recounted an anecdote from a sub-postmaster who had seen 'people hobbling in to collect their benefits, and the apparent transformation as they walk out, money in hand', and that: 'someone was telling me recently how a woman was leaving the health centre on her crutches looking pained, until she gets to her open-top sports car, throws the crutches in the back, jumps in the front seat and off she goes' (private interview). The supposed growth in fraud and dependency has fused with the imperative of cutting spending to form a further line of attack against Labour, who are blamed for encouraging this dependency through a misplaced sense of compassion. This failed to deter people from claiming benefits, or work hard enough to detect and punish those who were 'playing the system'.

The persistence of this view within the PCP combines and resonates with longer-term trends in attitudes towards the welfare state. Despite Cameron's perceived centrist tendencies, Conservative grassroots members tend to be 'culturally conservative' or authoritarian (Bale and Webb, 2014: 7-9). This is consistent with the morality-based perspectives on welfare that senior Conservatives have espoused (Hayton and McEnhill, 2014), which underpin the sorts of views discussed above. Specifically, Conservative members were very approving of the element of welfare policy (re-assessing disability benefit claimants) that Bale and Webb polled them on (2014: 5). Conservative voters are also significantly more likely that Labour voters to believe that benefits are 'too high and [discourage] work'; to exhibit declining sympathy towards groups such as the unemployed who are viewed as 'undeserving of support', and to exhibit scepticism regarding the extent to which it is the government's job to ameliorate social and economic disadvantage (Taylor-Gooby and Taylor, 2015). Significantly, these concerns have also been increasing amongst Labour voters, indicating the potential for this issue to bring extra support for the Conservatives in addition to appealing to grassroots members and existing supporters (Clery, Lee and Kunz, 2013; Clery, 2012).

This resulted in the potential for welfare policy to be utilised in such a way in government that it achieved 'cut-through in electoral terms in a way that it hadn't in previous years' (Penrose,

private interview). This was an emotive subject, which could be used to offer an easily understandable (if not accurate) moral argument for significant spending cuts to welfare. Gary Streeter suggested that whilst in 2005 calling for spending reductions on welfare would have been unpopular and damaging to the Party's image, in 2010 to 2015: 'the whole mood is completely changed…The Party had to respond to that changed mood and become more robust'. The public could 'see what was happening, they were already changing their own point of view on the cost of welfare' (private interview). Stuart Andrew, who won his seat from Labour in a marginal constituency in Yorkshire in 2010, commented that during the campaign (private interview):

> Time and again, the two issues that were cited were either immigration, or more prevalent, welfare. There was real frustration that people who were working felt – and it's not always accurate – that those who weren't working were having an easy life without any checks and balances against it […] People's finances were being squeezed, and when your household income is being squeezed you do notice where other money is going.

All of this is not to suggest that the Party would not have undertaken welfare reform were it not for the financial crisis: the overwhelming consensus amongst MPs of both parties is that reform of the welfare system is something that Duncan Smith, at least, regarded as a moral imperative (private interviews). Moreover, the strategy of linking the economic 'debt crisis' narrative with welfare reform does have downsides. Robert Buckland lamented: 'I suppose it was unfortunate that the agenda on benefit change which I believe would have happened anyway, has become enmeshed with austerity', suggesting that this might have caused some voters to question the extent of the Conservative Party's commitment to long-term reform over shorter-term budget savings. John Stevenson, also representing a marginal constituency in the North of England, suggested that reform would actually 'have been easier to have implemented if there had been money to oil the wheels […] The need to save money would not have been as great and therefore we could have taken more time with it'. However, in linking the need to make cuts with the 'broken society' and the economic downturn, the Conservative leadership was able to add an layer of justification to the agenda on welfare. This sought, in line with Conservative ideological perspectives, to reduce the role of the state for reasons connected both to spending (for those who prioritised the need for cuts) and the types of outcomes achieved (for those more concerned with reform). As a result of this, the strategy has relevance even if the economy improves

because there are two strands to it: one based on economic efficiency and one on social justice, with the former positioned as a precursor to enabling the latter. This then presents Labour with an even greater challenge than persuading voters that austerity on the scale the Coalition has pursued is not justified: it also needs to address the charges from the Conservatives of welfare state failure, and the extent to which this may have encouraged fraud and dependency.

5.6 Fairness, dependency and responsibility

The Conservative Party identified the political capital to be made from being seen to be tough on 'wasteful' welfare spending, using this as a method of attack against Labour. However this is not the extent of its strategic use of welfare policy. There has also been a broader moral narrative, which draws on socially conservative conceptions of the effect of the welfare system on individual morality in relation to unemployment, and the way that this might act as an affront to those who are in work. This has been an increasingly important part of the Conservative electoral narrative, and there is some evidence that such conservative views are prevalent amongst the wider electorate. However, there may be a limit to the extent to which such a negative strategy is viable. It relies quite heavily on assumptions about levels of fraud and the reasons for high welfare spending that depend, in part, on the lack of knowledge of the welfare system that is characteristic of many voters. These are quite inconsistent with reality, and how the Conservatives negotiate this disjuncture may prove to be critical.

Polling has revealed a number of these inconsistencies. Respondents to a poll by YouGov for the Trades Union Congress thought that 41 per cent of the welfare budget goes to unemployed people: in fact, it is three per cent (TUC, 2013). Respondents also believed that around 30 per cent of welfare payments are claimed fraudulently, but the DWP's own figures put payments lost to fraud in 2012/13 at just 0.7 per cent (2014a: 2); similarly, the 2015 British Social Attitudes Survey indicates that since the late 1980s, 30 to 40 per cent of people believe that 'most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another' (Taylor-Gooby and Taylor, 2015). Voters are also prone to over-estimating the level at which benefits are paid and the extent to which claimants would be better off in work (YouGov\TUC, 2013: 2-3), and to believing that benefits either encourage laziness, or disincentivise working because of this (Clery, Lee and Kunz, 2013). This feeds into Lord Ashcroft's observations, outlined above, regarding the amount that could be saved by cutting welfare spending and who would be affected by this, and supports the idea that

socially conservative perspectives on welfare are quite widespread. However, while voters might well be attracted to such ideas, these do not stand up to the reality of benefit spending and it do not accurately reflect where the cuts will be felt (see Chapter 7). Moreover, if the Conservative leadership was only to focus on this negative use of welfare policy in its electoral strategy, this would undermine its longer-term ambitions regarding Universal Credit. If all that is needed is to cut benefits and force claimants back to work, then implementing such a complex reform seems unnecessary.

There is, of course, a practical acknowledgement at the policy level that cutting benefits alone is not sufficient to address the reasons why people draw on welfare. This partly drives the implementation of policies and programmes such as Universal Credit and the Work Programme. The more positive utility of the Conservative's welfare reforms to its electoral appeal is in illustrating its commitment to 'fairness'. Fairness, defined in relation to deservingness, has been an integral theme in Conservative discussion on welfare since Cameron took the leadership, discussed in the previous chapter. This was linked in with the broader critique of the big state, as Osborne argued: 'at the root of the Left's failure on fairness in government is a stubbornly-held but severely mistaken belief, best expressed in Gordon Brown's assertion that "only the state can guarantee fairness"' (2008). Iain Duncan Smith continued this theme at the 2010 party conference, arguing that it was unfair that the state should take money from people in work, and transfer it to people who 'refuse' to work (2010). Similarly, Cameron has claimed that 'we're building a system that matches effort with reward…Instead of a system that rewards those who make no effort' (2011b) and expressed a desire to build 'a society where fairness is real. Not a free-for-all that lets people do as they wish, but an expectation that all will play their part. Where you get out what you put in' (quoted in Montgomerie, 2012).

On the basis of ensuring fairness for individuals, the Party has therefore proposed that its welfare reforms have a broader moral purpose than cutting the deficit. In part, this draws on the perceived need to tackle widespread abuse of the system. However there is also a more positive ideal of fairness, understood in terms of rewarding those who 'work hard' and 'do the right thing'. Fair treatment from the government is the reward for those who exercise personal responsibility. For example, Universal Credit is intended to offer clearer incentives to work and to encourage claimants to take on more work if this is possible, by smoothing the rate at which

they lose top-up benefits income if they do so. This helps to build up a longer-term narrative around the Conservative approach to social policy which can be sustained separately from the austerity agenda: indeed, as is illustrated in the former chapter, much of this narrative was built up *before* austerity in public spending was a concern. Through this the Conservative Party seeks to identify itself with those who are perceived as deserving of state support, albeit viewing this as a transitional step towards complete economic independence from the state. This encompasses a broad category of people who are perceive themselves as 'hardworking families', 'strivers' or 'ordinary people just trying to get on in life' (O'Brien and Wells, 2012: 44-45).

These are the voters amongst whom the Conservative Party still has an image problem, particularly amongst urban voters in the North of England and to an even greater extent, Scotland. Lord Ashcroft's analysis in relation to the 2010 general election (quoted in O'Brien and Wells, 2012: 21) suggested that:

> The biggest barrier, which was not overcome by election day and remains in place for most of [those who considered voting Conservative, but did not], is the perception (which Tories are sick of hearing about but is real nonetheless) that the Conservative Party is for the rich, not for people like them.

This is problematic. It contradicts the ideational ambitions of a Party which has positioned itself in relation to Labour as the party that is above acting for sectional interests and which claims it will govern in the best interests of the nation as a whole (Crines, 2013). More immediately, it has impeded the Conservatives' electoral prospects, and will continue to do so if left unresolved. To this end, both the Blue Collar Conservative Group and the Conservative Renewal group have been established to look at how the Party can better appeal to working class voters and lower-middle class voters, on the basis that many of the social and political views held by this demographic are not incompatible with Conservatism. Stevenson, one of the founders of the Blue Collar group, recognised that: 'the reality for the Conservative Party is that winning in the North is not an optional extra or a bonus; it is the only way we will construct another Conservative majority government in our lifetime' (2013). Conservative MPs see their approach to ensuring fairness within the welfare system as an important way of working around this. Guto Bebb MP claimed that welfare reform was 'all about the Conservative Party reaching out to elements of society who've always felt that we were nothing to do with them' (private

interview), appealing to those identified by Ashcroft as 'Considerers' (2011) by showing how the Conservatives are able to speak to their concerns.

Implementing longer-term reforms, such as Universal Credit, is ambitious and challenging. Whilst this may eventually bring rewards for lower-paid workers, it is difficult for the Conservative Party to express these in concrete terms in the short-term (see Chapter 7). What has been easier electorally since 2010 has been to link fairness through welfare reform with the cruder 'cutting' policies. As one backbench MP put it: 'the overwhelming view about what people do not want is for others to be receiving benefits to which they are not entitled. That offends their sense of social justice' (private interview).

For example, in relation to the benefit cap, polling for YouGov (2012) showed that in the North and Scotland, 51 per cent and 53 per cent of respondents respectively wanted the government to impose a lower limit than the initial £26,000 per annum (just 14 and 15 per cent respectively wanted the cap raised). Support amongst C2DE voters for a lower level was slightly less than it was for ABC1s (50 per cent and 52 per cent respectively), but still significant, particularly given that many of the C2DE voters will be in receipt of some state benefits themselves. Support for specific policies increased in the North compared to South: the benefits cap, the up-rating limits and changes to child benefits were all at least as popular in the North and Scotland as they were in the Party's southern base (excluding London). Of these, the cap was by far the most popular policy, with 75 per cent supporting it in the North and 82 per cent in Scotland (YouGov/Sunday Times, 2013). This is likely to reflect the difference in the cost of living between the North and Scotland and the South. One backbencher claimed that: 'it's extremely popular, and it gets more popular the further North you go – in many parts of the country, people probably think that the benefits cap is set too high' (private interview). Similarly, Stevenson stated that 'the £26,000 cap to a Northerner seems extortionate. They come to my surgeries and say "£26,000! We don't earn anywhere near that!"' (private interview). In response to these concerns, some party members stated that they would like to see a regional cap, whilst others have advocated a lower overall rate (Skidmore, quoted in Hardman, 2012). Cameron has pledged to immediately lower the cap should the Conservatives win in 2015 (Dominiczak, 2015).

This strategy seeks to exploit and amplify existing weaknesses in Labour's brand, while placing the Conservatives on the side of the aforementioned 'hardworking' majority. The concept of fairness used to justify these policies and Universal Credit is one of desert and reward for effort. The Conservative Party presents this as a response to its characterisation of Labour's conception of fairness, which it claims is concerned with equality of outcome over meritocracy. Therefore it is potentially unfair towards those who do work hard, because they do not receive a reasonable reward and recognition for this. This portrayal became more pertinent as Labour was seen to shift to the left under Ed Miliband's leadership, as the implication is that a more egalitarian approach to welfare policy would entail redistribution and more of the 'wrong' people receiving the benefits of this. It is too early to tell, as yet, whether this was a factor in Labour's poor electoral performance in 2015 but Conservatives clearly believe that it had the potential to be so. Labour is already wary of being labelled, not necessarily accurately, as the 'benefits party'. Duncan Smith noted: 'it's quite clear that the vast majority of the public back what we're doing. Where Labour gets their biggest negatives is when they're associated with welfare, i.e. they want more of it' (quoted in Gimson, 2013). Moreover, it is not just Conservative supporters who view Labour negatively in relation to benefits. The decline in support for greater welfare spending has been most marked since the 1980s amongst Labour voters. These voters are also increasingly likely to explain poverty as an individual (rather than a social) problem (Clery, Lee and Kunz, 2013), and as such they may be disposed to arguments that focus on fair reward and desert. Given this, attempting to align the Conservative Party with these voters' feelings about welfare appears to offer an easy electoral win.

5.7 The 2015 Election

The topic of welfare reform came up frequently during the lead-up to the 2015 general election. Cameron gave a speech in February 2015 suggesting that a majority Conservative government would seek to offer more of the same on welfare, returning to key themes discussed in this chapter (quoted in le Duc, 2015; see also Conclusion). In his final budget, Osborne (2015) announced that the Conservatives would seek to cut a further £12 billion from the welfare budget in the next parliament. Treasury minister David Gauke MP then stated that – aside from savings of up to £3 billion from freezing working age benefits – the Conservatives would not set out how this would be achieved prior to the general election (Mason, 2015). Subsequently, leaked DWP documents suggested that the Government was exploring options including restricting Carer's

Allowance, altering the contributory element of ESA, transferring responsibility for Statutory Maternity Pay to employers, taxing DLA and PIP, limiting Child Benefit to the first two children, and introducing regional benefit caps alongside a confirmed pledge to reduce the £26,000 cap to £23,0000 (Buchanan, 2015). Under criticism from Labour and numerous disability charities, a spokesperson for Duncan Smith stated that speculation was 'ill-informed and inaccurate' and that it was 'wrong and misleading to suggest that any of this is part of our plan' (quoted in Buchanan, 2015). Further details of the plan were not forthcoming.

The Conservatives managed to win 25 additional seats in 2015, gaining the majority that had eluded them in 2010. Addressing the 2010 result, Bale (2011: 396-397) suggested that the Conservative Party 'did not fail to win outright because it modernised and moved into the centre. It failed because, for some voters at least, that process had not gone far enough', singling out public services as a particularly important issue. We might therefore ask whether this result suggests that the 'detoxification' strategy carried out under Cameron's leadership is now complete. Has the Conservative Party managed to rid itself of its 'nasty party' image?

Table 5.1: Polling on key issues

Issue	Avg. Labour lead, May 2014 – May 2015
Economy	-14.8%
Unemployment	-1.8%
Welfare benefits	0.6%
Education	3.4%
Housing	8.7%
NHS	12.2%

Source: YouGov, 2015a

There are reasons to be cautious about inferring this from the victory. There was a paucity of credible alternatives in 2015: Labour weaknesses and the collapse in support for the Liberal Democrats both aided the Conservatives, while UKIP did not split the Conservative vote on the scale that might have been anticipated. Cameron himself was consistently personally preferred to Ed Miliband (Ipsos MORI, 2015b: 2-3), although the extent of this approval had fallen slightly since 2010 (Ipsos MORI, 2010: 3). Moreover, the Party maintained a strong lead on perceptions of economic competency, with Labour trailing by an average of 14.8 percentage points in the year preceding the election (YouGov, 2015a: 19; see Table 5.1, above). There were also clear indications that the economy itself was recovering (OECD, 2015) and, as the senior partner in

the Coalition, the Conservatives were well placed to take credit for this. Beyond this, voter perceptions of the Conservative Party offer a much more mixed picture.

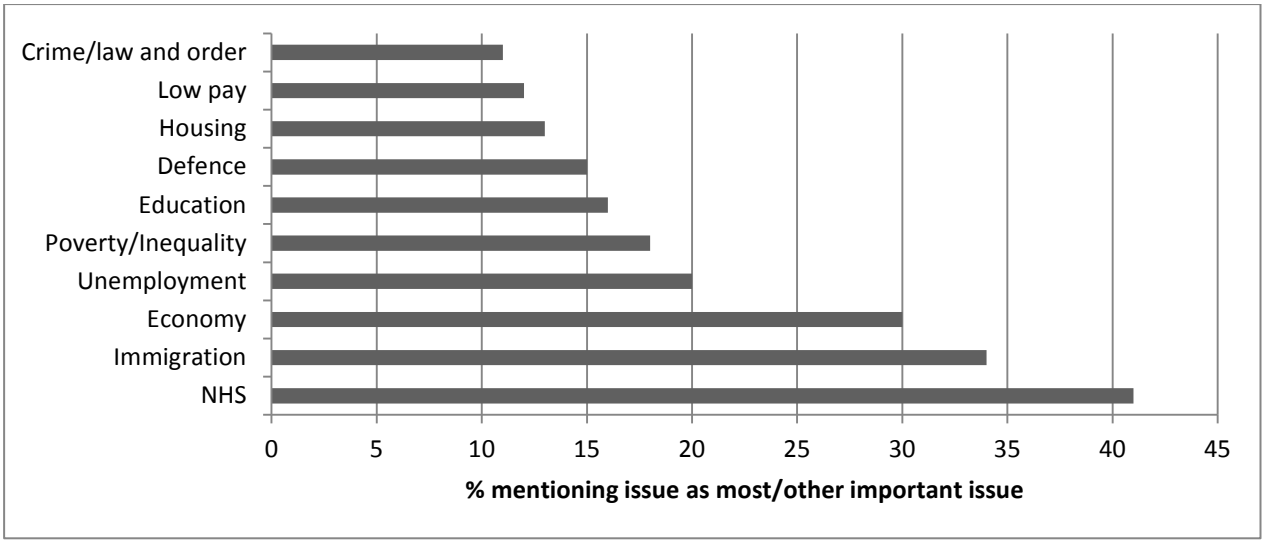
Polling prior to the election indicated that 'decontamination' of the Conservative brand is far from complete. Social issues were expected to play a large part in the result. Four of the ten issues perceived as the most important facing Britain in the months leading up to the election (unemployment, poverty, housing and low pay) were connected to welfare policy, and Ipsos MORI noted that the eighteen per cent who identified 'poverty and inequality' marked the highest ever percentage to name this issue. A further two – education and the NHS – were prominent in the Conservative modernisation agenda throughout the 2005 to 2015 period, with the NHS perceived as most important (see Chart 5.6). On these kinds of issues, the Conservatives struggled to maintain a clear lead over Labour if, indeed, they were able to attain one at all (see Table 5.1).

Moreover, although voters expressed a preference for Cameron, they were less convinced of the virtues of Conservative policies and by the party overall: precisely the opposite situation to that faced by Miliband (Ipsos MORI, 2015b: 2-3, 5). Perhaps most tellingly, YouGov suggested that over the entire parliament, between 44 and 52 per cent of voters felt that the Conservative Party 'appeal[s] to one section of society rather than the whole country' (2015b: 22-24), and that while its ability to 'take tough and unpopular decisions' was perceived by up to 62 per cent of voters, only 20 to 25 per cent felt that its 'heart is in the right place' in doing so (2015b: 7-9, 16-18). Similar issues emerged in Ipsos MORI's polling: since 2006, although the Conservatives can be encouraged by an increase in the number of people who believe it 'looks after the interests of people like me', the party is also more readily conceived as 'extreme' and 'out of date' (see Table 5.2).

There were signs in the short campaign that the Conservatives remained sensitive to these perceptions, and were taking steps to address them. The manifesto failed to focus on welfare savings beyond the pledge on the benefit cap, which Labour had also pledged to retain (Labour Party, 2015: 47). Instead, the section on welfare promised an expansion of childcare and tax changes. Far more attention was given to public services – notably, the NHS – and housing, through a pledge to extend the 'right to buy' to housing association tenants (Conservative Party,

2015: 37-47, 51-53). Even the Big Society enjoyed a brief revival (2015: 45). Overall, the Conservative short campaign around social issues aimed to strike quite a different tone to much of the party's time in government, playing down issues such as welfare reform that had been prominent in preceding years in favour of emphasising the Conservative Party's 'softer' image. This shift, while clearly connected to the electoral cycle itself, is indicative of a broader concern amongst those responsible for the Party's electoral fortunes. Fear of being perceived as the 'nasty party', it appears, remains strong, and with good reason.

Chart 5.6: Issues facing Britain, February 2015



Source: Ipsos MORI, 2015c

Table 5.2: Conservative Party image, 2006 - 2014

	Looks after the interests of people like me	Extreme	Out of date
September 2006	22	6	22
May 2010	32	7	25
September 2014	35	23	48

Source: Ipsos MORI, 2014a

However, with regard to welfare this appears likely to be a short-term, tactical shift rather than a wider shift in strategy. Although the Conservatives have been short on details, there has been no suggestion that they will not try to achieve the £12 billion of welfare cuts. The election victory is undoubtedly a high point in what has been a difficult period for the party and it masks the fact that 'modernisation' has brought some significant tensions to the surface, nowhere more clearly

than in the bitter disputes over same-sex marriage (Hayton and McEnhill, 2015). The up-coming referendum on Europe also threatens to unearth old tensions. As an area of policy that the PCP can broadly agree on and one which is perceived as strategically advantageous, welfare policy looks set to continue down the path set by the Coalition, unimpeded by the Liberal Democrats. It would be highly surprising if the Conservatives did not seek to make further, significant cuts.

These will be extremely difficult to make without affecting benefits paid to working people. Welfare is only one issue that contributes to voter perceptions of parties. However, there is significant potential here for the Conservatives to further cement their 'nasty party' image rather than mitigate against it, which may have implications for the longer-term exploitation of welfare policy in party competition with Labour. In the short-term, this appears fruitful for the Conservatives. The harsh tone struck on welfare issues over the Coalition's term of government may not have visibly damaged the Party's chances of re-election, but the reality of the scale of cuts that are proposed could do so, especially if the concurrent benefits of any economic recovery are not seen to be evenly shared. That this takes place within a much wider framework of reform is likely to only increase the overall challenges faced, especially as there is little evidence outside of the welfare system that the British electorate has widely accepted the idea of a permanently more limited state (Ashbee, 2015: 176). The Conservatives should therefore be very careful in maintaining a reputation for economic competency above all else: it may turn out to be the case that against a more effective opposition and with voters' memories of the previous Labour government fading, this is not enough to sustain them in office.

5.8 Conclusion

The Conservative Party's strategic use of welfare policy as an element of its electoral appeal has shifted significantly since 2005. When Cameron took the leadership, the Party's approach to welfare was just one element of a broader process of detoxification, aiming to present a more caring and socially inclusive image. This was based both on what it perceived as weaknesses in the Labour brand, and the economic context which meant that attacking Labour's record on economic management would have been futile. Further, not being in government, the extent to which the Conservatives could offer concrete illustrations of ideas through policies was necessarily limited. Accordingly the broader narrative assumed greater significance. Since forming the Coalition government in 2010, welfare reform, comprising both the long-term goal

of introducing Universal Credit and the more immediate cutting measures, has become a central component of the Conservative Party's electoral strategy. Connected to this, 'detoxifying' has appeared to be less of a priority for the Conservatives in this area, with the PCP falling back on more recognisably Thatcherite perspectives. There are two developments that are pivotal to understanding this.

The first is the financial crisis of late 2007. This led to the identification of austerity to eliminate the public spending deficit as the Coalition's first priority (HM Government, 2010: 7). As the single biggest area of public spending, the Treasury would have looked to the DWP to cut spending in any such exercise. However, the prioritisation of welfare policy as a part of electoral strategy goes beyond this perceived necessity, as the critique of spending and measures launched on the back of the austerity programme are clear reflections of a fairly consistent Conservative Party ideology on the welfare state. As such, the role of the financial crisis reflects Hay's contention that ideas are analytically prior to material circumstances in understanding political actions and developments. Even if there was widespread agreement between parties heading towards the 2010 election that cuts needed to be made that was precipitated by the crisis, the Conservatives nonetheless pursued an approach that was consistent with the Party's broader ideological perspectives on the proper relationship between state, society and individual, seeking to limit the direct remit of the interventionist state.

The second event is the existence of the Coalition itself, a result of the failure of the Conservative Party to win an overall majority in 2010. The perceived reasons for this and the extent to which these can be remedied through a focus on providing 'fairness' through the welfare state, whilst also tapping into longer-term trends regarding welfare spending, led the Party to identify welfare policy as being of particular instrumental value in 2015. Moreover, the move into government provided a significant change in context which necessitates a re-evaluation of strategy, opening up options that were not previously available to the party regarding attaching ideas and concepts to policy. Simultaneously, therefore, the 2010 election result (while clearly disappointing) provided both a justification for a change of strategy, and the means through which this could be put into practice. Combined with the interpretation of the crisis and the opportunity for reform brought about by this, a context which was highly selective towards welfare retrenchment had emerged. This further calls into question Hay's claim that

ideas exert an effect on context ‘independently’ of material circumstances. In explaining the changing role of welfare policy it has proven necessary to explicitly examine the interplay between the two, recognising that ‘events’ hold the possibility of prompting ideational re-assessment even if we continue to accept that it is actors’ interpretations of these that will direct their eventual actions.

To some extent, the negative strategy deployed by some elements of the Party in speaking to public concerns about fraud and dependency is quite effective. The more immediate reforms have been generally well received. The ‘success’ of this element of strategy may be best illustrated by the Labour response to it. Labour has struggled to carve out a distinctive position, whilst also refuting the Conservative accusation that it is the ‘party of benefits’. Liam Byrne, the former shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has occasionally used language about claimants that is at least as punitive as anything that has come from the Conservative Party: for example, contrasting ‘Britain’s shirkers’ with ‘Britain’s strivers’ and claiming that Labour lost the 2010 election because too many potential supporters ‘felt that too often we were for shirkers not workers’ (quoted in Jowitt, 2013). This suggests that the strategic advantage that Labour once had over the Conservatives in drawing on their more socially caring image has been at least somewhat ceded: it is now the Conservative Party that is setting the agenda on welfare policy, and striking an increasingly harsh tone. The more positive part of the strategy, aligning the Conservative Party with ‘hardworking families’ is intended to address weaknesses in the party’s appeal, as well as exploiting weaknesses in the Labour party’s brand.

Measures that are intended to address the gaps in the Conservative electoral constituency are proving broadly popular, tapping into widespread beliefs that benefits are too high and discourage work, or encourage laziness, and hence that spending needs to be restrained. These beliefs are closely aligned with Conservative perceptions of the individualised nature of poverty, which in turn provides an impetus for further reform in this area. However, the Conservatives may need to tread carefully if they wish to expand electoral support while pursuing the current programme of reductions, especially while ‘quality of life’ issues form a significant part of the political agenda.

Ultimately, the Coalition's reforms, and future Conservative plans, will end up cutting support to the low-paid 'strivers' that the Conservatives aim to appeal to, and such a strategy may not reflect well on them in the longer-term. Low-paid supporters might have to accept that their own incomes will fall, along with the incomes of those viewed as less deserving of support. Additionally, even if individuals are not personally affected, cuts to groups such as disabled people and the working poor tend to be less popular overall, with such groups often viewed as deserving of support (Clery, 2012; YouGov/TUC, 2012). Thus while it seems quite easy to gather support around appeals to fairness and connected concepts, the longer-term success of this strategy could require the Conservatives to achieve more than just superficial electoral buy-in with this concept, accepting the wider logic of a conservative ideological approach to welfare. This could prove more challenging, especially because the Conservatives have chosen to heavily prioritise short-term tactics over longer-term strategy in promoting their working-age welfare reforms, emphasising a view of the welfare state that is quite far from reality in terms of who claims, and why.

A complementary strategy relies on re-structuring the welfare system in such a way that existing spending is directed towards more 'deserving' claimants – which could, simultaneously, assist in re-defining what 'deserving' means. This is effectively the process of ideological decontestation at work in 'real life' politics: success here depends on the Conservative Party's ability to present its own interpretations of particular concepts surrounding welfare as being 'correct', re-formulating common understandings of fairness, compassion and so on in a Conservative ideological image. The reforms of the 2010 to 2015 period, and the way that these are implemented, are of vital importance to this effort. These are the subject of the next two chapters.

Chapter 6
Policy I: Universal Credit and the Work Programme

6.1 Introduction

The move into coalition government with the Liberal Democrats in 2010 provided the Conservative Party with the opportunity to put its ideas on welfare policy into practice. Although welfare had not formed a central part of the Party's electoral message leading up to the election, a number of Conservatives had been occupied with developing the Party's working-age welfare policy during opposition. In contrast, the Liberal Democrats had preferred to concentrate on pensioner policy (Liberal Democrats, 2010: 52-53). This divergence was reflected in the allocation of ministerial posts within the Department for Work and Pensions. Cameron appointed Iain Duncan Smith as Secretary of State, recognising the substantial work that he had undertaken related to poverty whilst on the backbenches. Chris Grayling and Maria Miller were initially selected as Minister for Employment and Minister for Disabled People respectively, whilst Nick Clegg chose Steve Webb as Minister for Pensions, reflecting both Liberal Democrat policy priorities and his substantial expertise on welfare. Given this division of labour, it is suggested here that the Conservatives have led on working-age welfare policy development (McEnhill, 2015).

At this point, it is helpful to clarify why the focus of this chapter and the subsequent one is on the Conservative role in policy-making as opposed to a more detailed examination of other groups feeding into the policy process. The analytical focus on the Conservatives here is a result of the research questions of this thesis. However, these embody an implicit perspective on policy-making, and the wider question of where power lies in the British political system. Some theories of policy development, notably Rhodes's 'differentiated polity' model, stress the plurality of actors involved in the process. Rhodes captures this relationship using the concept of policy networks, suggesting that rather than the Prime Minister and government deciding policy, it emerges from 'the deliberations of discrete, organised, closed networks of policy actors', with power relatively decentralised, 'although ministers and departments are important players' (Rhodes, 2003: 8). If this were the case in this policy area, it would necessitate a much wider focus on the ideas of other actors within the welfare policy network.

Challenging this, Marsh, Richards and Smith advocate an asymmetric power model. This suggests that the key actors in policy-making in Britain are still within the core executive, and that government 'is the dominant partner' in policy-making (2001: 234-235). Interviews for this project with those seeking to influence the policy process – for example, think-tanks and charities – suggested, in line with Marsh, Richards and Smith's findings, that the government had significant sway over the terms of engagement, particularly with regard to consultation. MPs, civil servants and external actors alike also stressed the continued importance of government ministers in shaping policy development. This is not to discount the importance of policy networks *per se*, or to claim that departments are entirely autonomous, but it does imply that an asymmetric power model offers a more accurate characterisation of the role of government in this policy area. This, in turn, justifies the focus in these chapters on the ideas and beliefs of Conservative actors and the actions of the relevant departments – notably, the DWP and the Treasury, the latter of which is increasingly concerned with policy initiatives around welfare (Marsh, Richards and Smith, 2001: 129-130).

With this said, Duncan Smith's appointment as Secretary of State was significant because he brought with him plans for a sweeping re-structure of the welfare system, in the form of Universal Credit. This was the centrepiece of the policy work that the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) had been developing since 2004. Universal Credit is the amalgamation of several separate benefits into one payment, as a means of bringing about greater clarity for claimants regarding the effects on their income of moving into work or increasing their working hours. While still viewing claiming benefits as a matter of choice, this reflects a rational, as opposed to a solely moral approach to countering this, which is quite novel for the Conservatives. This was added on to existing plans to reform the welfare-to-work programmes introduced by New Labour by implementing a new 'Work Programme' and an extended range of 'work experience' schemes. This was a policy area that Grayling had taken a keen interest in developing in opposition, as a means of achieving better results for 'hard to help' claimants by utilising the expertise of voluntary, community and private organisations in preference to state-led support. Together, these policies represent the crystallisation of the renewed Conservative ideas on poverty that had been developing over the years in opposition.

This chapter considers how effectively the Conservative Party has translated concepts of poverty, responsibility, fairness and compassion into these policies. Chapter 4 suggested that taken together, these four concepts form the basis of a coherent theoretical rationale for welfare reform, providing a set of goals to be fulfilled that relate to both the behaviour of individual claimants and, consequentially, the well-being of the broader society. However, the process of translating ideas into policy does not end at the point of policy introduction. In order to fully analyse and evaluate the process of translation from abstract ideas into policy it is important to examine not only policy rationales, intentions and stated goals, but also outcomes: how different policy instruments function together as a whole, and which concepts are prioritised or downplayed in their delivery and implementation. Putting together a coherent theoretical rationale is arguably the easier part of constructing an approach to a particular policy area: the bigger challenges lie around difficult decisions and adjustments that must be made during and after implementation. Therefore if the aim is to understand the nuanced aspects of Conservative ideology that feed into policy-making, consideration of this on-going stage is required. This is also important in understanding the longer-term implications of Coalition reforms in this policy area. Ultimately it is the impact of policy that will shape the policy context for both the majority Conservative administration and future governments.

This chapter suggests that plans for both policies fit fairly well with the four key concepts, and there are a number of common or complementary strands between the two. Both are founded on an individualised account of poverty. This is expressed as ‘welfare dependency’, implying that poverty is something that can be effectively tackled by addressing the perceived weaknesses and poor decisions of individual benefit claimants. Stemming from this, both contain a strong emphasis on responsibility decontested as self-sufficiency, through a focus on engagement in paid work as both a social and individual moral obligation. Both embody notions of fairness, operationalised via greater conditionality for claimants. This relates to the concern that claimants should not be seen to be getting ‘something for nothing’, but are also entitled to receive support in moving back into work. Finally, the Work Programme in particular exhibits a concern with conservative ‘compassion’. This is exemplified in the enhanced work requirements placed on (sometimes reluctant) claimants, and the attempt to develop a stronger civil society by utilising diverse organisations, which meet with the conception of compassionate values, as service

providers. This should support goals around the Big Society focused on nurturing civil society as an alternative to central state provision, beginning to allow state provision to be withdrawn.

Inevitably, the development and implementation process for both policies has thrown up challenges. It is mediated firstly by the existence and character of current institutions, systems and expectations. These may serve to shut down numerous possible approaches to particular policy issues, both in ideological and administrative terms. Secondly there is a need to maintain an electoral appeal alongside tackling policy problems. Depending on how these problems are framed and what outcomes are sought, these two strategic priorities may require different solutions, leading to tension and perhaps either sub-optimal policy or weak electoral strategies. Thirdly there is the pressure introduced by external challenges and interpretations of these: notably, here, the economy. The strategically selective context in which policy is made is therefore densely structured, rendering incremental change preferable to radicalism due to the risk of failure and requiring on-going compromise between different aims and goals.

Universal Credit, the Work Programme and the measures discussed in the subsequent chapter are therefore all best regarded as inevitably imperfect attempts to bring to life the afore-discussed Conservative ideas on welfare, balancing these with more immediate pressures and resolving inter-Party disagreements on the best means of implementation. In practice these policies cannot be reasonably portrayed as seamless or comprehensive manifestations of Conservative welfare ideology. However this is not a problem from the perspective of studying the Party's ideology. The outcomes of the process of implementation, including the particular elements of ideological concepts that are emphasised and explanations as to why other elements have been downplayed, can tell us a lot about both the Party's priorities and the balance of power within it. Accordingly, such understandings inform discussion of the likely future trajectory of policy through shaping the strategically selective context that all future administrations will have to negotiate.

The central argument of the chapter is that the ideational innovation of both reforms has been undermined, or has significant potential to be undermined, by the identified need to cut the public spending deficit as the 'most urgent task' facing the Coalition (HM Government, 2010: 7), and the subsequent cuts to come under the Conservative majority. The DWP will see its budget cut by £20 billion by the end of 2014/15 (NAO, 2011: 5), and the Conservatives have

announced plans to cut a further £12 billion in the 2015 to 2020 parliament (Osborne, 2015). While the austerity measures discussed in the following chapter arguably play a bigger part in electoral positioning than the policies discussed here, there is nonetheless an effect on these policies given the broader framing of spending on welfare as 'waste' rather than investment that is inherent in the austerity-focused strand of policy. This places additional pressures on the prospects for future development of Universal Credit and the Work Programme, limiting the opportunities for the Conservative Party to advance its approach to the welfare state beyond retrenchment, and stunting the overall progress of ideological development.

6.2 Universal Credit

Universal Credit is the Coalition government's flagship welfare reform. It will replace six separate 'legacy benefits': Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), income-based Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Housing Benefit, Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit. Universal Credit consists of a basic payment (the 'standard allowance'), alongside additional 'elements' for (un)employment, housing, disability, caring and children/childcare (DWP, 2010a: 2-3). The standard allowance and elements are all means-tested. A number of other benefits, including the Personal Independence Payment (PIP – formerly Disability Living Allowance), Child Benefit, Carer's Allowance, contribution-based JSA and contribution-based ESA are *not* included in Universal Credit. These will continue to exist as separate benefits, albeit with the latter two administered using the same systems as Universal Credit.[20] Reform will mean that the higher-rate contributory benefits will 'only be paid for a fixed period to facilitate a transition back to work' (DWP, 2010b: 32; DWP, 2012a), after which former recipients will wholly rely on Universal Credit. In theory, Universal Credit should make the claiming process easier for claimants in terms of how changes in employment circumstances will affect their income, thereby helping to 'incentivise' moves into work or increasing hours. This suggests a predominantly rational understanding of dependency, rather than one based on claimants' moral failings. However, as will be discussed, the two are not entirely separable.

[20] This means that income gained from contribution-based JSA and ESA will be taken into account when calculating a households' entitlement to Universal Credit. Therefore the level of payment received via Universal Credit will potentially be affected by the receipt of these benefits (DWP, 2010a: 23).

This reflects the partial resolution of tensions over fairness and the impact on responsibility of contributory versus means-tested benefits discussed in Chapter 4. It confirms that it is unlikely that the Conservatives will opt to make a strong case for the extension of the former type of benefit. A consequence of this 'non-decision' may be to limit the options available to a future Labour government, through moving provision further from a contributory basis. Instead, 'fairness' will be delivered via Universal Credit as a means-tested system which attempts to ensure that claimants are unable to get 'something for nothing'. This necessitates a strong emphasis on claimants both being designated 'in need' of financial support, and meeting defined conditions as a requisite for receipt of the benefit (DWP, 2010a: 65). This then also promotes responsible behaviour which, within both Universal Credit and the Work Programme, is synonymous with engaging in or taking steps to engage in paid work (Deacon and Patrick, 2011: 171). This embodiment of 'responsibility' is prioritised above almost all other means of social and economic engagement, with only some people with caring duties excused from Universal Credit's work-related conditions (DWP, 2010a: 24).

Operating alongside the Work Programme, Universal Credit can be understood as part of an 'activating' welfare system in which the emphasis is on providing support and opportunities for claimants to enable them to move from dependency to independence (Houston and Lindsay, 2010: 136). Activating systems take a primarily supply-side approach to moving benefit claimants into work. In addition to addressing the individual shortcomings that might prevent individuals from accessing the labour market (which is the main role of the Work Programme), part of this kind of approach involves focusing on the attitudes of individuals with respect to work. In Universal Credit, this takes the form of identifying the perceived disincentives within the structures of the welfare system that negate against people making the decision to move into work. These include the rates at which benefits are withdrawn when a claimant moves into work, and the diminishing returns or financial uncertainty that might be associated with working more hours. Such factors, the argument goes, might contribute to claimants forming the belief that they are 'better off on benefits' (Osborne, 2013a), thus discouraging them from seeking work. As such, part of the Universal Credit approach is to seek to produce attitudinal and hence behavioural change through reforming the structure of benefit payments.

Conceptually, such an approach is congruent with Conservative ideas on the behavioural causes of dependency, and hence of poverty. The root of the problem of reliance on the welfare system in this analysis is located at the level of individual decision-making, enabled by a system that has prioritised improving material well-being over rewarding constructive behaviour. However, the existence of structures within the British welfare system which might mitigate against working have been broadly identified both within and beyond the PCP. This is discussed further below in relation to benefit simplification. What identifies the ideas underpinning Universal Credit as distinctly Conservative and heavily influenced by Thatcherism, however, is that reforming the system so that the weak incentives and conditionality within it are ameliorated is posited as a 'magic bullet' for ending dependency. For example, the SJPG's *Economic dependency* report focuses extensively on various individual level barriers to work such as 'benefit traps' and high withdrawal rates (SJPG, 2006a: 79-88) but fails to propose any measures that address structural issues, such as low pay or a lack of jobs. Conservative interventions on welfare reform, such as those discussed below, are equally light on such problems, while strongly emphasising the centrality of individual choice in perpetuating poverty. Consequentially, Universal Credit leaves the problem of weaknesses in the labour market itself unaddressed. Within this understanding, supply-side interventions focused on individuals are not part of the solution to moving claimants away from state support; they are *the* solution.

Analyses of the British labour market routinely suggest that tackling supply-side issues is only part of the challenge in boosting employment. Significant demand-side barriers to work include a lack of demand for labour, lack of suitable jobs or poor pay (Goulden 2010; Crisp et al. 2009a). Lack of opportunities for in-work progression also form an important part of explanations for persistent material poverty (Schmuecker, 2014). For disabled claimants the barriers to work are potentially even higher, compounding the extent to which their employment difficulties can be addressed through supply-side interventions.[21] Drawing on this, a number of studies that suggest that widespread 'dependency' as Conservatives often define it (in terms of a conscious aversion

[21] Supply-side interventions for disability benefit claimants are reflective of an individualist approach to disability; while a full discussion of the implications of this approach are outside the remit of this chapter, these issues are returned to in the section on DLA/PIP reforms in the following chapter. See also Grover and Piggott (2010).

to working) does not exist: it is factors other than this that tend to lead to long-term unemployment (Esser, 2009; Walker with Howard, 2000; Dean and Taylor-Gooby, 1992).

These dovetail with analyses concerning the effectiveness of the specific strategies employed within Universal Credit. International evidence on whether conditionality operationalized via sanctioning is an effective means of bringing about behavioural change, in what circumstances, and at what social costs, does not engender straightforward conclusions (Lee, Slack and Lewis, 2004; van den Berg, 2002; Cherlin et al. 2002); similarly, the extent to which changes in marginal tax rates impact on work incentives varies between different demographics of unemployed and employed people (Adam, Brewer and Shepherd, 2006). This evidence suggests that viewing unemployment purely in individualistic terms (either rationally or morally) is unrealistic: hence, the extent to which 'dependency' can be overcome by the sorts of interventions used in Universal Credit is potentially more limited than Conservatives have proposed. As Katie Schmuecker, Poverty Team manager for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, summarised: 'our research shows that these [attitudinal and behavioural] things do matter, but they're probably not the things that matter most' (private interview).

Much of the PCP appears to simply not accept this, having already identified worklessness as a matter of choice which has been enabled by an insufficiently demanding welfare system and payments that are perceived as overly generous, thus dis-incentivising work. Conservative MPs provided a number of examples of this thinking during the second reading of the Welfare Reform Act (2012) (HC Hansard, 9 March 2011). Paul Uppal spoke of former friends who would: 'tell me to my face that they envisaged that the rest of their life would be on benefits, and they were quite happy to live that way'. Sajid Javid claimed: 'in short, many people have come to see welfare as a career option'. The idea of the welfare system as 'some sort of life choice' (Cameron, quoted in Hope and Mason, 2013) is also a recurrent piece of rhetoric by those at the top of the Party (Hayton and McEnhill, 2014). Such an interpretation reinforces the need to focus on the individuals who are within the welfare system in ending this 'culture of dependency' (Priti Patel, HC Hansard, 9 March 2011), rather than considering broader structural inequalities. This understanding of dependency and poverty as individualised problems has clear implications for policy, which are crystallised in the design and strategies of Universal Credit and the Work

Programme. These strategies and the ideas underpinning them are discussed in more detail below.

As mentioned above, there has been considerable interest in reform to simplify the welfare system since before the Coalition came to power. Dame Anne Begg, former Labour Chair of the Work and Pensions Select Committee, commented that the single working-age benefit had long been the 'Holy Grail of welfare reform' across all parties (private interview). A review commissioned by Gordon Brown's government reported that 'there has been a growing interest in recent years in the complexity of the British social security system' (Sainsbury and Weston, 2009: 6). Analyses for think-tanks from the IPPR (Sainsbury and Stanley, 2007) to the Centre for Policy Studies (Martin, 2009) have suggested that re-structuring welfare payments into one single payment might pay great dividends in terms of removing the uncertainty associated with moving into work or altering working hours. The Work and Pensions Select Committee has also tentatively endorsed the idea (2007). Ultimately, as one senior former civil servant suggested: 'the Universal Credit-type approach is the sort of thing which young researchers at the IFS, and indeed the Treasury and the DWP like to kick around, and have been doing so for the last twenty-five years' (private interview).

However, this particular manifestation was developed by the CSJ's Economic Dependency Working Group (EDWG) in its report *Dynamic Benefits* (EDWG, 2009). Peter King, an academic and advisor to the EDWG, suggested that it constituted 'the hard labour for welfare reform, sort of sub-let from the Conservative Party' (private interview). Catherine Haddon, author of a research project for the Institute for Government (2012) on policy-making in opposition from 2005-2010 corroborated this, confirming that as well as providing an important research resource, 'ideologically, [the CSJ] was hugely important'. Haddon commented that the exact nature of the relationship between the Conservative Party – specifically Duncan Smith – and the CSJ was unclear in terms of 'who influenced who' (private interview), a point that was similarly put by two senior civil servants (private interviews). Nonetheless, given the close relationship, it is unsurprising that the CSJ's work on the single benefit suggests ideas that are congruent with Conservative perspectives on welfare.

Principal amongst these, and signifying the innovation of the CSJ's approach in contrast to the others cited above, is the extent to which *Dynamic Benefits* focuses on the importance of the source of an individual or family's income, rather than the amount. It claims that: 'a system that penalises work, and focuses on how much income people have, without distinguishing between earnings from work and income from benefits, merely considers the symptoms of dependency and poverty' (EDWG, 2009: 16). The report goes on to correlate simply being in work (and being in a particular family situation) with good social outcomes. Referencing the SJPG's own research, it states that: 'there is a well-established body of evidence that two parent families with at least one working member generally produce the best overall long-term outcomes for the whole household' (EDWG, 2009: 19). Consequentially, the report argues that work must be incentivised through offering lower Participation Tax Rates and lower Marginal Tax Rates, as the levels at which these are set currently disincentivise employment (EDWG, 2009: 18-20). Implementing a system in which there is a clear financial advantage to moving into work or improving one hours is then linked with broader social issues. Engagement with work is presented as central to resolving a range of problems which the CSJ suggests result from dependency on the state, including social exclusion, poor health, low educational attainment, and low levels of social mobility (SJPG, 2006a: 13-14).

As well as offering an evidence base which can support Conservative scepticism towards the interventionist state, this analysis also ties in more specifically with the Conservative critique of the impact of receipt of unconditional, or insufficiently conditional, means-tested benefits on individual responsibility. Lack of money is cast as the symptom of poverty, but trying to address this through cash transfers merely perpetuates a cycle of irresponsible decision making which renders the recipient increasingly reliant on the state. This is because it implicitly rewards the decision not to work, in turn 'trapping' the recipient within a lifestyle to which they are able to become accustomed due to the receipt of unearned income (Grayling, HC Hansard, 1 February 2012a: see also Chapter 4). The responsible choice of going back to work therefore comes to represent hardship. The emphasis on incentives therefore acknowledges that it is unfair to expect claimants to take this route (see below). This is also linked with the over-arching perspective that poverty cannot be sustainably tackled without changing behaviour (Duncan Smith, 2012a). Altering incentives is then a necessary step. Without this, the fundamental building block of

responsible behaviour amongst claimants, which enables a fair system to flourish, will not and cannot be realised.

While *Dynamic Benefits* focuses on the incentivising element of Universal Credit, in implementation these ideas have also been linked to greater conditionality. Conditionality is significantly extended within Universal Credit compared to the previous system. It applies not only to JSA claimants or those claiming the full employment element, but also to those in work who may be required to 'increase their earnings to the equivalent of 35 hours per week at National Minimum Wage' (Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2014a: 5-6). It remains unclear how in-work conditionality will be applied in practice, but ideally it would encourage progression in work (HC Hansard, 11 September 2012). It is therefore justified on the basis that it is supportive in enabling claimants to move towards complete independence, and as a means of improving improve social mobility, with the attendant societal benefits that Conservatives have proposed that this brings (Tarr and Finn, 2012: 52). Conditionality is also extended to disabled people in the ESA Work-Related Activity Group (see DWP, 2012b), again on the basis that the appropriate application of this can provide positive outcomes in moving those disabled people designated as closest to the labour market back into work (DWP, 2012c: 6; Gregg, 2008).

The extended emphasis on conditionality for those out of work or in low-paid work reflects the Conservative complaint that New Labour did too little to tie receipt of benefits to making responsible decisions (Duncan Smith, HC Hansard, 31 March 2014). For many households, therefore, 'dependency on out-of-work benefits has been replaced by dependency on tax credits', with disincentives trapping people within the tax credit system (SJPG 2006a: 12). Extra conditionality can therefore also be tied in with a Conservative concept of compassion, which is coercive of individuals in the pursuit of eventually positive social and individual outcomes. This is discussed further in the second section of this chapter, in relation to conditionality within the Work Programme.

The ideas underpinning Universal Credit offer part of a very rational solution for discouraging dependency, which fits well with some Conservative MPs' perceptions of the rationality of claimant decision-making in claiming working-age benefits. This rational understanding of claimant behaviour underpinned the CSJ's approach to the topic as far as claimants are

concerned. Corin Taylor, a member of the group that worked on *Dynamic Benefits*, stated that 'there were very poor work incentives…You see people making very rational decisions not to work' (private interview). Deven Ghelani, a CSJ researcher, similarly suggested that without appropriate incentives: 'it becomes very difficult to moralise over "you need to do this, you need to do that to get this job, you need to…" It becomes a very antagonistic relationship because their response is "why?"' (private interview). *Dynamic Benefits* offers a similar awareness of the difficulties of imploring people to work without offering adequate recompense:

> We must also recognise that few of those out of work would look upon work as a moral choice, rather than a practical one. For them, employment and career progression above all has to pay and if we understand that this is part of what motivates those already in work, why do we seem to expect something altogether different of benefit claimants? (EDWG, 2009: 6-7)

This still very much follows an individualistic understanding of poverty and benefit receipt. However, rather than falling back solely on moral exhortations to work and an emphasis on claimants' moral failings, it introduces something that is innovative in policy terms for the Conservatives in this area, emphasising how the system itself needs to work for claimants. This is somewhat different from the Conservative approach of the 1980s, which assumed that limiting and de-valuing benefits would be enough to force claimants into self-sufficiency (Mabbett, 2013: 43), and from much of the rest of the Party's contemporary thinking on welfare. Via the proposed incentive structure there is a recognition of the need to make work more attractive to claimants, in addition to making not working, or not working enough, sufficiently unattractive. Hence it is with some justification that Lord Freud claimed that Universal Credit is concerned with 'redefining the contract between claimants and the welfare state' (quoted in DWP, 2014b), at least as far as the Conservative Party is concerned. It suggests the extension of economic liberal logic into social policy. Here, further indicating that there has been some ideological development in this area, the Conservatives found significant common ground with the Liberal Democrats around the idea of 'making work pay' (Clegg, quoted in Stratton, 2010).

The linking of conditionality with incentives in Universal Credit, alongside the support offered through the Work Programme, then opens up the space within which the moral argument for engaging in work as a matter of fairness can be advanced more convincingly since the practical barriers, according to Conservative thinking, will have been removed. The rationality of this

approach, which could be interpreted as a shift away from social conservatism, therefore permits the re-assertion of traditionally conservative moral perspectives. It can therefore be understood as a means to an end, rather than a wholesale ideological shift. Ideologically this is reflective of a strand of Conservatism that has a slightly different understanding of human behaviour within the relationship between state, society and individual than has been expressed in welfare policy in recent decades, as well as a sharper perception of the need to adapt to New Labour's changes. While still seeking to limit the direct relationship between individuals and the state, and to roll back state intervention as its ultimate goal, this strand takes a rather more long-term approach to doing so. This is duel-pronged, emphasising both individual responsibility and the importance of incentives.

A potential problem is that such long-term strategies will inevitably be affected by more immediate pressures and concerns. Universal Credit represents an up-front cost within a department that has been extensively targeted for expenditure cuts since 2010, for both political and economic purposes. The DWP expects to spend £2.4 billion implementing Universal Credit, up to April 2023 (Public Accounts Committee 2013: 5). The DWP impact assessment estimated that when implemented, Universal Credit would cost an extra £2.3 billion owing to changes in entitlement rules and increased take-up. However, this would be offset by £2.2 billion saved from reduced fraud and error. It remarks: 'in the longer term, reduced complexity has the potential to lead to savings of more than £0.2 billion a year in administrative costs'. These calculations do not allow for potential savings resulting from behavioural change, which are a key intention of the policy (DWP 2012d: 5). During the Public Bill Committee stage of the Welfare Reform Act, Mike Brewer of the IFS remarked that Universal Credit has 'the potential' to bring about such change as it should remove 'pinch points' in the welfare system around moving in and out of work (HC Hansard, 22 March 2011); however, this is contradicted by some other evidence regarding the effects of incentives and sanctions, cited above. Regardless of its capacity to bring about future savings and the possible realisation of Conservative ideological goals, Universal Credit's implementation must be considered within its immediate economic and political context.

The decision to attempt to implement Universal Credit appears unusual given its cost, challenging nature, and the fact that it was entirely absent from pre-election Conservative

literature on welfare policy. Duncan Smith's appointment was instrumental in its introduction, as senior civil servants confirmed (private interviews). In Frank Field's words: 'IDS made the Universal Credit a programme to be implemented. It would never have happened without him. It would have been squashed by the Treasury on the grounds that they've never done an IT scheme that works' (private interview). Cameron's decision in this respect could be understood partially in terms of party management. One 2010 intake MP remarked that for the right of the Conservative Party, it was 'certainly a source of comfort […] to have one of their own in such a position', particularly given some scepticism of Cameron's leadership on the Party's socially conservative wing. Others found it 'immensely reassuring' that 'there was a central moral thread to [welfare reform], rather than just slash and burn' (Penrose, private interview) feeling that this buttressed the Conservative Party's claim to not just being about 'pounds, shillings and pence and the economy' (Streeter, private interview). However, Duncan Smith brought with him a clear plan from the CSJ. In return for the money being made available for implementation, he then acceded to severe welfare cuts, which would see the welfare budget fall by £20 billion in 2014/15 (NAO, 2011: 5). Duncan Smith was retained in the welfare brief in Cameron's new cabinet in 2015, and it must be assumed that there Universal Credit roll-out will continue. Further cuts are also to come.

Reservations from the Treasury over the project resulted in clashes between Duncan Smith and Osborne, with Osborne reportedly claiming that Duncan Smith '[opposed] every cut' that he sought to make (d'Ancona, 2013: 90). Most of these, and the emerging tensions between austerity and Universal Credit, are discussed in the following chapter. However, there are two issues which merit further discussion here. These are the Treasury's announcement that claimants will be required to wait for seven days before claiming unemployment benefits, and the effect of austerity on the Universal Credit single taper.

The 'seven-day' policy was announced by Osborne and justified with reference to the importance of being in work and making every effort to look for work. He stated: 'those first few days should be spent looking for work, not looking to sign on. We're doing these things because we know they help people stay off benefits and help those on benefits get back into work faster' (2013b). Where claimants are eligible for Universal Credit, the seven-day wait will apply to the entire award including the housing element. This will result in an average loss of £153 per

household; far higher than the amount lost in the existing three-day waiting period for JSA only (Kennedy, 2013: 8). Although it is one of the less eye-catching elements of benefit reforms, this is significant. It cuts across the rationale behind Universal Credit regarding taking some of the financial uncertainty and risk out of moving into work.

The importance of the cost implications behind this decision cannot be ignored, especially given the conditions that already apply to new JSA claims that prevent those who find themselves 'voluntarily' workless from claiming (see below). This move is expected to save approximately £350 million per year (BBC News, 2013a). This is reflective of a more instrumental, immediate approach to tackling welfare spending than the longer-term agenda that appears to drive Duncan Smith's reforms. As Kwasi Kwarteng put it: 'we can get into a moral argument [about cutting welfare spending] but I would suggest that now, given where we are, it's almost irrelevant'. He continued: 'The point is that we're still borrowing £120 billion a year, and the welfare bill is the largest slice of the pie so we've got to deal with that and stop borrowing this money' (private interview). Similarly, Richard Graham MP told the house that 'compassion is incredibly important, but money matters in this game, because there is no social justice in bankrupting the public finances' (HC Hansard, 30 June 2014). In such a perspective, sound public finances are elevated above the moral imperative in a way that significantly contradicts the goals of Universal Credit.

Such a move can also be tied in with some elements of ideological and electoral concerns, at least from a short-term perspective, as they apply to non-claimants. This relates to being seen to offer a system that is 'fair' to those who fund it by cutting down opportunities for people to 'play the system' (Hoban, 2012). The people who will be affected by the seven-day requirement are those who the Conservatives characterise as 'perpetual jobseekers' (Conservative Party, 2009: 10). This group cycle in and out of work and poverty, thus avoiding the more onerous conditions placed on long-term unemployed people but still being in receipt of benefits. If receipt is understood in terms of choice then ostensibly the seven-day wait would discourage this. However, such circumstances are often less through personal choice than because the work that these claimants are engaged in is insecure and badly paid (Shildrick et al., 2010). Additionally, there are already restrictions on newly unemployed claimants' entitlement to aim unemployment benefits. JSA is not usually immediately available to those who have left their jobs voluntarily,

nor to those who have been sacked. In fact, the waiting period for such claimants is much longer than seven days.[22] Crucially, the claimants that will be affected are those who are behaving as Universal Credit intends them to by taking work wherever possible even if the longer-term prospects are poor. The central concern here is with constructing an impression of 'fairness for taxpayers'. However, this important element of electoral positioning is accomplished here in such a way that it cuts across both the conceptions of fairness and compassion for those within the welfare system, and may ultimately discourage moving into work.

Dynamic Benefits proposed a 55 per cent single taper within Universal Credit, arguing that this 'represents the best compromise between improving incentives and containing costs' (EDWG, 2009: 26). Owing to budget pressures, Universal Credit is being implemented with a 65 per cent taper. This will save £2.8 billion per year (Save the Children, 2013: 4). It will also mean that approximately 2.8 million households will face higher marginal deduction rates under Universal Credit than they would have under the tax credit system, losing an average of £137 per month (Department for Work and Pensions, 2012d: 5). Lone parent families are at particular risk of losing out, compounded by the extra barriers that they face in progressing in work (Brewer and DeAngostini, 2013).

Ghelani acknowledged that it was a 'crying shame' that the taper was higher than envisaged, but that implementing Universal Credit with the lower rate was 'very difficult to justify right now' due to financial pressures. However, he continued: 'I think it's more important to have Universal Credit as a system in place and working. What you want is for the next Secretary of State to be able to make those sorts of decisions with confidence' (private interview). His perspective was shared by some Conservatives. Guto Bebb stated that the taper was 'not as generous as it could be'; 'if we have money available at some point in the near future I would like to see that lowered […] I think it's a step in the right direction, but it's not going be as revolutionary as I would have hoped' (private interview). Similarly, when questioned on the change by former Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Douglas Alexander, Duncan Smith replied: 'the real issue here is not that the taper is 65 per cent'. Rather, 'the taper rate itself involves a decision,

[22] Newly unemployed claimants must show that they have left work 'for good reason', or that a dismissal was not 'because of the way that [they] behaved'. Failure to do so results in JSA payments being delayed for between thirteen weeks and three years (DWP, 2013a: 7-8).

which a government of any hue would take, about how to set the balance between what we can afford and how much we will be able to give people as they go back into work'. The more important concern was the implementation of the system itself (HC Hansard, 11 November 2010). The levels at which its levers were set could then be adjusted in relation to economic context.

Such an argument is somewhat reasonable. Universal Credit should, after all, improve incentives for the majority of claimants (Brewer, Browne and Jin, 2011), and the taper rate is not set in stone. However, the argument must be further considered against Conservative perceptions of the political and economic reality. The direction of travel on welfare policy (and austerity, more widely) suggests that it is highly unlikely that either the in-coming Cameron majority government, or a future Conservative government will seek to lower the taper. Moreover, as discussed in the following chapter, Osborne has announced the intention to find further savings after 2015; these savings will impact on people in work, including those claiming Universal Credit as they cut across the elements within it (BBC News, 2014). Thus the part of Universal Credit that offers a somewhat innovative Conservative approach to welfare policy appears to be on increasingly shaky ground. Without this, Universal Credit becomes less 'carrot' and more 'stick', relying on conditionality to compel people into work that may be of negligible financial benefit.

With a greater reliance on conditionality, and less emphasis on incentives, the implementation of this policy therefore begins to rely more on arguments around the moral benefits of working which are redolent of unreformed Thatcherism. As with the seven-day requirement, the emphasis here is on providing an impression of fairness for the 'taxpayers' who fund the welfare system, closely related to Conservative electoral strategy. Whilst arguably satisfying the goals of producing responsible behaviour amongst claimants (if they are able to find work), this is again accomplished at the expense of fairness for low-paid workers who are expected to work simply because it is the 'right' thing to do. If not altered, this approach will undermine the more innovative side of Universal Credit, based on a rational conception of claimant behaviour, leaving only a limited, highly conditional welfare 'safety net' rather than the enabling system that the CSJ, and Duncan Smith, had envisaged. This is further compounded in relation to the reforms discussed in Chapter 8.

6.3 The Work Programme

Given the centrality of resolving poverty by promoting self-sufficiency to the Conservative Party's social vision, the implementation of a number of 'welfare-to-work' programmes is the second key plank in its welfare reforms. These include the flagship Work Programme and a number of smaller 'work experience' schemes operating alongside this, including Work Experience, Mandatory Work Activity, Community Work Placements and Sector-based Work Academies. Although there are differences in the structure and purpose of each of these programmes, all of their goals are broadly complimentary to those of Universal Credit. While Universal Credit should ensure that 'work pays' and remove some of the uncertainty associated with moving into a job, the welfare-to-work reforms aim to help claimants to develop the skills that they need in order to get a job and remain in work (DWP, 2014b).

Work Experience, Mandatory Work Experience, Community Work Placements and Sector-based Work Academies serve similar purposes to the Work Programme in terms of promoting paid work, but are aimed at different groups and carry different requirements. Participants in the former three programmes 'do not receive a wage but continue to receive benefits and must continue to look for permanent work' (McGuinness, 2014: 3). For Sector-based Work Academies, the work-seeking requirement is removed because it is an employer-based programme. The main difference between the programmes is the age groups that they are aimed at, and participants' proximity to the labour market. Work Experience is aimed at young people aged 18-24 who have been claiming for more than three months, but less than nine (which is the point of referral to the full Work Programme). Participation and on-going engagement is voluntary.[23] Mandatory Work Placements, as its name suggests, is compulsory. It is intended to help claimants of any age with very little experience of working to 'establish the discipline and habits of working life', such as 'attending on time regularly, carrying out specific tasks and working under supervision' (DWP, 2014c: 6). Community Work Placements is also mandatory, aimed at those who have 'spent a great deal of time' out of work and 'whose primary barrier to

[23] Up until February 2012, claimants could be sanctioned if they left the scheme after their first week (DWP 2012e: 6). This was revised following adverse media attention and subsequent meetings between Grayling and placement providers. Claimants now only face sanctions in cases of gross misconduct (Grayling, quoted in Watt, Wintour and Malik, 2012).

work is a lack of work experience or motivation' (DWP, 2014d: 3). Finally, Sector-based Work Academies offers funding for employers to take an unemployed person on a voluntary placement, during which they will be offered pre-employment training, a work placement, and an interview for an advertised role at the end. This is aimed at people who are 'ready for work', but it does not offer a guarantee of getting a job (DWP 2012f: 2). The introduction of these schemes represents an increase in conditionality applied to out-of-work benefit claimants, although it should be noted that New Labour also had plans to launch a single scheme targeted towards similar demographics (Deacon and Patrick, 2012: 326).

The DWP claimed on its launch that the Work Programme represents a 'revolution in back to work support' (2011a). The Work Programme replaced all of New Labour's previous welfare-to-work programmes including the New Deals and Flexible New Deal. Chris Grayling claimed that it would 'tackle the endemic worklessness that has blighted so many of the country's communities for decades', stating:

> We want to establish a deal, where we will do our bit and get people ready for work and in exchange we will expect people to take up the work that is available. We are sending out a clear message: if you can work, and we can help you find a job, you must work (quoted in DWP 2011a).

Despite Conservative claims to the contrary, the Work Programme exhibits considerable continuity with New Labour's welfare-to-work reforms. This is in part due to its heritage. In contrast to Universal Credit, the development of the Work Programme stemmed from inside Parliament and represented an 'evolution of what was there before', according to one civil servant (private interview). It drew substantially on Lord Freud's independent report for the DWP (2007). New Labour was initially cautious about Freud's recommendations, which are discussed in greater detail below. However, following James Purnell's appointment as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in 2008, the Labour government subsequently proposed implementing several of Freud's suggested reforms in the form of Flexible New Deal, following a set of pilot projects (DWP, 2008). The Conservative Party in opposition also seemed to quickly warm to Freud's recommendations. In January 2008, Cameron and Grayling announced that the Conservatives would adopt the recommendations on 'increased conditionality; more rigorous assessments [and] expanded payment by results for the private and voluntary sector' (Haddon,

2012: 4). These proposals went on to form the backbone of the Party's *Get Britain Working* green paper (2009).

Set against recognition of New Labour's considerable success on some aspects of welfare-to-work, the Freud report sought to address the remaining challenges (Freud, 2007: 3). Specifically, it investigated ways of supporting the 'very hardest to help' or those suffering from multiple disadvantages back into work (2007: 43-44). The central recommendation of the Freud report was that the range of welfare-to-work providers should be diversified, giving greater responsibility to the private and voluntary sectors. This was justified on the basis that 'there are clear potential gains from…bringing in innovation with a different skill set, and from the potential to engage with groups who are often beyond the reach of the welfare state' (2007: 6). These groups should be permitted substantial freedom in structuring and delivering their programmes in order to decide 'what works for them' and the jobseekers for whom they are responsible (2007: 6). This is the 'black box' approach, recommended based on evidence from the United States and Australian models (2007: 46, 127-128) as well from the UK's 'Employment Zones' (2007: 56). To counter the high costs of this kind of intensive support and to ensure that contractors were achieving adequate results, the report also recommended a shift to 'payment by results' (Freud, 2007: 51-52).

The convergence on this policy issue can be understood by considering the concepts underpinning the New Deals and welfare-to-work programmes more broadly, and well as New Labour's framing of its policies. Aspects of New Labour's approach fit with a market-driven, supply-side understanding of the causes of poverty and unemployment (Theodore, 2007). These have largely been accepted, retained and accelerated by the Conservatives. Notably, this includes the emphasis on the responsibilities of claimants in relation to the state and, implicitly, towards society, which both parties have primarily emphasised in terms of independence and self-sufficiency (Levitas, 2005). There is some ideological overlap here, which reflects the relationship between New Labour and Thatcherism. Other aspects, such New Labour's emphasis on income transfers and a recognition of structural causes of poverty via the National Minimum Wage, have been either rejected or played down. These imply conceptions of fairness and compassion based around egalitarianism and a conventional perception of social justice

(Hayton and McEnhill, 2015). These, then, are incompatible with current Conservative decontestations of the same concepts.

Part of the reason why it was possible for the Conservatives to do this was because, either through lack of political will or ideological desire, New Labour failed to make a strong, on-going case for these latter aspects of reform. The case for such measures was then further hampered by the economic downturn and lack of money to sustain high spending on welfare, particularly tax credits, which allowed the Conservatives the opportunity to side-line these strategies. Consequentially while New Labour's welfare reforms bore the imprint of Thatcherite ideology, there is little in the Conservative approach that reflects an accommodation with social democratic values, goal and explanations.

The central aim of the Work Programme and the work experience programmes is addressing existing welfare dependency, and preventing its growth. Hence Conservative Party's welfare papers identify two imperatives in support of these. The first is ensuring that 'those made unemployed because of the recession do not become long-term unemployed'. The second, more wide-ranging task is 'to tackle Britain's long-term structural unemployment and the welfare dependency culture' (Conservative Party, 2009: 10). The elision of 'structural unemployment' with a welfare dependency 'culture' here is significant, in that it suggests that the two identified issues have similar causes and solutions. As with the emphasis on welfare as a 'lifestyle choice' discussed above, this is a further reflection of the idea of dependency as a cause of poverty discussed in Chapter 4. This emphasis is the common thread running through Universal Credit and welfare-to-work, placing the receipt of benefits within a 'behavioural and cultural analysis which attributes the underlying causes of poverty with the failings of individuals rather than to socio-economic factors' (Lister and Bennett, 2010: 92). It is these failings that welfare-to-work policy then seeks to address in terms of barriers to the labour market, providing 'the key to breaking the back of our deeply-ingrained benefits culture' (Grayling, 2011). The underlying identification of the problem as one of individual failings and individual-level barriers to work therefore does not break out from the dominant Thatcherite framework. However, the policy tools are rather more advanced.

In tackling these perceived failings, the Conservative Party is committed to providing 'proper support and intervention for those who require it' (2009: 12), building on New Labour's legacy in this area. Plans to extend PbR are critical to realising this intention. PbR and the 'black box' approach are supported not only for cost reasons, but because they will enabled providers to give 'tailored support [to] hundreds of thousands of long term benefit claimants, built around their needs […] Rather than having to follow a top-down approach dictated by the government' (DWP 2010c). This 'top down' approach has been a sustained target of Conservative attacks, on the basis that it is 'outmoded and ineffective' (Grayling, 2011). In its place, the Work Programme offers a system in which providers have the freedom to choose 'what works' combined with the incentive of receiving a higher payment for placing the 'hardest to help' claimants (DWP, 2013b: 4; DWP, 2014e: 6). Grayling remarked that this was 'specifically designed to chase out best practice, to make sure that the best rise to the top' (2012b), and would bring about 'transformational' change within the welfare system (2010b). Specifically, for people on out-of-work benefits who 'could and should be working, and yet every time employment levels rise, those people seem to stay stranded on benefits…The Work Programme will change all of that' (Grayling, quoted in DWP, 2010c).

In addition to the diversification of providers which is justified in terms of providing more nuanced expertise to help these claimants, the Work Programme and work experience schemes also aim to accomplish these goals by extending the reach of welfare-to-work, pulling more people under their respective conditionality regimes. One notable group that this applies to is former Incapacity Benefit claimants, who may be subject to work-related conditionality and sanctions after undergoing Work Capability Assessments during the process of transferral to ESA. All current Incapacity Benefit claimants will, in time, be subject to such an assessment (DWP, 2011b). Critics of the Work Capability Assessment have argued since its implementation in 2008 that it does not take adequate account of disabled people's barriers to the labour market at a social level, and often arrives at the wrong decision as to whether claimants are able to work (Anon., 2012). The DWP carries out on-going reviews on this issue, and has implemented changes as a result of these. However, the most recent (and final) review into the assessments makes clear that claimants still experience considerable anxiety around the experience, perceiving it as unfair (Litchfield, 2014: 51), and mistakes are still frequent (Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2014b: 5). Accordingly, Labour MPs have argued that the extension of

conditionality determined via this method is evidence of a lack of compassion in Coalition welfare to work policy (HC Hansard, 1 February 2012b).

Conservatives acknowledge that imposing work-related conditions on these claimants might be unpopular with the claimants themselves. However, this is framed as ultimately in the claimants' best interests: hence, drawing these people into welfare-to-work programmes is the compassionate course of action. For example, John Stevenson stated: 'even though it might seem like you're forcing somebody to do something that they don't want to, actually forcing people to go and get a job is a good thing'. He explained: 'the cure – for health issues, housing issues, mental health issues – the cure, invariably, is a job' (private interview). Similarly, Grayling told an anecdote about a women who had been mandated to the Work Programme 'after 14 years off work with chronic depression'. Initially, she was 'in tears, [she] did not believe that she should be there […] she was protesting bitterly'. Eight weeks later, 'she said that that was the right thing to do after all'. He concluded: 'we will not always get it right, but we are taking some people down a path that can be right for them, even if they are reluctant to follow it at first' (HC Hansard, 13 March 2012).

This is based foremost on the Conservative conception of compassion as being 'firm to be kind' (Stevenson, private interview), reflecting a similar kind of thinking to that informing the Universal Credit conditionality regime. It is underpinned by the claim that 'abandoning' such claimants within the welfare system by transferring money whilst not compelling them to work is not compassionate. Rather, it perpetuates dependency and condemns them to poverty (Grayling, quoted in DWP, 2011a; Duncan Smith, quoted in Winnett, 2012). Such a system would also be unfair to the claimant, as it would prevent them from attaining independence. This then links into the ideal of responsibility and the state's role in constructing a welfare system that promotes 'responsible' behaviour, principally constructing this as synonymous with engagement in work. This is founded on a negative view of claimants as tending towards being disinterested in working if other options are available, and hence requiring an extra push towards to workplace. Owing to the positive outcomes that Conservatives suggest will be achieved by this, the coercive approach from the state towards claimants is justified.

There is some acknowledgement that the Work Programme will take time to bed in, and for the best providers and approaches to become clear (Grayling, 2012b). However, there is little in the Conservative Party literature or speeches that suggests doubt that the approach taken will not eventually yield 'best practice' that is capable of moving unemployed people – even those with complex needs, such as disabilities - back into work. When the problem of unemployment is framed in terms of the attitudes of claimants and the benefit system itself, it is logical to believe that strong welfare-to-work programmes should prove effective for anybody who wants to move into employment. The approach therefore also attempts to establish the conditions within which fairness for those who are in employment, and therefore fulfilling their responsibilities, can be realised. The rapid expansion of PbR, framed as a means of uncovering 'best practice', combined with the strong emphasis on unemployment as a choice is central to this. As the labour market recovers and successful support strategies begin to emerge, those who do not move into work can be construed as having failed to do so through lack of effort or engagement with the services provided. This effect is compounded if Universal Credit is in place in terms of work incentives, as this should remove a further rational reason why people might not return to work. As long as the approach to understanding unemployment fails to acknowledge structural problems with the labour market, the behavioural explanation for these people's continued reliance on the state is further reinforced by these policies.

Subsequently, if people have made the 'choice' not to work, then Conservative ideas around 'fairness for taxpayers' and supporting responsible behaviour suggest that it is not right that the state should continue to support them at the same level as, for example, those in low-paid work. Streeter suggested that this issue had become particularly pressing due to the economic downturn: greater pressure on incomes meant that working people were increasingly prone to look at those claiming out-of-work benefits and think: 'hang on a minute...And I'm paying for that as well!' (private interview). Stevenson concurred that the downturn had 'opened up a gap for us to say to people who either need the minimum or don't need welfare: "you're working hard and paying for that". You only want to pay for it if you see it going to a proper purpose and not a lifestyle choice' (private interview). Brandon Lewis explained that he was concerned about 'the injustice of people who do not work and who stay at home having a lifestyle that is similar to that of the people who work all those hours' (HC Hansard, 16 February 2011). All three echoed similar comments by Duncan Smith (2010) and Cameron (2011a).

This, then, links up with the broader justification for cutting benefits to unemployed claimants who are seen to be not fulfilling their responsibilities with regard to looking for work. Based on an understanding of benefit dependency as a rational decision, further cutting should help to dis-incentivise this choice. This is discussed further in the following chapter. It constitutes a step towards ensuring that the system is delivering fairness to those who are paying for it, by not rewarding the irresponsible decision not to work. The work experience element of the Party's approach to welfare-to-work is also legitimated through emphasis on these priorities, as it is a key element in ensuring that claimants are not getting 'something for nothing'. Given this, it is not surprising that Osborne has indicated that the Conservatives are considering extending such programmes (2013c). This allows unemployment benefits to be re-framed as 'pay' for work experience or looking for work rather than an automatic entitlement (Duncan Smith, 2013). This reflects the ideological emphasis on fairness as desert, within which only those designated 'medically unable' to work can expect unconditional support from the state (Conservative Party, 2008b: 22).

Much of the framing of the Work Programme therefore relates to unemployed individuals and ensuring a 'fair' relationship between contributors and beneficiaries of the welfare system. However, of the two flagship policies, its implementation also offers the clearest opportunity for the realisation of the broader ideal of the Big Society. Universal Credit is an essentially technical policy that primarily aims to reconfigure the relationship between state and individual. The state/society relationship is not the primary concern. In contrast, the Work Programme plays a direct part in redressing what Conservatives see as the imbalance between state service provision and the role of voluntary and civil society organisations (VCSOs). This, in turn, is presented as the key to achieving the individual-level outcomes discussed above (Conservative Party, 2008c: 52-56). Accomplishing this is essential to realising the ideal of a truly compassionate and responsible society in which 'horizontal', community-level networks provide the primary means of social support and assistance, as opposed to the vertical relationship with the state.

Conservatives have acknowledged that this is part of the purpose of the restructuring of welfare-to-work programmes that Work Programme represents. According to David Cameron, the central idea of the Big Society is taking 'power away from politicians, and giving it to people' (quoted

in Prime Minister's Office, 2010). Within welfare provision, VCSOs have been identified as the main potential recipients of this power. For example, Francis Maude has stated that VCSOs should play a key role in the delivery of the Work Programme, estimating that 35 to 40 per cent of all Work Programme contracts should go to such groups (HC Hansard, 27 April 2011). This preference for organisations outside of the state is supported with reference to an evidence claim, based on their records of involvement in providing welfare-to-work services under New Labour (Freud, 2007: 56). As overt themes, both the Big Society and 'compassionate Conservatism' have waned since 2010: however, the ideas underpinning these remained strong within the justification and design of the Work Programme.

Grayling has invoked these sorts of arguments, contrasting the top-down approach of the New Deals with a 'grassroots' approach. For example, he stated that he would like to see the Work Programme providers 'assembling teams of people and organisations whose skills drive down to the lowest possible level - in the heart of the local neighbourhood' (2011). He also claimed that the Work Programme would allow 'those charities and voluntary sector organisations across the country with the know-how to help people with real difficulties in their communities get back to work…The chance to do just that'. This was in a DWP press release that framed Work Programme contracts as 'a massive boost for the Big Society' (DWP, 2011c). When questioned on his contribution to the Big Society, Duncan Smith claimed: 'I've created the Work Programme, which is all about the voluntary and private sector' (quoted in Butler, 2011). Thus while aspects of the Work Programme outlined above as applied to individuals do not move substantially beyond the individual-level analysis of poverty that characterised Thatcherism, this aspect appears to represent an opportunity to make a more substantive change. Rather than simply rolling back the boundaries of the state, this could be an area of welfare policy that facilitates the Conservative goal of '[rolling] forwards the frontiers of society' (Cameron, 2006f). In practice, however, many of the contracts within the Work Programmes have been given to the private sector rather than community organisations.

Understanding the opportunities for VCSOs to become involved in the Work Programme requires a brief summary of the structure of the programme. At the top of the structure are eighteen 'prime providers', who hold a total of 40 Work Programme contracts between them. Primes then use subcontractors to deliver support to claimants: either 'tier one' types, who will

‘support participants for the whole of their time’ on the Work Programme, or ‘tier two’ types, who will deliver specialist interventions to certain types of claimants: for example, those with extra needs resulting from disability (McGuinness and Dar, 2014: 15-16). In theory, VCSOs could get involved at any level of the programme. However, as the Work Programme is based on PbR, it requires primes to have the necessary financial resources to support the required outlay. It therefore favours large private companies as prime contractors; this is compounded by the speed with which the Work Programme was implemented, which gave the voluntary and community sectors little time to develop ways of working around this such as through establishing consortiums (NCVO, 2011a: a). Consequentially, fifteen of the primes are private companies, one is from the public sector, one is from the voluntary sector, and one is mixed voluntary and private (DWP, 2013c). As of September 2013, there are 858 subcontractors working on the forty Work Programme contracts, around three-quarters of which are tier two-subcontractors only. Approximately 40 per cent of the 858 come from the voluntary sector (McGuinness and Dar, 2014: 15).

Initially, then, this appears somewhat encouraging: Maude’s goal for the involvement of VCSOs is being met, for example. However, underpinning these numbers are several more worrying trends that threaten to undermine the possibility of the Big Society being developed through the Work Programme. In turn, these may impinge on the realisation of goals outlined above related to the programmes capacity to support responsible behaviour amongst claimants.

The structure of the Work Programme, and in particular the way that PbR has been operationalised, is widely identified by a number of voluntary and civil service representative groups as something that is causing their members significant difficulty. Organisations including AVECO (2013), the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (2011a; 2011b) and the London Voluntary Service Council (Kerr, 2013) have produced research showing that subcontractors are receiving significantly fewer referrals from the Work Programme than anticipated. This is resulting in difficulties which ‘directly impact on the financial viability of the contract’ (Kerr, 2013: 23; NCVO 2011b: 6-7). Irregular, unpredictable referrals are a potential problem for all types of organisations. However, this is arguably ‘a particularly important issue for the voluntary sector, which is generally less able to absorb financial losses’ (AVECO/Shaw Trust, 2013: 8). This is compounded by a broadly shared feeling amongst voluntary and civil

society organisations that primes are not passing on sufficient up-front 'attachment' fees to their subcontractors (Kerr, 2013: 27; AVECO/Shaw Trust, 2013; 9), which has fuelled subcontractor suspicions that the DWP prioritised cost over programme quality in awarding Work Programme prime contracts (NVCO, 2011a: 4). Since payment is only made when a participant in the Work Programme is moved into sustained employment, this leaves subcontractors struggling to provide appropriate support in the meantime.

All of these problems are particularly marked for small, 'niche' tier-two providers, who are working with people who may be a very long way from being ready to work. In such cases, the gap between taking on a Work Programme claimant and receiving a payment for moving them into work may be so large that it contributes to rendering the contract unsustainable, even though these organisations may make valuable interim progress with their claimants (Kerr, 2013: 28). Rather than promoting and supporting them in their role, the structure and funding of Work Programme is causing them such difficulty that some will be forced to halt their engagement (NVCO, 2011b: 14). This is deeply problematic when related to Conservative promotion of the Big Society and the importance of conservative compassion in service delivery, as it is precisely these small, niche organisations which are identified as providing the most effective services and expertise which are framed as vastly superior to 'one size fits all' state support (SJPG, 2007b).

None of these problems are insurmountable; the Work and Pensions Select Committee offers a number of possible solutions (2013: 37-8). However owing to the way that the Work Programme is funded, tackling those issues related to payments may prove difficult. Welfare-to-work programmes would usually be funded from within the Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) – the sum of money allocated via the spending review. However, the Work Programme is being funded from projected savings in the Department's larger Annually Managed Expenditure (AME) limit – the demand-led element of spending that includes most cash benefits (Haddon, 2012: 5-6). This is the 'AME/DEL' switch. It 'means that if a provider succeeds in getting someone a job for a period, we can use the money which we save in benefit savings (the net savings) to reward them, and that of course is big sums of money.' (Freud, 2009). The shift in the balance of spending towards AME also plays into longer-term fiscal plans announced by Osborne that would see a cap introduced on this element of spending (Osborne 2014a; Cooke, 2013).

While welcoming ‘the extra resources that the Government has released by using the AME/DEL switch mechanism to help people find jobs in a time of constrained public finances’, the Work and Pensions Select Committee warned that ‘there is a risk that the expected savings will not be realised if too few people gain full time work or if the number falling out of work rises’ (2011: 57). Given the evidence outlined about regarding the performance of the Work Programme so far, in turn this could impact on the viability of the programme and the contractors within it. While the Work Programme is now performing comparably to the programmes that it replaced, it is not delivering the improvement in outcomes that the DWP had projected (NAO, 2014a: 6-7). As such, problems with the current structure of the programme relate not only to the goal of developing and nurturing a vibrant civil society sector as an alternative to central state provision, but also directly impact on the possibility of achieving the positive outcomes from moving people into work that Conservatives have claimed the Work Programme will produce.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that parts of the Conservative Party invested considerable effort in developing policy in line with Conservative ideational perspectives on welfare. Both policies discussed here contain nods, at least, to each of the four concepts discussed in previous chapters. The plans for their implementation comprise a fairly balanced approach to a number of different aspects identified within each concept, regarding their implications for claimants, the broader society, and the state/society relationship.

However, in practice the implementation of these ideas has been somewhat lacking. Primarily, this has been due to the prioritisation of the need to cut public spending once in government combined with the perception of the electoral gains to be made from appearing to be taking a hard line towards benefit claimants. Lower spending was a longer-term goal of both of the sets of reforms discussed here. Its elevation to central, immediate priority has had a considerable effect on Universal Credit, and may lead to problems with the Work Programme in time if the difficulties identified are not resolved. The main consequence is that the reforms have become unbalanced in favour of providing an impression of fairness to non-claimants, as opposed to rewarding those who do rely on the welfare system for meeting their responsibilities. This

problem is intensified when taken in addition to the austerity-based reforms discussed in the subsequent chapter.

The effect on Universal Credit in particular is significant because it is not a cost-neutral programme: its major innovation, which is bringing changes in the work incentive structure, requires investment. This has been severely curtailed, and it seems unlikely given the Conservative Party's stated future goals on spending that this will be reversed by the incoming Conservative government in 2015. Moreover, the current mood around welfare and spending may also inhibit other parties from lowering the taper: as such, Conservative decisions in this respect have an impact on the wider strategic context beyond the Party itself. The effect on the Work Programme is less clear as yet, although here too problems with funding threaten to undermine some of its key objectives, notably those related to the Big Society. The broader outcome of this is that while conditionality on claimants has been ratcheted up, the reforms are currently failing to balance this with a strong emphasis on fairer and more compassionate outcomes for those who are behaving as the reformed system expects them to. As such, while the main weight of expectation within the reforms is placed on individual benefit claimants to meet their obligations towards the wider society, the central concern in outcomes is in providing a system that appears fair to those who do not require support from the welfare system. This marks a disjuncture. This could be interpreted in relation to electoral imperatives, but it also reflects a return to a socially conservative position regarding the morality of working, and a concurrent retreat from the more rational views of behaviour that were inherent in the original conception of Universal Credit.

This may have been possible because New Labour emphasised the individual-focused aspects of its reforms far more than the social democratic ones. This created a space within which the Conservatives could expand the aspects that fit with their own perspectives, in what one analysis has referred to as a 'process of policy leap-frog' (Lister and Bennett, 2010: 102), whilst side-lining those that did not. This institutional context is significant in understanding the development of supply-side welfare initiatives under the Conservative. It reflects an important element of the strategically selective context and can thus enhance understanding of the circumstances in which a shift in ideas (as between Labour and the Conservatives) is able to drive policy change. There was already a substantial policy infrastructure that fit with

Conservative ideas on the attitudinal and behavioural causes of poverty in place under New Labour. What was absent was a strong articulation of structural causes to balance this. This has been instrumental in buttressing Conservative arguments regarding a lack of individual responsibility or the centrality of behavioural factors in explaining worklessness. These are then used to legitimate a range of reforms, including those around welfare-to-work, Universal Credit, and the austerity measures that are the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 7
Policy II: Austerity

7.1 Introduction

Alongside the reforms discussed in the previous chapter, which drew substantially on Conservative policy ideas developed in opposition, the Coalition also introduced a further set of reforms from 2010 that have been strongly linked to the priority of cutting public spending. The aim in this respect was to reduce the DWP's budget by £20 billion by 2014/15, comprising £2.7 billion in efficiency savings and £17 billion from pensions and benefits (NAO, 2011: 11). Substantial benefit savings from Universal Credit and the Work Programme would not be realised in the short-term. Universal Credit aims to induce behavioural change amongst claimants to deliver reduced welfare costs, whilst even if payment by results (PbR) within the Work Programme works as intended it will take time for the most effective providers and means of support provision to become apparent. As such, Kwasi Kwarteng's view that: 'I don't see how, in the current climate, you can talk about welfare without talking about deficits, debts and the economy' (private interview) is an accurate reflection of the more immediate pressures on the welfare system. This chapter focuses on a set of welfare policies that must be understood as closely related to these pressures. It discusses four central reforms: those to Disability Living Allowance (now the Personal Independence Payment), the Social Rented Sector Size Criterion (better known as the 'bedroom tax'), the introduction of an overall cap on the amount of cash benefits that households can receive per week, and changes to the mechanisms for up-rating benefits.

As in the previous chapter, one concern here is to understand how these reforms fit with perspectives around poverty and dependency, responsibility, fairness and compassion which underpin the Conservative approach to welfare and to consider the extent to which these have been realised in implementation. While cutting spending must be viewed as an important immediate pressure, Conservatives have subsequently moved to justify reform in relation to these ideas. In part this will be because introducing such moral justifications renders cutting a significant amount from the welfare budget more palatable, particularly where it affects vulnerable groups such as disabled people and children. It also maintains a broader narrative

threaded through the entire programme of welfare reform concerning the approach to poverty, ensuring responsible behaviour and promoting fairness. This, in turn, coheres with electoral strategy, positioning the Conservatives as being on the side of 'people who work hard and play by the rules' (Cameron, 2013).

Theoretically, all four reforms can be identified with some of the ideas set out in chapter four. At root, they all share an individualised notion of the causes of the growth of welfare spending. This is justified with reference to the perception of a passive welfare state which allows or attracts people to choose not to work, thus contributing to the perpetuation of a 'dependency culture' which is transmitted inter-generationally and entrenches poverty. The solution to this within all four is to incentivise or push claimants towards responsible behaviour, understood as that which leads to economic self-sufficiency. This can then also be linked to a Conservative concept of compassion, whereby short-term discomfort is an acceptable trade-off for longer-term positive outcomes for both the individual and society. As such, there is an underlying logic to this set of reforms that is based around a suspicion of the effects of long-term support by the state on individuals, and a belief in the inherent and absolute capacity of most individuals to reduce the extent to which they require state support.

When considered against the welfare policies discussed in the previous chapter, however, the coherence of the entire reform package is less clear. Conservatives have discussed moving away from a measurement of poverty based on income, often preferring to talk about poverty in terms of lifestyle and irresponsible decision making enabled by the state, of which the condition of 'welfare dependency' is an example. Despite this, Universal Credit maintains an emphasis on financial need as a determinant of eligibility for support from the welfare state, albeit whilst making this eligibility conditional on engagement with aspects of the Universal Credit and Work Programme reforms. It also encompasses, although in a more limited way than initially envisaged, a positive commitment to incentive as a driver of behaviour, around 'making work pay' through increasing returns associated with this. Importantly it is engagement with conditionality (in the form of attending meetings, conducting job-searches, attending work placements and so on) which determines eligibility: not whether this actually results in a move into paid employment, as Duncan Smith has explained (Andrew Marr Show, 2015). Concurrently, the longer-term thinking underpinning Universal Credit and the Work Programme

positions financial savings through alleviating dependency as a result of changing claimant behaviour as a key outcome of an effective welfare system. This suggests some acceptance that the state has a positive role to play in facilitating the transition between dependence and independence, and an admission that making an exclusively moral case for working is not sufficient.

In contrast, the reforms discussed in this chapter alter the relationship between need and financial support, and the basis on which that support is provided. They reflect a strand of thinking based strongly on desert as a central element of fairness, and hence of entitlement to state support. This relates to having a full-time job, or providing demonstrations for why support is otherwise required. This leads to a 'cutting first' approach, whereby reducing spending is framed as a catalyst for reducing dependency. Within this, reliance on the welfare state and self-sufficiency cannot co-exist for individuals: the relationship is zero-sum. As well as dovetailing neatly with financial pressures, this approach supports the immediate Conservative electoral appeal on fairness in a very direct and effective way, and this should not be considered a separate issue in understanding the relationship between the two sets of reforms. As this chapter demonstrates, this approach contradicts and cuts across much of the thinking behind Universal Credit and the Work Programme, suggesting a more negative approach to incentives which is strongly linked to morality. Its implementation reveals the dominance of a short-termist approach to welfare policy-making that is strongly linked to electoral positioning and the need to make an impact within a five-year governing cycle. Beyond this, it is emblematic of a deeply negative view of the welfare state, such that even the provision of transitional support for unemployed people ultimately undermines self-reliance and individual responsibility, and should hence be urgently reduced.

7.2 Disability Living Allowance and the Personal Independence Payment

Amongst the changes brought in under the Welfare Reform Act (2012) are changes to disability benefits. In addition to those related to conditionality in ESA, discussed in the previous chapter, Disability Living Allowance has also been a target for reform. DLA is available to disabled people who are both in and out of work, and is intended to compensate for some of the extra financial costs associated with disability in order to enable independent living (Scope, 2011). It is paid depending on recipients' care and mobility needs, at rates ranging from £21.55 per week

to £138.05 per week, with entitlement determined via self-assessment and supporting evidence from GPs. In 2012, 3.2 million people claimed DLA, and forecast expenditure for 2011/12 was £12.6 billion. It therefore accounted for around six per cent of the DWP's annual benefit expenditure (Browne and Hood, 2012: 5). DLA reform is predicted to reduce this by twenty per cent (approximately £2.2 billion) by 2015/16 (DWP, 2012g: 2) and £3 billion by 2018/19 (NAO, 2014b: 24) as a result of 500,000 fewer people claiming the benefit.

Being non-means tested and non-contributory, DLA seems an obvious target for reform under the Conservatives as its structure goes against a number of the ideas outlined in Chapter 4, including those on individual responsibility and hence on dependency. However, Conservatives have not previously been averse to providing for disabled people in this way, in doing so identifying some disabled people as deserving of state support. DLA itself was introduced under the Major government in 1992, following a consultation on '[enabling] many more disabled people to maximise their own potential and their wider contribution to society' (DSS, 1990: 1). Its rationale seemed to fit with individualist aspects of Thatcherism, emphasising disabled people's 'rights to autonomy and self-determination' or capacity for 'choice and control' (Morris, 2011: 3). At that point, far from encouraging dependency, increased spending on disability benefits since 1979 owing to greater awareness of their availability was feted as 'a real gain in improving the position of long-term sick and disabled people as a whole' (DSS, 1990: 10). DLA was therefore framed as something that would encourage, not inhibit, independence.

Moreover, the ideas underpinning DLA are not incompatible with much of Cameron's Conservatives' conceptual approach to welfare provision, reflecting the extent to which Cameron's party continues to draw on perspectives that were ascendant in the years when it was introduced. Receipt of DLA entrusts disabled people with responsibility for managing their own needs. It draws on 'social model' thinking on disability in terms of understanding the barriers to social inclusion that disabled people experience (see below); however, it is still an individualised benefit, as it transfers some responsibility for disabled people's needs from the state to the disabled individual. While casting disabled people as deserving of support in addressing barriers, DLA also supports the idea of disabled people as autonomous individuals who are capable of realising and managing their own social inclusion, rather than as passive recipients of state support. This means that it is theoretically compatible with Conservative ideas on compassion as

an active concept, feeding into the prevalent conception of social justice which emphasises encouraging independence and opportunity (HM Government, 2012). Given this, and its political heritage, DLA is perhaps not such an obvious target for reform after all.

However, in 2010 plans were announced to replace DLA with a new benefit: the Personal Independence Payment (PIP). DLA reform was not trailed before the election and the announcement came not from the DWP, but from the Treasury. Osborne claimed that a three-fold increase in DLA claims and a four-fold increase in cost since introduction was both unsustainable financially, and undesirable on a welfare dependency basis. The main sticking point was the existing assessment process, which is returned to below. The introduction of a new assessment process would ensure that: 'we can continue to afford paying this important benefit to those with the greatest needs, while significantly improving incentives to work for others' (Osborne, 2010a). Conservatives subsequently moved to justify the reforms in moral terms, and Cameron claimed that the Government is 'not cutting money that is going into disability benefits' (HC Hansard, 7 March 2012). However, DWP publications re-iterate Osborne's concern that spending is 'not sustainable in the long term' (DWP, 2012a: 1). The cost of DLA was clearly a concern.

The announcement was therefore met with some suspicion. Dame Anne Begg remarked that the Government 'got off on the wrong foot' with DLA reform, 'inasmuch as they saw it as a revenue saving exercise'. With the caveat that she was 'not sure that Iain Duncan Smith necessarily saw it in those terms', she continued: 'certainly the Treasury did because it was in that first budget [...] completely out of the blue, with a price tag on it' (private interview). Richard Hawkes, Chief Executive of Scope, suggested that reform had 'been designed to achieve a budget target of the reductions that the government talked about in the Comprehensive Spending Review. They said there was going to be a 20% reduction, then developed an assessment that will deliver that' (quoted in BBC News, 2013b). Andy Rickell, a former member of Equality 2025,[24] similarly stated: 'I'm sure part of the reason why the Conservatives came in to reform DLA was cost reasons'. This 'tainted any reform in this area, because all of the reform in this area is presumed

[24] Equality 2025 was a cross-departmental advisory body established to provide appointed disabled people with a direct link to policy-makers. It was closed down in 2013.

to be to do with saving money' (private interview). An emphasis on cost also explains the speed of implementation. PIP was implemented without a pilot programme, leading to a backlog of claims that has been strongly criticised by the Public Accounts Committee (2014a). One charity representative, who contributed to parliamentary scrutiny of welfare reform, suggested that this was indicative of an area of policy that 'hadn't been given the thought in advance' that it required (private interview), while Public Accounts Committee Chair Margaret Hodge described PIP's implementation as 'nothing short of a fiasco' (quoted in Public Accounts Committee, 2014b).

A former civil servant shed further light on the decision to reform DLA in relation to the DWP's financial pressures, remarking that when the Coalition came in: 'it was quite noticeable that they hadn't really thought through what their approach around disability equality was going to be'. However, 'there were two things that were very clearly bigger policies issues that had a big impact on disabled people'. Alongside reducing the deficit:

> There was also Iain Duncan Smith's view of welfare reform, and that wasn't really about disabled people, it was about creating Universal Credit and addressing what he saw as issues around how the benefit system keeps people out of work.

Disability policy itself, however, was 'a bit of a vacuum' in 2010 (private interview). This may have rendered DLA vulnerable to pressures introduced by these overarching priorities. It was not directly related to the Universal Credit plans; out of all of the changes discussed in this chapter, DLA reform is the least likely to affect these because it is not included in Universal Credit. It also represented a large portion of DWP spending and so was exposed to the immediate financial pressures. Finally, the prevalence of indefinite awards and lack of continuous re-assessment (DWP, 2011d: 6), built into DLA's structure as a benefit for people with long-term health conditions and disabilities, was vulnerable in relation to the electoral imperative of ensuring fairness and spending limited money wisely. If there was a vacuum within this policy area in 2010, it is these pressures that began to fill it. DLA has been drawn into the wider narrative of benefits acting as a barrier to work and perpetuating dependency, doing a disservice to working people and preventing greater support from reaching 'genuinely […] long-term disabled' people (Streeter, private interview). This is presented as contradicting both the ideal of fairness, and therefore the Conservatives' electoral claim to be committed to ensuring this.

DLA and PIP are not out-of-work benefits: rather DLA was designed with independence, which is not necessarily synonymous with employment, in mind (DSS, 1990). However, the number of DLA claimants who are in work is very low. The employment rate for claimants is nine per cent, and claimants are much less likely to be in work than disabled people who are not in receipt of DLA (Thomas and Griffiths, 2010: 1-2). While claimants are more likely than disabled people on average to have impairments that carry the greatest employment disadvantages, they are also 'significantly less likely to have a job *than other disabled people with a similar level of employment disadvantage*' (Thomas and Griffiths, 2010: 2, emphasis in original). Additionally, claiming DLA is associated with a trajectory out of work, with some recipients seeing receipt of the benefit as 'proof' that they are unable to work (Thomas and Griffiths, 2010: 4). Although unable to establish a causal link, the DWP's research therefore states that there is significant association between receipt of DLA and lower work expectations, including a potential financial disincentive (Thomas and Griffiths, 2010: 3). Within an ideological approach that elevates paid work as the embodiment of responsible behaviour and primary means of achieving societal fairness, this is a concern. It can be read as suggesting that unreformed DLA discourages people who could take paid employment from working.

Before discussing the implications and usage of these findings within PIP, it should be noted that they are underpinned by a nuanced body of analysis regarding the relationship between claiming DLA and working. A number of complex issues contribute to DLA claimant unemployment which go beyond a simple 'choice' not to work (Thomas and Griffiths, 2010: 4-5, Adams and Oldfield, 2012). There is some acknowledgement of this amongst Conservatives. For example, Robert Buckland noted: 'I still think that we've got a long way to go in changing the culture…There's still a long way to go before we change the attitude of employers'. He continued: 'I get so fed up of the debate. It's always about the benefits system, dependency, these people are a problem and how do we deal with the "challenge". It's totally the wrong way to look at it' (private interview). There is also evidence of acknowledgement within the DWP's policy. The employment support scheme, Access to Work, is funded by a protected budget of £320 million (McVey, 2012) in recognition of the effectiveness of such provision (Sayce, 2011), although witnesses to a Work and Pensions Select Committee inquiry on disability equality also described Access to Work as the DWP's 'best kept secret' (Work and Pensions Select

Committee, 2009: 53) and the DWP has yet to carry out any robust cost-benefit analysis on it. All of this alludes to some concern with a social model of disability. This emphasises that it is often the structure of society rather than an individual's impairment which causes 'disability', and therefore efforts to promote disabled peoples' integration must also go substantially beyond the individual (Grover and Piggott, 2010).

Initial plans for PIP implied further moves in this direction. PIP assessments would be 'less medical' and 'not based on the type of impairment individuals have but how these affect their everyday lives'. They would be 'more active and enabling' by considering 'what individuals can do rather than what they cannot'. PIP would also be 'more holistic...than the current Disability Living Allowance criteria, fairly reflecting the full range of impairment types' (DWP, 2011e: 4). Maria Miller's foreword to the DLA consultation indicated that social model thinking was behind the plans (quoted in DWP, 2010d: 1), and she later reaffirmed the government's commitment to this understanding of disability (HC Hansard, 12 December 2011). However, PIP needs to provide financial savings. In implementation these claims have sat uneasily alongside a more individualist understanding of the relationship between disability, receipt of benefits, and engagement in paid work.

The main departure from DLA is the introduction of a new, periodic re-assessment for determining eligibility for PIP. This is the means through which savings will be realised, effectively by raising the bar for what constitutes being deserving of support and thus reducing eligibility. This has been justified in terms of assessing whether conditions have changed as a means of ensuring that funding went to 'those who need it most' (Duncan Smith, 2013): disabled people who face the 'greatest challenges in taking part in everyday life' (DWP, 2013d). This is fair entitlement as need viewed through the prism of austerity: the view that 'when money is tight, you absolutely have to cut out anything which is going to people who are not "needy", or even not terribly needy' (John Penrose, private interview). As such the assessment criteria for PIP are necessarily restrictive, retreating from a social understanding of disability, because 'by the time you've got to the point of going beyond the medical […] and into the social, you've got to the stage where actually you're not going to be assessing people who don't have those basic needs, but have wider needs' (Rickell, private interview). As such, although the criteria for PIP ostensibly deals with 'need' this illustrates a conceptual link between fairness as need and

fairness as desert. The assessment determines which currently met-needs will continue to be identified as deserving of support and which will not, imposing a lower cut-off due to the need to save money.

The more restrictive nature of the PIP criteria, and the reduction of permanent awards, feeds into Conservative perspectives on dependency and the effect of receipt of benefits on responsible behaviour, buttressed by the observation that very few DLA claimants are in work. The reforms can therefore also be framed as a measure of compassion towards claimants, as Duncan Smith suggested. Claiming that 'too often in the past' the assessment process for DLA would 'say to people…"you are in receipt of a particular benefit and we don't want to see you again"', he argued that 'it is right to see people, and wrong to leave them parked for ever on set benefits. Seeing them is more humane than inhumane, and that balance is the way that we should go' (HC Hansard, 9 March 2011). Alongside this, there is a clear suspicion that there are a significant number DLA claimants who could support themselves without the benefit. Duncan Smith suggested that the number of claimants had risen 'well ahead of any other gauge you might make about illness, sickness, disability or, for that matter, general trends in society', which he attributed to the lack of a face-to-face assessment and the prevalence of indefinite awards (quoted in Winnett, 2012). This is linked to the suggestion that providing DLA to those who are not in the 'greatest need' has led to the benefit being used as part of a welfare-sustained 'lifestyle' (see previous chapter). This then renders those who are found ineligible essentially undeserving of support, helping to sustain the Conservative electoral narrative of ensuring fairness for both non-claimants and those who are in 'real need'.

Overall, the changes to DLA are consistent with broad Conservative plans for a more conditional and work-focused approach to welfare. While neither DLA nor PIP are out-of-work benefits, part of the ideological basis of the reform is the idea that providing a substantial sum of money to disabled people without sufficient conditionality or checks attached will inhibit work incentives, and encourage inactivity. This can be tentatively supported via the DWP research cited above. However, it is very likely that the immediate impetus for DLA reform is reducing public spending, and this has supported a slightly different approach to reducing reliance on the benefit system than that taken in the reforms in the previous chapter.

DLA reform is quite a blunt instrument in this respect. It may reduce spending on DLA and claimant counts in the short-term. However, even viewed from an individualist perspective it has limited capacity to move disabled people into work. As Charles Walker MP observed, allowing for the idea that 'giving people an opportunity to re-engage with their communities and re-engage with the workforce' is the right direction of travel, the journey into work for some disabled people 'will be, perhaps, a great deal longer than for others' (private interview). This is compounded by current issues around providers within the Work Programme and the way that PbR works in relation to individuals who are a long way from the labour market. Disability organisations have expressed concern that restrictions in eligibility for PIP will increase poverty levels for disabled people (Disability Alliance, 2011: 9-14; Disability Rights Partnership, 2011), yet the decision to implement PIP regardless suggests that this is a price worth paying for both being able to reduce immediate spending, and perhaps providing a work incentive (although this is by no means a certainty). As such, while the thinking behind Universal Credit perceives flaws in the welfare system and proposes altering the system as a means of changing behaviour resulting from this, DLA reform, in common with the other reforms discussed in this chapter, places a much stronger emphasis on withdrawing aspects of welfare support as a means of enforcing individual responsibility.

7.3 The Social Rented Sector Size Criterion

The rising cost of housing benefit has been another area of concern for the Conservatives since moving into government. In 2010 Osborne noted that: 'spending on housing benefit has risen from £14 billion ten years ago to £21 billion today. That is close to a 50 per cent increase over and above inflation'. This, he suggested, indicated that 'costs are completely out of control' (2010a). Similarly Duncan Smith stated: 'the cost of housing benefit has spiralled completely out of control', supporting 'crazy excesses…of people on benefits living in houses that those in work could not afford' (quoted in Ramesh, 2011). Cameron has also turned to the idea of an 'out of control' housing benefit bill (HC Hansard, 27 October 2010; 22 June 2011). Caps on Local Housing Allowance and the overall benefit cap form the main strategy for addressing this in relation to private sector housing, as discussed below. However, 68 per cent of housing benefit claimants were in the social housing sector in 2011. Sub-market rents and different rules applying to benefit entitlement mean that social sector tenants are unlikely to be affected by the cap-related changes. On grounds of financial necessity and fairness, the DWP therefore argued

that addressing housing benefit levels within the social sector specifically was necessary (DWP, 2012h: 6-7). The policy intended to achieve this is the Social Rented Sector Size Criterion (SRSSC), also known as the 'under-occupancy penalty', 'removal of the spare room subsidy' or 'the bedroom tax'.

The SRSSC was introduced under the Welfare Reform Act (2012). It is intended to '[limit] social tenants' entitlement to appropriately sized homes' (Osborne, 2010a). Working age social housing tenants experienced a reduction in housing benefit entitlement from 1 April 2013 if their property was deemed too large for their needs. The reduction is fourteen per cent for one 'spare' bedroom, or 25 per cent for two or more (DWP, 2012h: 6). The DWP estimated that this would affect 660,000 tenants, or 31 per cent of working-age housing benefit claimants in the social sector at the time of introduction, with 81 per cent of these losing £12 per week on average for one bedroom (2012h: 8). There are 'very limited' permanent exemptions (Wilson, 2014a: 1), although the Government put extra funding into the budget for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) from 2013/14 to support implementation. (DWP, 2012i: 11-12). It is estimated that the SRSSC will save £465 million per year from 2013/14 to 2015/16, rising to £470 million annually thereafter (HM Treasury, 2013b: 67).[25] Even at the Government's best estimate, it is therefore projected to save less than half of the annual amount of changes to DLA (NAO, 2014b: 24), and less than 5 per cent of the amount saved via changes to up-rating (Cracknell, 2011: iv; DWP, 2013e: 1).

Despite this, the SRSSC has attracted significant controversy. The National Housing Federation (2013a) and Shelter (Webb, 2013) have both offered vocal criticism. Both the Work and Pensions (2014c: 20-30) and Scottish Affairs Committees (2014) identified concerns that it is causing hardship for vulnerable people. Reflecting these concerns, the Scottish Government committed to effectively cancelling the SRSSC by supporting local authorities in granting DHPs to all applicants (Scottish Government, 2014). All major parties apart from the Conservatives (Labour, the Liberal Democrats, the SNP, Plaid Cymru, the Green Party and UKIP) committed to either abolishing or significantly reforming the policy as the 2015 election approached.

[25] These savings may have been over-estimated: Tunstall (2013: 3) suggests that 'real data available from housing organisations since 1st April 2013 does not match key assumptions about claimant behaviour underlying the DWP's model'. This data indicates the possibility of reductions in savings of up to 39 per cent.

Criticism has not come solely from those who might be expected to be hostile to the Conservatives. Phillip Blond described the SRSSC as: ‘a very stupid policy…It presumes that there’s a mass of property out there that people can access and move simply from two bedrooms to one bedroom. They just can’t’ (private interview). Conservative MP Andrew Percy told the House: ‘on issues such as the bedroom tax and changes to council house tenancies, I think that the Government got it wrong’ (HC Hansard, 9 May 2012). He argued that Ministers needed to: ‘take account of the fact that houses are not only public assets; they are also people’s homes…This is not a simple matter to resolve, even though we should encourage an end to under-occupancy’ (HC Hansard, 1 February 2012b). Guto Bebb expressed ‘doubts about the merits of the bedroom tax’ (private interview), and Angie Bray, then-Conservative MP for Ealing Central and Acton, rebelled in the vote on the Affordable Homes Bill which supported further exemptions to SRSSC. Public support for the policy has also declined since implementation, despite high approval of its underlying principles (DWP, 2013f). The SRSSC has been one of the less straightforward elements of Coalition welfare reform.

This is likely to be due to the method of implementation. The immediate motivation for the policy was presented by Osborne as restraining housing benefit expenditure. Therefore it applies to both new and existing tenancies, in contrast to Universal Credit and PIP which are being trialled on new claims before being extended to existing claimants. This created an immediate, direct impact on a large number of tenants, heightening controversy. Stuart Andrew, whose Pudsey constituency in West Yorkshire is one of the 100 constituencies most affected by the SRSSC (National Housing Foundation, 2013b) observed that: ‘everybody who I’ve spoken to, or the vast majority, completely believe that cuts are necessary. Where they start to differ is when the cuts affect them!’ (private interview). Conservatives justify such an approach as the actions of a responsible government, making up for the irresponsibility of the preceding Labour government’s spending. Sir Roger Gale MP argued:

> There are very few Members of Parliament that are in favour of retrospective legislation, because taking something away from somebody is always worse than not giving it to them in the first place. There have been occasions where we’ve had to take away things from people because we can’t just phase it out by natural wastage. We’ve had to take some fairly harsh economic decisions to get the economy that the last government bequeathed us back on track. (private interview)

Similarly, John Stevenson suggested that the financial situation had made reform harder in some ways, identifying the SRSSC as an example of a policy where sound finances might have enabled more gradual implementation (private interview). Nonetheless, he and Gale agreed that while the financial crisis provided an explanation for the immediacy of the reform, there was more to the agenda than this. As Duncan Smith has claimed, the Conservatives are leading on welfare reform 'in the firm belief that it is the right thing to do, not only saving money but breaking dependency and restoring the incentive to work' (HC Hansard, 25 March 2014). Maria Miller also stated that work incentives form part of the rationale behind the policy (Welfare Reform Bill Deb., 3 May 2011). The SRSSC, implemented alongside DCLG moves to end lifelong tenancies in the social sector (DCLG, 2011), is perhaps more significant in relation to this than in terms of financial savings.

Supporting this, the Scottish National Party's Stewart Hosie MP observed:

> The extraordinary thing is that the bedroom tax works only if the policy fails. If everybody could move to what the Government consider to be a "properly sized property", the housing benefit costs would probably be identical to what they are today—not one penny would be saved. (HC Hansard, 27 February 2013; see also Orr, 2014).

One goal of the policy is to promote efficient usage of social housing stock by encouraging tenants to downsize. However, many tenants have found that there is not suitable local property available to downsize into (DWP, 2014f: 59), and the financial savings and benefits in terms of incentivising work and responsible spending come from tenants staying in their existing properties and making up the shortfall in rent. Moving into a smaller property that fits the size criteria, or a private sector property with attendant higher rent would dent or off-set the financial savings, while providing no identifiable incentive for recipients to alter spending patterns or increase housing income since rental liability would be unchanged. This strongly suggests that staying put and paying something closer to the market rent is the preferred outcome. This can then be framed as incentivising responsible behaviour, in the form of working more or spending less.

Therefore at the root of the policy is a concern with dependency and the way that altering the structure of the welfare system might affect the behaviour of those who draw on its resources. If

dependency is defined as drawing on the state's resources on a long-term basis, social housing tenants are vulnerable to being perceived as more dependent than many other groups. The physical resource of social housing has usually been provided on a permanent basis, although the DCLG changes discussed above will alter this. Additionally, social sector rents are lower than the market rate. In terms of need, this is necessary because it is targeted towards people with low incomes. 29 per cent of social rental households are in relative poverty before housing costs, and despite the lower rents, 43 per cent are in poverty after housing costs (Tunstall et al., 2013: 2). Social sector tenants make up the majority of housing benefit claimants, and 63 per cent of all social sector households claim housing benefit (DWP, 2012h: 7). Finally, approximately 40 per cent of social households are workless, compared with seventeen per cent of private tenancies and nine per cent of owner-occupied properties (ONS, 2014a: 7). Housing benefit is vulnerable because it is not widely supported; politically, it may represent an easy, popular cut, although the disquiet over the SRSSC and benefit cap should serve as a note of caution (Cooke and Davies, 2014: 3). Combined with this, Conservatives view material poverty as a symptom of social disadvantage and reliance on the state as a cause. As such social housing tenants present a particular challenge in overcoming dependency, which is viewed as being at the root of many social problems. While implementation has not proved as smooth as the government would have hoped, it is clear to see why a Conservative-led approach to welfare might result in such a policy.

The concern with long-term dependency is also evident in the main strategy for smoothing the transition for claimants. This is the use of DHPs to make up shortfalls in rent. The first important point from this regarding dependency is that entitlement to support is not a given: DHPs are usually only awarded on a temporary basis, and reapplication offers 'no guarantees for success' (Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, 2013: 17). The identification of this as a suitable transitional measure therefore reflects similar thinking to that informing the PIP re-assessment process, rejecting indefinite support in favour of a more conditional process. This coheres with conceptions of the permanent, low-cost tenancy as a manifestation of welfare dependency, altering the relationship between the recipient and the state into a less permanent arrangement whereby entitlement to support must be repeatedly demonstrated and justified.

The second significant implication is in the identification of groups that are considered entitled to some support, and thereby implicitly permitted a level of dependency. DHPs are administered

locally. Decisions on awards do not rest with the DWP, and the only official qualifying criteria is receipt of housing benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit (DWP, 2014g: 6). However, DWP guidance suggests prioritising disabled people in significantly adapted homes for DHPs. The additional allocation to DHPs related to the SRSSC of £30 billion reflects £25 billion to cover the expected impact on disabled people (DWP, 2012i: 11-12; DWP, 2014g: 27-28), and an additional £5 billion that was intended for foster carers (who were subsequently exempted) (Wilson, 2014b: 3). There is therefore usually a requirement to demonstrate need that goes beyond financial hardship, particularly in the northern regions where under-occupancy is much higher and funds are stretched more thinly (Apps, 2014). The allocation strategy therefore necessitates breaking the link between financial need and entitlement to support. This is demonstrated in local authority management of DHPs, with support usually only provided when additional grounds can be demonstrated and additional conditions met (Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2014c: 42-45). Simply not having enough money to make up the increase in rent is not usually enough, so the financial aspects of poverty are also somewhat omitted from this policy. This then leads into concepts of fairness, and the circumstances under which support is deserved.

The main justification for the imposition of the SRSSC is an appeal to fairness. Immediate financial concerns aside, a central argument employed in justifying the policy it is that since housing benefit entitlements for private sector tenants are determined 'with reference to the size of the claimant's household', similar rules should apply in the social sector where tenants 'generally have no restrictions based on the size of accommodation that they occupy' (DWP, 2012h: 1). The change is presented as remedying an anachronistic discrepancy which allows social housing tenants more favourable conditions than their less 'dependent' fellow citizens, building on the introduction of the private sector Local Housing Allowance by New Labour as part of the Welfare Reform Act (2007). Remedying this by offering greater support to those in the private sector would not only constitute an expensive step back from New Labour's reforms, but also an ideologically unacceptable extension of state provision. The solution, therefore, has to be limiting support for those in social housing. This is an expression of the idea of fairness as desert since it aims to ameliorate a variety of 'something for nothing', whereby a group that overall contributes less economically receives a far greater return from the welfare system than those that contribute more.

Reflecting this, arguments from Conservatives regarding the SRSSC have increasingly shifted from financial, towards moral justifications. John Redwood accused MPs who pointed out the lack of savings from the policy of 'misunderstanding' its 'true nature', claiming: 'it is not primarily a public spending-cut policy' (HC Hansard, 27 February 2013). Kwarteng explained that the move was 'an issue of principle - equality between socially provided housing and private sector rents. At the moment, there is a discrepancy that the Government - perfectly fairly and perfectly wisely - are trying to equalise' (HC Hansard, 12 November 2013). Similarly, Duncan Smith expounded: 'the rationale for the policy was fairness. The previous government left us with the situation where some on housing benefit in the private sector were not allowed to occupy houses that had extra rooms, so balancing that is fair' (HC Hansard, 3 November 2014b). Gary Streeter argued that the existing lack of parity was the result of lower rents in the social sector, rather than perceiving private rents as excessively high: 'people in social housing are already getting a huge subsidy, so we're just making their benefit situation the same as someone in private rented housing. How is that so draconian?' (private interview). This conception of fairness and the need to balance treatment of low-paid working households and workless, or partly-working 'dependent' households, is common across the wider programme of non-disability benefit reforms discussed in this chapter. The SRSSC, concerned with establishing fairness between two sub-sets of 'welfare dependent' groups, can be understood as a precursor to enabling this.

To some extent there is a concern with relativity in the framing of the SRSSC, illustrated in the perceived need to ensure parity between two groups of claimants. However, the solution offered reflects a very individualised conception of poverty and disadvantage. Growth in housing benefit is driven structurally by pressures including a lack of housing stock and the failure of wages to keep pace with rising market rents in the private sector (Webb, 2012; Cooke and Davies, 2014). These pressures are also part of the reason for the disparity between social and private sector rental rates. Despite acknowledgement of the need to build more homes (Cameron, 2010b), a report by Policy Exchange warns that the Coalition 'is in danger of overseeing the lowest total number of new homes built as a government since at least before the 1920s' (Morton, 2012: 6-7).

The weight of expectation for ameliorating both the disparity between the public and private sectors and the growth of the cost of housing benefit is therefore placed on these 'most dependent' households, who are deemed to be in entrenched poverty owing to their reliance on the state. In turn, this reinforces the promotion of the market as a 'natural' or extra-human social and economic framework, with state rental levels correspondingly framed as artificially low and unjustified owing to the dependency perpetuated by this. The SRSSC suggests that these social outcomes can be altered through increasing the responsibilities placed on social sector tenants. As such, while the limited financial savings expected to result from the reform fit with the priority of cutting welfare spending, the SRSSC also supports the principle that for the majority of people who depend on the welfare system, positive change cannot occur without first removing some financial support. Implicit within this is the suggestion that the housing benefit in the social sector, unreformed, encourages and supports idleness and a lack of impetus to either find work, or alter spending patterns.

7.4 The household benefit cap

The household benefit cap was also introduced as part of the Welfare Reform Act from April 2013. The cap applies a weekly limit to the total amount that households aged 16 to 64 can receive in benefits of £500 per week for couples (with or without children) or single parents whose children live with them, or £350 a week for single adults without resident children. Within this overall cap are measures intended to address levels of housing benefit payments in the private sector, which came into force in April 2011. These include a cap on housing benefit of £400 or £280 per week for couples or single people respectively, and the restriction of Local Housing Allowance to the 30th percentile of market rates, as opposed to the 50th percentile that was used previously (DWP, 2010e: 6-7). The imposition of the 2013 benefit cap layered on top of the 2011 housing benefit cap means that households entitled to the highest level of housing benefit will then only be eligible to receive a maximum of £100 on top of this, even if their entitlement without the cap would have been much higher.

The household benefit cap is aimed at households without any adults in substantial work, as receipt of Working Tax Credit exempts households from it. Eligibility for Working Tax Credit depends on working a minimum number of hours per week, ranging from sixteen hours for single parents and some disabled people, to 30 hours for people aged 25-59 with no children or

additional considerations (DWP, 2014h). Exemption is also applied with regard to receipt of some other benefits, including DLA/PIP and the support component of ESA. The DWP initially estimated that 56,000 households would lose money as a result of the cap (2012j: 10). This was subsequently revised down to 40,000 in light of a number of changes, including those to benefit up-rating discussed below (DWP, 2013g: 1). This represents approximately one per cent of the DWP's out-of-work caseload (ONS, 2013a: 2). While the cap will not affect very many households, those that are affected will see a significant decrease in income, engendering potentially very serious consequences. The cap is expected to save £265 million in 2014/15 (DWP, 2012j: 7), by reducing average household income for those affected by £93 per week (DWP, 2012j: 2).

In common with the other changes discussed in this chapter, both the household and housing benefit caps were announced by the Treasury. Following the announcement on housing benefit in the Emergency Budget (Osborne 2010a), Osborne told the Conservative conference that an overall cap on benefits would be introduced. This would ensure that: 'no family on out-of-work benefits will get more than the average family gets by going out to work' (2010b). The annual level of the cap is therefore aligned with median household earnings of £26,000.[26] In terms of ideas, the cap somewhat supports the aim of 'making work pay', although its limited impact means it does so in a very uneven way, discussed further below. It also accomplished this in a negative sense, through reducing out-of-work benefits rather than increasing returns from work. As indicated above, the cap is not one of the biggest money-savers that the Coalition has introduced. On the contrary, it saves the least of all of the changes discussed in this chapter because it affects so few households. Despite what the involvement of the Treasury might suggest, it is therefore difficult to explain the cap fully in terms of fiscal pressures, especially given concerns outlined by DCLG that it might generate a net cost to the government due to increases in homelessness (Heslop, 2011). A more tenable explanation given the structure of the cap is that rather than representing the Treasury in terms of controlling finances, the cap is a political move by Osborne, enabled by both his strategist position within the Conservative Party and the power vested in the Treasury as a department.

[26] The Children's Society has argued that this is misleading as it does not take into account the assistance that households earning £26,000 would receive through the benefit system. Basing the cap on average household income would raise it to £31,500 (quoted in Butler, 2012).

The main justification for the cap has been an appeal to fairness. This is used to establish a relationship between working and non-working households. For Cameron, the cap is a 'basic issue of fairness' (2012b), which Grayling explained supports the claim that it is 'clearly not fair…That households on out-of-work benefits should receive a greater income from benefits than the average earnings of working households' (Grayling, HC Hansard, 1 February 2012b). This reflects the emphasis within the Conservative approach to as welfare a whole on ensuring that those who are not working are prevented from receiving 'something for nothing', justified in terms of the causes and consequences of irresponsible behaviour. However, it is around the cap that these ideas seem to have been expressed most strongly.

The austerity-based elements of the Conservative Party's approach to welfare policy provide a much easier sell electorally than the longer-term programmes such as Universal Credit. Benefits paid to unemployed people are particularly vulnerable in this respect compared to those paid to some other groups. For example, support for the idea that the government should be responsible for providing adequate income for unemployed people was 59% in 2011, compared to 84% for disabled people in 2010 (Clery, 2012: 5). Electorally, there is a regional dimension to the cap, which affects very few families outside of London and the South East. Support for a lower cap becomes slightly higher towards the north of the England, which is where the Conservatives urgently needed to win and retain support in 2015 (see Chapter 5). Graham Evans, Conservative MP for Weaver Vale in Cheshire, summarised an aspect of the thinking behind this, telling the House that his constituents: 'believe it deeply unfair that people living on low incomes…are paying through their taxes for unemployed Londoners to live in multimillion pound houses in trendy parts of the capital' (HC Hansard, 18 July 2011; see also Stevenson in Chapter 5). The cap is clearly a potentially very useful policy in the short-term politically, although its longer-term impact in respect of the concerns raised by DCLG are less clear.

The uneven impact of the cap appears deliberate rather than an oversight, as it works in the Conservatives' favour. Sheila Gilmore, a former Labour member of the Work and Pensions Select Committee, suggested that the decline in support for the SRSSC occurred because it affected a large number of people across the UK who did not identify themselves, their friends or relatives in the image of 'this scrounger person' underpinning the justification for reform (private

interview). The structure of the cap has enabled the Conservatives to avoid this pitfall: DWP research showed that voters considered themselves to know much less about the cap than about the SRSSC, but were strongly inclined to support it (DWP, 2013h: 15-16). The Conservatives are left with a popular policy as evidence of their willingness to take a hard line on unemployed or underemployed benefit claimants, without the attendant fall-out from implementing the policy on a nation-wide basis, and having largely brushed over its longer-term implications.

By linking the cap specifically to out-of-work benefits, the Conservatives aim to place themselves on the side of 'hardworking people', which was the theme of their 2013 conference. The cap identifies the Conservatives as 'the party of ordinary people who are working' (Sir Roger Gale, private interview), supporting 'the people who…were sick of going out to work knowing their neighbours were on benefits – but had no intention of getting a job' (Cameron, 2011a). Like the SRSSC, the concern is with people towards the bottom of the income ladder and specifically those who are earning very little from working, set against those whose income is comprised solely of out-of-work benefits. For example, Gale stated: 'to anybody earning say, £16-18,000 a year, working hard and doing a full day's work, five or even six days a week, to see somebody receiving massive sums in benefits from going out and doing absolutely nothing, it's offensive' (private interview). Conor Burns similarly claimed: 'you find very robust views amongst the working class about those who they feel are exploiting benefits whilst they're working hard and making a contribution' (private interview). Within the electoral positioning of the cap, therefore, is the ideological claim that the Conservative concept of fairness as desert represents 'real fairness'.

Beyond this in explaining the cap, Conservatives have drawn on arguments which suggest that it shares some of the thinking behind Universal Credit in terms of 'making work pay'. For example, Duncan Smith explained that the cap was:

> Simply looking to those families who have become static and immobile. There is a disincentive against their going to work; the amount of money that they receive is such that they could never get it if they went to work. Therefore their incentive to work is non-existent. (HC Hansard, 11 October 2010)

Grayling similarly stated that the cap would 'remove perverse disincentives to work' (HC Hansard, 9 March 2011), and Miller claimed that it cap would 'be one of the best ways of ensuring that work pays, for families throughout our country' (HC Hansard, 23 January 2012). This is a very similar ideological argument to parts of that behind Universal Credit, in that it suggests that paying out high levels of benefits without sufficient work-related conditions attached perpetuates dependency by rewarding irresponsible behaviour. This is then both lacking in compassion towards those whose lives have become 'static and immobile' within the welfare system, and unfair to those who are in work. In as far as human behaviour and decision-making is understood within it, therefore, the cap supports the basic tenets around the idea of 'dependency' contained in Universal Credit and the Work Programme. It is presented as a policy that will fit in with and buttress the effects of Universal Credit incentives, reducing the perceived attractiveness of not working. Here, therefore, it is possible to see how more positive incentive based arguments link with more negative aspects, based on withdrawing support as a means of stimulating activity.

Beyond this rhetorical similarity, however, there are some important differences between Universal Credit, the Work Programme, and the cap. Accepting the idea that any of these policies will help to tackle poverty and dependency requires accepting the Conservative proposition that poverty is a problem experienced at the individual level, and therefore one that can be addressed at the individual level. Within this, Universal Credit and the Work Programme offer broad-ranging solutions to poverty, albeit on a long-term basis. Despite the similar justifications for the cap, it is difficult to make the same claim for it. It is simply not tenable to claim that a policy that affects one per cent of the DWP's out-of-work caseload will encourage responsible behaviour across the UK, as Duncan Smith, Miller and Grayling suggest above. Owing to the strategic considerations discussed, households affected by the cap are in very specific circumstances. They tend to have large numbers of children, live in areas with high rent, or both (DWP, 2012j: 7-8). DWP data accurate to January 2014 stated that 60 per cent of households affected had between one and four children, while 36 per cent had five or more children. 47 per cent of households were in London with a further eleven per cent in the South East, and only one of the twenty Local Authorities most affected by the cap was outside London (DWP, 2014i: 6-8). Universal Credit and the Work Programme have much wider reach, and are consequently much more thoroughgoing reforms of the welfare system. As such, the similarities

should not be exaggerated, as the two policies seem to be intended to achieve quite different results.

There is also evidence of incoherence between the ideas underpinning Universal Credit and those underpinning the cap. The case for the cap is that some families receive overall benefit payments that are too high. Yet, the cap, Universal Credit, and the legacy benefits all come from within the same system. As Joyce (2012) suggests, if the Government believes that some families are entitled to excessive benefits then the best-targeted means of remedying this would be to alter the rates for those benefits. Given that Universal Credit presents an opportunity to 'start from scratch' in this respect, it is unclear what will be gained by 'layering a cap on top of a system that is designed to allow higher payments'. The cap, however, is a much simpler and less electorally risky measure, at least when considered in terms of society as a whole rather than its impact on individuals, which is returned to below. This points to a triumph of political expediency and concern with achieving short-term gains over longer-term thinking.

In addition to the effects of the cap in relation to society and in terms of its utility to the Conservatives, it is also important to consider its impact on those households affected by it. The £100 per week that can be claimed on top of the maximum permissible housing benefit falls considerably short of the relative poverty threshold in 2012/13 for all household types (MacInnes et al., 2014: 14), and households affected by the cap stand to lose an average of £93 per week, with larger households losing the most. Larger households are more likely to rely on benefits and so will be impacted by the range of reforms: despite this, the benefit cap will have a particular impact on relative poverty when its effects are isolated (Browne, 2012a: 23; see also Children's Society, 2013). This will be somewhat mitigated in the longer-term by Universal Credit, offering a further example of this and the austerity reforms pulling in different directions. This supports the suggestion that reforms within this strand of policy reflect a willingness to accept an increase in relative poverty as a consequence of enacting a desert-based conception of fairness.

Moreover, the cap disproportionately affects children, suggesting a departure from compassion as a key concept in informing welfare policy. The Children's Society calculated that 140,000 children will be affected by the policy, compared to 60,000 adults (2013); Action for Children suggested a higher figure, of 175,000 children (Rennison, 2013). The impact on children was

responsible for Welfare Reform Act defeats in the House of Lords, and it has been criticised as 'horrible' and 'traumatic' by Liberal Democrats in the Commons, with reference to possible evictions (Sarah Teather, quoted in Helm, 2012). The concept of Conservative compassion suggests that some hardship is acceptable, based on the claim that if life on out-of-work benefits is comfortable then this will preclude claimants from taking steps towards self-sufficiency and better outcomes. This is perhaps tenable when applied to adults, who within an individualised conception of poverty are responsible for their situation. Connected to this, the DWP's research has found that the most common response from people affected by the cap is to express a wish to move into work (2014j: 7). However, as a report for one of the four pilot boroughs for the cap cautions, these claimants are 'likely to need intensive and personalised support to help them respond to the cap and move into employment' (Davies et al., 2013: 6). In the meantime, the impact on children is difficult to understand in relation to even Conservative conceptions compassion or fairness. These are connected to a concept of responsible behaviour which dependents, by definition, are unable to fulfil.

The presence of this approach within justifications for the cap therefore contributes to a significant ideological shift between New Labour and the Conservatives, and in the principles underpinning the British welfare system more broadly. While moving towards a more conditional approach to welfare provision and sharing some foundational ideas with the cap, Universal Credit preserves some commitment to a needs-based conception of fairness via the retention of means-testing, and some commitment to a relative conception of poverty via its modest redistributive aspect (see below). This supports the idea of the welfare system as a 'safety net', which is popular amongst Conservatives. The cap, however, pulls away from both of these conceptions, focusing strongly (although not consistently, given its limited reach) on fairness as desert and a behavioural conception of poverty which is linked to being out of work. In doing so, it severs the link between entitlement and need for those households who are affected by it, again reflecting a 'cut first' approach to welfare provision which extends the significant power of the Treasury. This shift is no less significant if it is read as being the result of electoral positioning, especially given its popularity amongst voters across the political spectrum (Taylor-Gooby and Taylor, 2015). It should not be underplayed despite the small number of households affected by the cap initially, especially as Conservatives have indicated that it will be reduced further should the Party win in 2015 (Cameron, quoted in le Duc, 2015).

The importance of this line of policy-making is further reinforced when considered in relation to changes to benefit up-rating measures.

7.5 Welfare up-rating changes

Changes to DLA, the SRSSC and the benefit cap have all been linked to the need to reduce public spending. The extent that they will do so effectively and substantially is both varied in terms of headline savings, and uncertain in relation to consequential costs that might occur as a result of the policies. As mentioned above, DCLG has outlined concerns that the cap's limited savings will be overwhelmed by the need to provide additional support (including homelessness provision) to some of those affected (Heslop, 2011), while the Scottish Welfare Reform Committee has suggested the same of the SRSSC (2014: 14). However, these policies do not need to make much of an impact financially because the Government has introduced other changes which will have a far greater and more predictable effect on welfare spending, accomplishing much of the long-term heavy lifting in this respect. These are the changes to the mechanisms and levels by which cash benefits are up-rated.

The first of these changes alters the mechanism for up-rating of working-age benefits and pensions from the Retail Prices Index (RPI), to the Consumer Prices Index (CPI).[27] This came into effect in April 2011. Inflation measured by CPI tends to be the lower of the two measures because CPI excludes some goods and services that are included in RPI, and because different methods are used to calculate each rate (ONS, 2013b: 20). Since 1997, RPI has only exceeded CPI for one extended period of sixteen months during the financial crisis, and for very short periods in 1999 and 2002. Since 1989, RPI has been on average 0.7 percentage points higher than CPI (Miller, 2011: 2-3). However, forecasting by the OBR suggests this will increase to 1.4 percentage points in the long-run future (OBR, 2011: 90). This has a cumulative negative effect on the value of benefits: it is estimated that it will save £1.2 billion in 2011/12, rising to £5.8 billion in 2014/15, and increasing exponentially thereafter (Cracknell, 2011: iv). In addition, the Coalition implemented the Welfare Benefits Up-rating Act in 2013, which restricts certain working-age benefits, elements of tax credits and Child Benefit to an up-rating of 1 per cent in

[27] Pensions, however, are protected by the 'triple lock'. This means that they may rise at a different, higher rate than working age benefits.

2014/15 and 2015/16. This is projected to save approximately an extra £1.1 billion in 2014/15 and £1.9 billion in 2015/16 (DWP, 2013i: 1). The Conservative electoral victory in 2015 also means that all working-age benefits will be frozen for two years up to 2017, saving approximately £3 billion (Osborne, 2014b).

Given their centrality to reducing welfare spending, it is unsurprising that these reforms were announced by the Treasury. They reflect an immediate concern with reducing spending on welfare, framed in terms of achieving fiscal sustainability in the longer-term as opposed to the more short-term approach of other reforms discussed in this chapter. Announcing the RPI-CPI change, Osborne argued that the growth in welfare spending (including tax credits) from £132 billion in 2004 to £192 billion in 2014, representing a 'real terms increase of a staggering 45 per cent' was 'one reason why there is no money left'. Moreover, not only was welfare spending apparently becoming unsustainable, but it had a social cost: leaving 'an increasing number of our fellow citizens trapped on out-of-work benefits for their entire lives' (2010a). As such, a sustainable means of bringing spending down, such as this policy represents, was necessary both financially and morally. The 1 per cent up-rating was also justified in terms of delivering 'permanent savings each and every year from our country's welfare bill' (Osborne, 2012b). Duncan Smith similarly claimed that fiscal savings were 'at the heart of the measure', while emphasising the wider effects of New Labour's approach to welfare spending which he argued 'delivered poor social outcomes, trapping people in dependency' (HC Hansard, 8 January 2013).

These are highly effective methods of consistently and predictably reducing welfare spending. They are also easier politically than the other policies discussed in this chapter, since their impact on individual households is both uniform and gradual. As James Plunkett, the former Director of Policy for the Resolution Foundation suggested, the RPI-CPI change 'means skimming small amounts each year from the budgets of lower-income households, in the hope that you'll be out the door before they notice' (2011). It should also be noted that the framing of these policies represents an ideologically-grounded critique of New Labour's approach to welfare, rather than one entirely stemming from economic necessity. The growth of the welfare budget under New Labour was not accidental and can be explained with reference to policy priorities, including reducing pensioner and child poverty via the extension of tax credits (see Chapter 1). As New Labour practised 'redistribution by stealth' (Piachaud, 2007), the up-rating

changes are reductions by stealth, which reflect a departure from previous policy priorities and a re-shaping of the relationship between individuals and the state, in addition to reducing spending.

The way that welfare spending has been framed in relation to up-rating reforms provides an indication of the thinking behind this. Beyond the immediate need to restrict spending in accordance with the priority of cutting the deficit, the broader argument from Conservatives has been that high spending on welfare is wasteful and indicative of an ineffective welfare state. One strand of this argument concerns the reach of tax credits. Duncan Smith argued that it was 'ridiculous nonsense' that 'nine out of 10 families with children were eligible for tax credits, in some cases those with more than £70,000 in earnings', having previously claimed that this was indicative of an attempt by Labour to buy votes from higher earners (HC Hansard, 8 January 2013). The Conservative view on this was neatly summarised by Robert Halfon MP, who queried:

> Is not the philosophical underpinning of this debate our wish to create a hand-back society, not a hand-out society? Is not cutting taxes on lower earners the best way to help those on low earnings, rather than recycling their hard-earned money through the benefits system? (HC Hansard, 8 January 2013)

This refers to foundational questions about the purpose of the welfare state and the sort of relationship that it should have with individuals, which is linked to the ideas discussed in Chapter 4 regarding whether extending individuals' direct relationships with the state has a detrimental effect overall on 'horizontal' social connections and on independence and self-sufficiency. It was presented as a negation of Labour MPs' claims that working people would be affected by the bill, suggesting that some of those higher-earners affected should never have been eligible for welfare payments in the first place. This is returned to below.

Such questions also emerge in the more prominent strand of argument around up-rating, which relates to claimants on out-of-work benefits. Here, high spending is presented as contrary to compassion: Osborne claimed 'we are wasting the talent of millions, and spending billions on it in the process' (2010a). This is the familiar argument that appears throughout justifications for reform in this and the previous chapter, that receiving money from the state causes claimants to become reliant on that money, encouraging them to remain dependent and therefore in poverty

rather than striving for self-sufficiency. This is then linked with irresponsible decision-making, including the decision not to work. As Gareth Johnson explained during the second reading of the Up-rating Act: 'if we allow benefits to be increased by more than salaries, that will increase the number of people on benefits who are trapped in poverty and unable to afford to go to work' (HC Hansard, 8 January 2013). In terms of unemployed claimants, therefore, Conservatives have attempted to illustrate how reducing benefit levels in the long-term contributes to creating a more compassionate system, in which the incentives for self-sufficiency are increased. Lowering the income to be gained from out-of-work benefits is identified as a vital part of this process, and up-rating changes play an important part in this by bringing out-of-work benefit inflation onto a lower trajectory than average earnings (Hoode, Johnson and Joyce, 2013).

There is also an appeal to ensuring fairness between working and non-working benefit recipients. Here, Johnson's point above regarding rates of increases in benefits and salaries is important, as the appeal is based on the relative financial statuses of out-of-work benefit recipients and low-paid workers. Duncan Smith explained: 'the reality is that in the period since the recession, payments for those in work have risen by about ten per cent and payments for those on benefits have risen by about twenty per cent. We are trying to get a fair settlement back over the next few years'. In the same debate, this was echoed by other Conservative Members including Charlie Elphicke and Alun Cairnes, leading Julian Sturdy to describe it as the 'key fact' in determining the debate over the policy (HC, Hansard, 8 January 2013). Similarly, out-of-work benefit payments were compared to public sector pay freezes. Jake Berry's constituent had asked him: 'how can you justify putting out-of-work benefits up by 5.2 per cent last year, when I have had a pay freeze and I risk my life every day?' (HC Hansard, 8 January 2013), while Amber Rudd asked whether it was not 'confusing that the Opposition support fixing public sector pay rises at one per cent, but not controlling the level by which out-of-work benefits increase?' (HC Hansard, 21 January 2013). This deployment of a desert-based conception of fairness is central to justifying up-rating changes as they apply to unemployed people. The changes attempt to implement the idea that low-paid workers need to be in a better financial position because this is morally correct, in addition to arguments around compassion and responsible behaviour for out-of-work benefit claimants outlined above.

The use of such a concept of fairness for working people and the attendant emphasis on individual responsibility in claimants then has an important impact on the connected concept of poverty, illustrating how the eventual deconstestations of concepts are linked together. The arguments outlined above, regarding the position of low-paid workers vis-à-vis out-of-work claimants suggest a concern with relativism, albeit one which is limited to those at bottom of the income scale. However, the projected impacts of the up-rating changes do not reflect this: instead, these imply a shift away from income as a central measure of poverty and a further disconnection of the relationship between need and entitlement to support, as is present in the benefit cap. This is supported by projections of the effects of the Up-rating Act on child poverty. The IPPR's analysis states that 'under the reform scenario, the number of families and individuals in relative poverty will increase', with 200,000 more households earnings less than 60% of median income by 2017/18 (Thompson, 2013: 4). Esther McVey, the former Minister of State for Employment, confirmed this, adding a qualification that the Government 'strongly [believes that] looking at relative income in isolation is not a helpful measure to track progress towards our target of eradicating child poverty' (HC Hansard, 15 January 2013).

The adoption of a policy that will increase relative child poverty in the long run is a further departure from New Labour's priorities. This is rendered acceptable for Conservatives through the centrality of fairness as desert in informing policy, with the attendant claim that welfare spending for unemployed people is akin to 'throwing money' at the problem (David Gauke, HC Hansard, 11 December 2012). This rewards undeserving and irresponsible behaviour, hence perpetuating both dependency and unfairness. It reflects the belief that the source of income is more important than its level in terms of moving people out of poverty in the long-term, thus conceptualising poverty as a problem of individual behaviour rather than one of social inequality. Thus while under Gordon Brown's stewardship targeting money towards low-income households via the Treasury was a central strategy for alleviating poverty, under Osborne removing it again is intended to achieve the same aim. This is possible theoretically because the conception of poverty underpinning the two approaches differs, and practically due to the amount of power over welfare policy imbued in the Treasury itself through tax credits as a mechanism.

At this point, it is useful to return to the impact that up-rating changes will have on those in work, as well as on out-of-work benefit claimants. While Conservative parliamentary rhetoric has focused on unemployed people and this is a politically expedient way of justifying the changes, it is not an accurate reflection of those affected. Changes to up-rating also affect benefits which would not usually be associated with inactivity. These include the Work-Related Activity component of ESA, couple and lone parent elements of Working Tax Credit, the child element of Child Tax Credit (and their corresponding elements in Universal Credit), and Statutory Sick, Maternity, Paternity and Adoption pay, in addition to more familiar targets such as Income Support and JSA (DWP, 2013i: 4).

The impact on those in work is a difficult topic to negotiate electorally. As Chapter 5 showed, alongside the issues discussed above regarding the cap and SRSSC, benefit cuts tend to be popular when they are perceived as negatively affecting 'scroungers' in favour of 'strivers'. They are less so when those affected do not fit neatly within this dichotomy. For some middle earners, the impact will be somewhat offset by increases in the tax-free personal allowance, but this does not apply to the lowest earners who are already earning too little to pay tax (Browne, 2012b; Hirsch, 2013: 4-5). The problem is compounded when considered in relation to evidence indicating that aside from a small core of long-term unemployed households, there is not a clear line between employed and unemployed groups. Job insecurity and casualization at the bottom of the income scale means that individuals here often cycle between being in and out of work (Shildrick et al., 2010). Of the 200,000 households that will fall into material poverty as a direct result of the up-rating changes, approximately half have at least one adult in work (HC Hansard, 30 January 2013).

This is problematic in relation to a conventional concept of poverty focused on income, even though the number of in-work households affected is small. However, it also reinforces that the dominant Conservative concept of poverty is one that is focused on behaviour and choices, as it has to be in relation to the conceptions of fairness and responsibility that also inform the changes. Half of all people who are in material poverty live with a working adult (MacInnes et al., 2014: 30-31), but in-work poverty is a particular problem for those belonging to 'partly working' households, where jobs are part-time or one adult is not working at all (Kenway, 2008: 16). When challenged on the impact to these families, Duncan Smith argued that 'the vast

majority of people who take part-time work choose to take part-time work' (HC Hansard, 8 January 2013). The ONS showed that approximately one in five part-time workers were 'under-employed' between 2000 and 2014, with a higher proportion in 'elementary' occupations which are low-paid and more likely to require top-ups via the benefit system (2014b: 5-6). This perception of individual choice is essential to justifying the effect of up-rating changes on those in work. It is related to the idea that individuals should accept responsibility for the consequences of their choices. Even if this means dipping below the material poverty line, it is not for the state to step in to support part-time workers. Additionally, if poverty is understood more in terms of behaviour, then this is less problematic in general. As Stewart Jackson MP explained: 'work is the No. 1 determinant in [...] breaking the cycle of children seeing their parents unemployed, living in a half-life of hopelessness and poverty and lacking ambition' (HC Hansard, 8 January 2013). Following this logic, it is the fact that there is a working adult in the household that is of most importance to sustainably tackling poverty, rather than the amount that they earn.

In leading to increased inequality, the projected outcomes of up-rating changes betray a sense of scepticism towards the idea of relative poverty within the Conservative Party. This is evident in spite of both the relativistic conception of the relationship between unemployed and low-earners' income statuses, and Conservative claims to accept the idea of relative poverty prior to 2010. Curiously, although Duncan Smith's work with the SJPG was instrumental in pushing forward the idea of 'redefining' poverty in terms other than income, it is in the strand of policy associated with Osborne and the Treasury that these ideas have come to earlier fruition. This perhaps serves as a note of caution against exaggerating the ideological differences between this strand and that discussed in the former chapter.

However, the long-term approach of Universal Credit and the implications of up-rating changes do not sit easily alongside each other. Universal Credit is predicted to have the greatest positive impact on relative poverty of all of the Coalition's reforms. The DWP argued that Universal Credit would have a positive impact on income poverty by increasing take-up of benefits, and re-focusing entitlements on lower income households (2010a: 18-20). This analysis was judged 'reasonable' in a report by the OECD (Pareliussen, 2013: 23). The IFS concurred: Universal Credit should reduce relative poverty by 450,000 children and 600,000 working-age adults by

2020 (Brewer, Browne and Joyce, 2011: 3). However, a crucial caveat to this analysis is that it examines the effects of Universal Credit in isolation. Brewer, Browne and Joyce note that 'this reduction is more than offset by the poverty-increasing impact of the government's other changes to personal taxes and state benefits', identifying the RPI/CPI shift as the most significant of these because it directly impacts on the value of the elements of Universal Credit (2011: 3). As a result of these changes, relative child poverty will have risen from 20% to 24% by 2020 (against a goal of 5% in the Child Poverty Act), which is the highest level since 1999/2000 (2011: 31). Absolute poverty for households with and without children is also predicted to increase more sharply as a result of up-rating changes (2011: 25). The changes to up-rating, which limit the level at which the benefits that compose Universal Credit can be paid, illustrate how considerable power over the effects of Universal Credit lies not with the DWP but with the Treasury. As Dame Anne Begg suggested to the House, this '[ties] the Government's hands on the introduction of Universal Credit' (HC Hansard, 8 January 2013), potentially undermining its longer term achievements in favour of an approach which emphasises reducing welfare spending as a central priority for ensuring both economic stability, and social change.

7.6 Conclusion

Although the reforms discussed in this chapter have been prompted by the economic downturn and subsequent identification of the need to cut the public spending deficit, Conservatives have made concerted efforts to tie these in with a broader moral narrative around welfare reform discussed in the previous chapter. As suggested at the end of Chapter 5, this is central to a process of ideological deconstestation as an element of strategy, the success of which will bear considerably on the justification and electoral utility of Conservative reforms.

The success of this is varied: while some reforms fit quite clearly with the moral imperatives outlined in Chapter 4, others, notably the changes to DLA, have been less easily slotted into the wider welfare agenda. Despite this, there is an underlying logic to the changes discussed here, again assuming that the basis of Conservative ideology on welfare is accepted. However, the centrality of being seen to be both reducing welfare spending, and refocusing this from 'undeserving' to 'deserving' claimants has introduced a slight yet significant shift of emphasis compared to the thinking underpinning Universal Credit. Universal Credit retains a concern with need understood in financial terms despite the reduction in generosity of its taper. Its projected

outcomes suggest a limited acceptance of the concept of relative poverty, at least in the short term, and some agreement with the idea that within households there is a minimum acceptable standard of living that the welfare state should provide as long as claimants are meeting pre-defined conditions. The SRSSC, the benefit cap and the changes to up-rating all go beyond this, severing the link between need and entitlement to benefits for some households and instead basing entitlement on desert determined, ostensibly (although not entirely accurately in the case of up-rating) with reference to work status.

This therefore offers an illustration of something of a disagreement between Conservatives regarding the solution to the problem of an over-extended welfare state. These differences should not be over-stated. Within the context of the economic downturn, all of the reforms discussed in this chapter are intended to deliver immediate budget savings to some extent. Some, such as the up-rating changes, will do so with a great deal more certainty and consistently in the long-run than others, and the levels of saving are variable. All of them to some extent purport to uphold the goal of 'making work pay' which runs through the longer-term agenda in the previous chapter, and all of them understand the issue of unemployment on an individual, rather than a social level. As such they are somewhat compatible with Universal Credit and the Work Programme, which aim to incentivise and 'activate' individuals to move into work, progress in work, and develop their skills. The reforms discussed here provide an extra layer of financial incentive to work in relation to this, in the negative form of removing support, alongside the more positive approach of Universal Credit in aiming to increase returns from work. This comes about partly as a result of perceived financial necessity but also as a means of altering the relationship between individuals and the state in terms of the need for support and the transfer of responsibility.

However, the slightly different approaches between the two strands of policy illustrate some strategic differences amongst Conservatives on how such goals are best achieved. Universal Credit and the Work Programme aim to deliver savings by reducing dependence in the longer-term as a result of the behaviour-changing aspects of the policies. The austerity policies, on the other hand, suggest that immediate budget reductions will be the catalyst for achieving these broader ideological goals related to reducing dependency, enhancing responsibility, and promoting fairness. While they are both aiming towards the same goals, this reflects slightly

different priorities. The latter strand appears willing to accept increases in income poverty as a cost of boosting work incentives, focusing more strongly on a lifestyle-based conception of poverty and a corresponding emphasis on fairness as desert for responsible life choices. In turn, this strongly emphasises the morality of work. The former strand, despite Duncan Smith's apparent support for moving away from income-based conceptions of poverty, seems less willing to accept the very strong individualism of this approach, focusing somewhat less on claimant morality and more on rational decision-making (hence retaining a conviction that income matters). Ultimately, given the primacy of reducing spending and the extent to which both the short and longer term aspects of measures outlined in this chapter cut across the longer-term approach embodied in Universal Credit, it seems that the balance of power within Conservative welfare policy lies with the short-termist, intensely moral approach.

The extent to which the Coalition has been able to implement such an approach, which will be extended by the majority Conservative administration (see Conclusion), also suggests an interesting additional dimension to the role of ideas as proposed in the SRA. This necessitates referring back to New Labour. New Labour's welfare reforms comprised some measures which were concordant with Conservative ideological perspectives on the potentially detrimental effects of welfare provision, notably around increased conditionality for unemployed claimants. Alongside this, more quietly, Blair's governments also implemented a swathe of measures that addressed more conventional indicators of and problems associated with deprivation largely through tax credits (Piachaud, 2007). These quieter changes are those that Conservatives have sought most determinedly to discredit. In considering which parts of context matter in determining strategic selectivity, it is therefore necessary to consider not only path dependency in policy (with respect to the costs and risks involved in dismantling existing policy infrastructure) but path-dependency in ideas as expressed through policy rhetoric. This means that what is emphasised publically or alternately played down has implications for the possibility of retrenchment or expansion of existing programmes, especially given the strong electoral dimension of welfare policy. Interpretation remains central to explaining why particular policies are chosen, since the policies addressed in this chapter and the preceding one constitute an example of a Conservative-led approach to welfare judging that elements of New Labour's reforms can be dismantled without significant social or electoral cost. However, this is related to what has been seen and presented as the most significant and transformative elements of welfare

policy in preceding contexts, as well as the reality of the policy landscape itself. The extent to which Conservatives have been able to begin to dismantle parts of New Labour's welfare reforms, implementing more conservative perspectives in replacement, is significantly due to New Labour's failure to robustly defend these policies and thus embed its thinking in the party political debate – a major element of selective context - around welfare.

Chapter 8
Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

This thesis has focused on the Conservative Party in both opposition and government between 2005 and 2015, exploring the development and usage of its ideas in both contexts and how this is affected by the transition between the two. Through analysing the approach to welfare policy it aimed to provide a window into the ideological character of the PCP, considering this in relation to a number of issues around the broad social, political and electoral context in which it operates. This is central to a range of academic and popular debates. It is explicit in political analytical discussions of what 'Cameronism' itself is, what 'modernisation' has entailed, and where this is subsequently likely to take the Conservative Party. More implicitly, it is one of a range of questions underpinning policy-focused discussions around the goals and likely impacts of key policy areas, of which welfare (as a significant aspect of the Coalition's reform programme) is one. In approaching this topic, this thesis constructed and deployed an appropriate theoretical framework, combining the Strategic-Relational Approach and a morphological approach to ideologies, which informed the analysis throughout. This emphasised the importance of ideas and interrogating the process of ideational change and development, as well as providing a basis from which such a task might be approached which is sensitive to the political context within which change is embedded.

This concluding chapter begins by summarising how the research approach drove and added to the understanding of the empirical material of this thesis and what the implications of the findings of the thesis are for the theoretical framework, alongside a discussion of the framework's utility for future research. The chapter then re-visits and draws together the overall empirical conclusions drawn from the research, relating these to the three research questions set out in Chapter 1. These pertain to the ideological character of the Conservative Party under David Cameron, the process of party change in this period as borne out in policy decisions, and what this study can tell us about British party politics and ideologies more broadly. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the possible implications of the conclusions drawn here for the Conservative Party, the welfare state, and the British political landscape.

8.1 Theoretical implications and contribution

Chapter 2 of this thesis was dedicated to supporting its central theoretical premise: that ideas matter in informing and hence in understanding political outcomes and development trajectories. Colin Hay's Strategic-Relational Approach (2002) was introduced as a means of substantiating this claim, illustrating how the ideas of actors (in this case, Conservative elites) are instrumental in enabling their capacity for strategic action.

The SRA draws attention to two constructions that are essential in understanding political action and the transformation of context, or political change. These are 'strategic actors', in this case, the Conservative Party, oriented in pursuit of particular goals, and the 'strategically selective context' in which the Party exists and attempt to achieve such goals. In these attempts, actors must rely on strategic calculations based on their understanding of the present context and the effects of their actions. This therefore necessitates a reliance on ideas and interpretations. Moreover, as context will change as a result of both the Party's actions and those taken by a wide range of other, similarly strategically-minded actors strategies – and hence, the ideas informing these strategies – cannot be conceived as static and unchanging. This suggests that in understanding political decision-making, it is necessary to interrogate the process of ideational development informing this and how this relates to contextual developments. The central contribution of the SRA to this research is therefore to provide a clear framework for understanding and mapping the way in which actors appropriate and navigate the reality of political life, balancing pressing realities with longer-term goals and more deeply-held beliefs. This is centred on their ideas and interpretations. In turn, acknowledging the constraints on actors and effects of changes in material circumstances allows for a holistic appraisal of why the Conservative Party has developed as it has ideologically since 2005 which is sensitive to the role of historical Conservative perspectives, policy landscape and inheritance and immediate political and electoral pressures.

It is possible, of course, to outline developments in Conservative welfare policy since 2005 and identify where shifts in policy have occurred without even talking to any Conservative MPs. However, by utilising the characterisation of the role of ideas put forward in the SRA, this research has taken a more detailed examination of the policy area. A framework eschewing analysis of ideas and interpretations in favour of a more behavioural or action-orientated analysis

would have struggled to achieve this depth, which is essential to answering the research questions of this work fully. Drawing on this, the SRA also led towards the framing of questions around particular events that might be clearly identified as bringing about a change in material context (see Appendix 2) in order to gain a deeper understanding of how these changes were interpreted, and their effects on Conservative thought, than could be gained by simply looking at the Party's actions. The SRA has therefore proven illuminating as a means of allowing consideration not only of *what* the Conservative Party has done but *why* this was the case.

Overall the conclusions drawn from this research have supported the central claim of the SRA regarding the centrality of ideas in decision-making. This thesis has shown that ideas act as a filter through which politicians interpret contemporary contexts and events, subsequently devising strategies that take these into account as a means of achieving interlinked goals. Moreover, it has also provided an illustration of the circumstances through which particular ideas acquire and retain resonance and relevance to policy-making, notably through examining the shifts between New Labour and Conservative-led policy discussed in Chapters 6 and 7 and the lack of implementation of some of the Conservatives' more innovative ideas. In addition to path dependency in policy itself, the empirical chapters of this thesis illustrated the importance of path dependency in ideas and interpretations of problems. This applies especially to the perceived need for 'tough' welfare policies to tackle welfare dependency. This was certainly a feature of Thatcherite rhetoric on welfare, if not one that was fully reflected in policy terms. The maintenance of this approach by New Labour, while also downplaying its more conventional redistributionist elements, appears to have enhanced the possibility of Cameron's Conservatives continuing down a Thatcherite path. This suggests that strategically selective context, which is a central component of the decision-making process in the SRA, is shaped not only by what 'is' in terms of policy, but by what is consciously emphasised and alternately played down by other actors. There is no need for a rigid conception of structure to shape political decision-making processes: the conscious decisions of others, whether made in pursuit of electoral or policy gain, fulfil this function quite effectively.

The SRA convincingly makes a case for the importance of ideas in understanding decision-making on a smaller scale and political change (or lack of) on a larger one, and directs our attention towards examining the interplay between material and ideational changes and

developments from the perspective of Conservatives. However, it has less to say about the process of change itself: how ideological change occurs. By not addressing this, the SRA leaves ideas at once integral to political life and yet at the same time oddly detached from the individuals and groups which constitute, deploy and re-constitute them. This problem was identified in Chapter 2, and to overcome it a second element was brought into the theoretical framework. This is Michael Freeden's morphological approach to ideologies. Freeden proposes that political ideologies have a structure consisting of core, adjacent and peripheral layers, made up of individual political concepts. A central point of his analysis is that the meaning of these concepts is not fixed: rather, they are defined or 'decontested' in relation to one another, within the structure of the ideology. This offered a framework for analysing the extent of change within Conservative ideology and the extent to which Cameron's Party's approach to welfare policy subverted or re-shaped that of previous Conservative governments.

Like Hay, Freeden insists that ideas are central in informing action. However, his approach has the capacity to distinguish between different sources and levels of change through analysing how the decontestation and re-decontestation of concepts occurs, and whether or how this effects change on the more stable inner layers of the ideology. This allows for a more detailed examination of the process of change itself, enabling the possibility of understanding whether change is ideologically substantive and consistent, or largely contingent and pragmatic. As such, the framework deployed here addresses a weakness in the SRA which, despite recognising and conceptualising the incrementally transformative role of ideas in political life (Hay, 2002: 156-163), Hay fails to properly address. This relates to the depth of ideological change, the consequences of this for policy and, consequentially, the likely endurance of particular policy approaches.

The theoretical approach constructed here has proven illuminating as a means of studying Cameron's Conservative Party. In conceptualising the relationship between ideas and context, the SRA directs our attention towards a number of different imperatives, influences and pressures that political parties have to reconcile in making decisions and formulating strategies. Moreover, it combines this with a means of analysing the process and nature of change, getting beneath the surface of what might appear to be significant ideological developments in order to assess their broader relevance to conservatism and thus accounting for the subtleties of

Conservative ideology under Cameron. In doing so the conclusions of the research not only confirm that ideas do matter in informing strategy, but provide an illustration of how and why they matter, thus adding to our understanding of the role of ideas in political life.

Policy, as a dynamic 'product' which reflects the assimilation of a range of different strategic considerations, offers a potentially rich source of information about the way in which the party proposing it perceives the context in which it exists. It is therefore an interesting focus for analysis of this kind, providing a window through which broader processes of ideological change can be identified and understood. Aside from its empirical contributions (which are returned to below), what the approach of this thesis has also therefore shown is that analysis of policy areas need not be considered as only partial or contributory to the broader study of party ideologies. Within political analysis, different policy areas are often treated as discretely contributing to a 'whole' picture of party ideologies, implying that the conclusions to be drawn on this topic from studying areas individually are perhaps quite limited. By linking the study of a policy area closely to wider decision-making and strategy, this thesis has shown that considered in sufficient depth, such an approach can stand alone as a means of analysing party ideologies and ideational developments.

The research presented here focuses on Conservative elites and one area of social policy. However, its theoretical framework has a wider application. This is due to its sensitivity to context and changing circumstances, alongside the emphasis on interrogating the patterns of thought that shape responses to these circumstances and hence play a role in re-producing contextual and institutional peculiarities. As such, the approach outlined here is valuable for analysts of political parties in a range of contexts, seeking to understand both the internal influences on change within parties and how they relate to the political world around them. Moreover, it provides a useful theoretical foundation for the politically-informed analysis of the development, refinement and re-development of policy itself in a range of different areas. There is significant potential for further research drawing on this approach, particularly as it provides a means of interrogating very current processes of change.

8.2 Ideational development and political change

When Cameron was elected as leader in 2005, he faced considerable challenges. The most pressing of these was the Conservative legacy of electoral failure following New Labour's victory in 1997. As Chapter 5 discusses he was, if nothing else, granted a mandate for 'change' by his MPs and wider party members as a means of reversing this (Heppell, 2013; Heppell and Hill, 2009). Yet despite this, in many ways little has changed within Conservative Party thinking during Cameron's ten years as leader. Perceiving that its main opposition had become much more like the Conservative Party itself, as Cameron outlined early in his leadership (2006a), there was not much impetus for radical ideational change as in the period leading up to Thatcher's election. Some analyses of Cameron's Conservatives have emphasised the PCP's accommodation with liberalism (Garnett, 2013; Beech, 2015, 2011, 2009; Marquand, 2008). However, this thesis has demonstrated that in its perspectives on welfare – and the issues connected to this, including wider, fundamental questions around individuals, the state and society – Cameron's party has ultimately retained a socially conservative ideology that is redolent of Thatcherism. Change has not been as great as Conservative parliamentarians might have hoped or feared: neither, given the 2015 election result, does further significant ideological adjustment appear likely to be a priority for the Conservatives in the immediate future.

Chapter 1 of this thesis set out three central research questions that have been investigated in arriving at these broad conclusions. These are discussed, in turn, below.

What are the key concepts informing the Conservative Party's approach to welfare policy, and how are these decontested in relation to one another?

Chapter 4 identified the key concepts underpinning the Conservative Party's approach to welfare policy and discussed the Conservative decontestation of these, including how they relate to unfolding events and to each other in constructing an ideologically coherent theoretical approach to welfare provision. This was carried out as a basis for understanding how such concepts have been utilised in the pursuit of primary goals such as policy development in government, and constructing a winning electoral strategy, and as a means of drawing out possible implications for the future of the welfare system in Conservative thought. The four central concepts, identified from a thematic analysis of interview data and document analysis, are poverty, responsibility, compassion and fairness.

The overriding concern within the PCP in relation to this is the malign influence of an over-extended welfare state on individual morality, portrayed as a central failing of New Labour, even if Blair's party could be seen to have adapted in some ways to Thatcherite ideas. The approach to welfare is therefore built around reducing and ending dependency, which is framed as a cause of poverty. The concept of poverty is therefore decontested not as primarily income-based, as in conventional absolute or relative understandings, but as strongly behavioural and hence individualised.

Supporting this, the main solution to poverty is also focused on individuals, through the concept of (individual) responsibility. Whether through insufficient conditionality attached to the receipt of benefits, overly generous levels of payments for some claimants, or lack of deterrents against fraud or deception, the welfare state is widely perceived as having undermined responsibility. This is then viewed both as having undermined social cohesion, and as having contributed to economic difficulties. This reflects an intensification of the individualised and behavioural conception of poverty which leaves little room for addressing the structural factors that contribute to this. With the welfare system viewed in this way, the idea of a long-term, positive role for the state in providing support to working-age individuals and as a source of social cohesion is ideologically incompatible with elite contemporary Conservatism. This has significant implications for the longer-term trajectory of change that we might expect to see under a Conservative government. However, as Chapter 5 illustrates, political and economic contexts cannot be assumed to be fixed and Conservative Party does not have complete control over the circumstances in which it governs (although it will certainly have more such power as a single-party government). Strategic changes in the direction of policy should not be ruled out, particularly if the tide of public opinion on both welfare and wider public sector reforms begins to turn against the Conservatives.

Alongside this, however, it is clear that there is a concern within the Party regarding the perception of social breakdown as a threat to social order and how a 'welfare society' or 'Big Society' might be constructed. This is linked to the influence of the state: the main underlying idea is that as the welfare system has supported more and more people, the ties between people and civil society itself have been weakened. This is the area where Conservative ideological

innovation might most obviously have been directed. If Thatcherism in part represented a reaction against the collectivism of the post-war years and was largely concerned with economic decline, then there was little space left in which to really develop a 'conservative' conception of society.

Here Cameron's party have drawn in two further concepts – 'fairness' and 'compassion'. Compassion contains two key elements. These are an emphasis on mutual responsibilities to improve society, and a corresponding emphasis on 'expecting more' from people claiming state support. This is linked to responsibility and poverty: if the latter concept is understood as a consequence of a lack of the former and conceived as fundamentally unjust, then actions that push claimants towards taking further responsibility for themselves are justified on the basis that they will ultimately improve claimants' lives. Fairness is decontested as needs-based, linked to moral authoritarianism through an emphasis on desert within this. Fairness is linked closely to the individual responsibilities of people who require state support, further indicating the Conservative belief that current social problems can be resolved through correcting individual failings. This ties into thinking around the social benefits of a robust approach to welfare policy. What the Conservative decontestation of fairness does not require, linking it to a behavioural conception of poverty and disadvantage, is much action from those who are already 'independent'. Compassion, while framing independence and the state's withdrawal as key aims, also requires more of the wider society. In this way, it could cross over with a broader concept of social responsibility, accounting for some of the detail on the sort of society the Conservatives would like to see.

How do these concepts relate to the wider structure of conservatism? In particular, to what extent do they reflect, subvert or re-constitute the character of previous Conservative ideological traditions?

The Conservative Party in the post-war period has been associated with two broad traditions or schools of thought: One Nation, and Thatcherism. Contrasting with some of the literature on these, this thesis rejected the idea that these represent clearly separable manifestations of Conservatism or that either can be accurately described as an aberration from conservative ideology (Garnett, 2003; Gilmour and Garnett, 1997; Grey, 1995). The party has retained its commitment to a limited core based on social order, extra-human justification of this, and a

mirror-image characterisation of its opponents or 'enemies' (Freeden, 1996). The changes within Conservative ideas in the post-war years have occurred primarily because the identified 'enemy' has changed. Specifically, earlier One Nation Conservatives were willing to accommodate the state as a means of ensuring social order and as means of fulfilling the perceived moral imperative of helping the poor, with reference to a belief in hierarchy. As the PCP turned towards Thatcherism, the expansion of the state's functions over the post-war period began to be perceived as threatening the nation's order and prosperity. Thatcherism moved to advocate a limited state which was thus able to retain its authority. This necessitated a strengthened emphasis on individual morality and self-sufficiency in place of state support.

In relation to welfare policy and the issues surrounding it, speculation that Cameron's leadership could herald a retreat from Thatcherism has proven unfounded. One Nation Conservatism no longer offers a viable alternative within the PCP, with even Conservatives who profess to be more inclined towards One Nation expressing Thatcherite-influenced views of the welfare system and its effects on human behaviour. The main indicator of this which is present within each of the four concepts (poverty, responsibility, fairness and compassion) discussed above, is the clear presence of hostility towards the interventionist state. The identification of the state as the on-going 'enemy' forms a significant part of the strategically selective context within which the Conservative approach to welfare policy is shaped and implemented. It serves to shut down a range of alternative approaches to provision that might otherwise be compatible with at least some aspects of the concepts outlined above. The clearest example of this is the general lack of interest amongst Conservative MPs in a more contributory system which, while ostensibly satisfying concerns around responsibility and fairness and through rewarding responsible behaviour, would represent an unacceptable and costly extension of state support. The on-going identification of the interventionist state as the enemy therefore has a major impact on Conservative perceptions of both current social and economic problems and the courses of action to be pursued in amending these.

Overall therefore Cameron's party remains firmly within Thatcherite parameters, with its approach to welfare policy clearly reflecting this. This has exerted a considerable influence on the scope of positioning available to it. It is committed to a small, strong state, and to economic liberalism combined with a strongly moral approach to social issues, emphasising notions of

self-sufficiency similar to Letwin's 'vigorous virtues' (1992). These are presented as a counter to the area where Conservatives believe Labour *does* differ significantly from itself, in its use of state. Consequentially, while 'Cameronism' does not break away from Thatcherism, there does appear to have been some attempt to develop ideas within this ideological framework and thus re-constituting Thatcherite social policy. The Thatcher governments' main concern was the economy. Despite the onset of the recession, the contemporary Conservative Party has not attempted to develop an alternative approach to economic management, instead portraying the cause of this as too much state intervention rather than too little regulation. As a result, both in opposition and government, Cameron's party potentially had substantially more latitude to develop a Conservative approach to social policy, albeit within these limitations. Notably, this has applied around the idea of 'compassion' and a communitarian emphasis on responsibility, developed in the 'Big Society' theme that was centrally placed in the 2010 Conservative election campaign. However since 2010, the more society-focused aspects of these concepts have been downplayed. This reflects both the perceived reasons for the failure to win an outright electoral victory alongside a belief that reducing welfare spending offered a way of reducing the remit of the state in a way that was both financially and electorally appealing. As such while Conservative thinking early in the period under consideration suggested that Cameron's leadership might lead to a substantive, if recognisably Thatcherite approach to social issues such as poverty and disadvantage, the development of the approach has been less fruitful in government.

How have these ideas been utilised in practice, in relation to policy and the competing strategic motivations that impact on this, and what is the effect of this on the character of the Conservatives' conservatism?

It is relatively easy to talk about party change and to attempt to influence the image of a party in this way. However, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Cameron (and, indeed, many of his MPs) has been adamant that the Conservatives could not win back support purely through re-branding. Real action in support of these principles was, apparently, needed. Strategies are formulated with reference to the context in which the actor finds themselves, but this entails managing competing goals and expectations within a context which may change rapidly owing to factors outside of the PCP's control. The challenge, therefore, is putting ideas and the

strategies that emerge from specific contexts, responding to particular challenges and events, into practice within further contexts that are likely to have changed considerably. Ultimately the way that these ideas are implemented within the 'real life' context of policy and electoral competition shapes the material circumstances within which further strategies are constructed, both within the Conservative Party and beyond. This illustrates the proposed dialectical relationship between ideas and material circumstances that is proposed in the SRA. Therefore analysing not only intent but also outcomes is essential to fully conceptualising the process of ideological chang and understanding the future implications of this.

The conclusions outlined above indicate that change at the core of Conservatism has not occurred under Cameron. As a result, policy development continues within a Thatcherite framework. However, this does not preclude the possibility of ideational development. By considering how the concepts underpinning Cameron's Conservatives' approach to welfare have been utilised and developed between 2005 and 2015, we have a means of establishing the extent to which substantive ideational development has occurred. Alongside this, it is possible to reflect on the sorts of variables that influence the process of strategic learning and how these impact on the transformation of context within which future strategies are constructed (Hay, 2002: 131)

Electoral considerations must be understood as an important influence on the development of policy. Prior to 2010 welfare was not a stand-alone electoral issue (although this does not mean that policy ideas were not in evidence) but formed a part of a wider narrative around the 'Big Society', which is concerned primarily with concepts of responsibility and compassion. Since 2010 welfare policy has been a central part of the Conservative Party's electoral positioning, offering a concrete illustration of how the party is seeking to implement concepts of responsibility, fairness and compassion as a means of reducing poverty and dependency. Overall, the PCP's offer to potential voters has been strongly based around fairness. Owing to an unwillingness to further extend state support to those who 'do the right thing' (for example, through maintaining the value of in-work benefits), this has had to focus on showing how the party will prevent people who do not engage with the system responsibility from accessing support. Where compassion has been deployed, it has been in the form of a 'tough' or active approach to ensuring compliance. Concurrently there has been little emphasis on the responsibilities of those who are in work towards those who are not, suggesting that these people

have fulfilled their side of the bargain. The responsibility to build a 'stronger' society and to ensure fairness is very much placed on claimants themselves.

This has also been connected to the economic narrative and the need to cut spending, with welfare spending presented as 'waste' because it supports dependency. In turn, this links to a more policy-focused dimension regarding how dependency might be reduced. While there is evidence of a longer-term approach to reducing dependency *and* cutting spending in which the state plays a transitional role, as discussed in Chapter 6, there is also another approach within the PCP that frames cutting spending immediately as a catalyst for reducing dependency. As illustrated in Chapters 6 and 7, the way that the Conservatives have implemented these two strategies means they are frequently at cross-purposes to one another.

Electorally, a lack of knowledge about the sources of welfare spending and hostility towards benefit claimants contributes to a context in which there is an incentive to implement policies that achieve 'quick wins' in this area. This shorter-term approach provides an effective match with the Conservative electoral use of welfare policy through providing a number of clear illustrations of how the party is seeking to remove support from claimants who are framed as 'undeserving'. Mirroring the electoral strategy, more sophisticated concepts of how a stronger society could develop are absent in this approach, which heavily emphasises retrenchment but has less to say about what might replace welfare support other than 'self-reliance'. Cameron's Conservative Party had much to say in the earlier years of his leadership about how values of compassion and responsibility could contribute to building a stronger society. However, within the confines of its own economic and electoral considerations and ideological perspectives on the welfare state, the party leadership has struggled to come up with a workable means of developing these. Instead the more progressive elements of PCP conservatism have been pushed outwards in favour of a narrow individualism.

It is also possible to relate these developments to the shift between being in opposition, and in government. The change in tone and in the ideas emphasised between the two periods is quite striking. This could be interpreted as the Conservatives playing a 'wolf in sheep's clothing' role prior to the election – and, indeed, this was how some voters interpreted the Big Society (Lindsey and Bulloch, 2013). Equally it might be a consequence of the economic downturn – but

the Big Society was the main theme of the 2010 election, suggesting there was some longevity beyond this. The ability to offer such an alternative vision of society in the 2005 to 2010 period was perhaps one of the few luxuries of remaining in opposition, affording the Conservatives some freedom to develop these ideas while insulated from the harsher realities of governing. However, such plans were really still in their infancy when the Conservatives moved into coalition in 2010. The return to government after thirteen years and the failure to win an outright electoral victory in 2010 introduced further pressures on the Conservatives to produce results in government. The often ambiguous and more risky nature of the newer ideas stood little chance of subverting more established, tried-and-tested Thatcherite perspectives that were widely accepted within the party itself. This points to some of the over-arching practical reasons for the overall lack of ideological development in this period. Having placed such emphasis on the undesirability of state intervention, viewing this as a key factor in their continued electoral support and a major underlying component of recent policy reforms, the Conservative Party will find it very difficult to break away from such ideological frameworks in the future. However as far as welfare is concerned, there does not currently appear to be much appetite for this to happen in any case.

This also suggests that the usage of ideas and the strategic processes through which they are mediated might be quite different between government and opposition parties, indicating that the possibility of substantive ideational development once in government might be quite limited. Although exploring the extent to which this is accurate more widely is beyond the scope of this thesis, such an observation certainly leaves open the possibility of building on these findings in future research. In turn, this has implications for the SRA-based framework as a means of understanding political change, suggesting that certain circumstances are more conducive to change (whether progressive or regressive) and providing an illustration of such processes and circumstances within a real-life context.

8.3 2015 and beyond

It is not yet possible to fully understand or predict the impact that decisions taken in this period will have on the trajectory of either conservatism or welfare policy in the more distant future. However the idea of strategically selective contexts does suggest that ideas and policy-making are to an extent path-dependent, and what has been illustrated here is the longevity of ideas and

ideological frames despite considerable changes in context. As such, even allowing for the unpredictable input of other actors and events, it is possible to make some informed reflections on the potential wider significance of this period.

Given the significance of the welfare reforms enacted during the 2010 to 2015 parliament and the importance of this to the Conservatives' electoral positioning, it is not surprising that the topic cropped up regularly in the Conservative campaign in 2015. In a major speech in February, three months before the election, Cameron set out what a Conservative majority government intended to implement. All four of the concepts underpinning the analysis in this thesis were present. Cameron pledged to 'tackle poverty' by 'breaking [the] cycle' of 'letting people in their teens and twenties sit at home all day slipping into depression and despair'. He alluded to the individual-focused aspects of a conservative conception of compassion, linking this with dependency and disputing the charge 'that welfare reform just hits the poorest, changing their lives for the worse'. He asked: 'is it compassionate to leave people on the dole for years with no incentive to get into work?'. He pledged to address the 'sense of deep unfairness' that saw 'hardworking young people…stuck living with their parents into their 30s while others got a council house straight out of school'. Finally, Cameron concluded, his party would 'build a more responsible country, where we back those who work hard and do the right thing' (quoted in le Duc, 2015).

The direction of travel taken with regard to policy in this parliament, combined with the policy changes that had already been announced ahead of the election, raise a number of questions regarding whether the Conservatives can achieve these ends. Viewed in terms of cutting financial support to claimants, there are several elements of Conservative plans that stand out. These include lowering the household benefit cap to £23,000 per year (and thereby extending its reach and its impact on income poverty), replacing JSA for young people under the age of 21 with a 'youth allowance' and requiring them to do community work after six months, while removing entitlement to housing benefit altogether (Cameron, quoted in le Duc, 2015). Universal Credit will continue to be rolled out. However, with a continued focus on austerity from the Treasury it seems unlikely that the taper will be altered, and other changes will continue to cut across this. Notably, in late 2014, following an announcement trailed at that year's Conservative conference, George Osborne announced that all working-age benefits (which had previously

been subject to the one per cent up-rating measure) would be frozen for two years from 2015 (Osborne, 2014b).

The trajectory of the incoming Conservative government therefore looks likely to continue to follow the path set by the Coalition, intensifying existing policies and approaches rather than diversifying in the immediate future. This means that the problems outlined in this thesis with regard to applying work incentives consistently, and incoherence within the overall approach, will continue to apply. The wider policy debate about the effectiveness of such measures in helping people into work (as opposed to simply moving them off the DWP's support) will also remain significant, as will concern over the wider impacts of such measures (for example, on child poverty, or other departments).

In continuing the focus on austerity in such a way that this will also impact on working-age benefit claimants who are in employment, the Conservatives have taken a strategic gamble. Reforms to working-age welfare support within the context of concerns over the cost of living could still end up alienating the lower-paid workers whose support the Conservatives need to win, and to retain. The resolution of this will be significant in determining whether or not the limited ideational change that Cameron's leadership has enacted will be enough to adequately address Conservative Party weaknesses on social issues.

8.4 Conclusion

This thesis opened with a simple question: what sort of 'conservatism' is embodied in the Conservative Party under David Cameron? Given the reforms enacted by New Labour, 'doing nothing' about social issues was not an option for the Conservatives in 2005. However, despite increased attention dedicated to these, what has come to pass since does not support the idea that Cameron might have moved the Conservatives away from Thatcherism, towards a new form of British Conservatism.

Elite Conservatives have identified two interconnected reasons for why individuals find themselves in poverty: either because they are discouraged from working by the present welfare system, or because the welfare state itself undermines individual responsibility and hence has a detrimental effect on social and individual morality. Frequently, as the preceding chapters have

shown, these are two sides of the same coin, falling back on a highly negative understanding of the impact of the welfare system on human behaviour. Two ideational strands and policy responses have developed in response to this, one emphasising rational decision-making in claimants and the other more recognisably conservative moral arguments. It is the former that is more ideologically innovative for the Conservatives; the latter falls back on highly moralistic, recognisably Thatcherite ideology. In identifying the dominance of the latter strand, this thesis questions the extent to which Cameron's leadership has resulted in ideological 'modernisation' for the Conservatives. Indeed, even attempts to develop a Conservative approach to society within a Thatcherite ideological frame have been rather stunted, with longer-term approaches not being implemented as effectively as they might have been thanks to a stronger conviction that immediate cuts are necessary both economically and morally.

This can be related to the change in strategic context between opposition and government. Having only belatedly accepted during their long spell in opposition that change was needed, the Conservatives were left with a comparatively short period of time in which to develop ideas in support of this. The modernisation agenda, with Cameron at its forefront, can be identified as integral to the upturn in Conservative support in 2010, but the ideas behind this and the policies to support it were neither well developed, nor widely embedded within the party at that point. Within a more pressurised governing context, the more innovative ideas associated with it were pushed to one side in favour of more familiar, reliable options – and, indeed, some Conservatives blamed the ambiguous character of these for the failure to secure an outright victory. In turn, the ideas emphasised and the decisions taken in government will have a significant future impact on both the shape of policy and the landscape of British politics itself, and on the options that appear realistically available to a future Conservative Party. Conservative 'modernisation' has, it seems, resulted in an unexpected victory for social conservatism.

Appendix 1
MP interviewee biographies

Conservatives

Stuart Andrew MP

Stuart Andrew was elected MP for Pudsey in 2010, and was appointed as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Rt. Hon. Francis Maude MP, a leading figure in Conservative 'modernisation' in the Cabinet Office in 2012. He has a background in voluntary sector work, and identifies as a 'One Nation' Conservative.

Robert Buckland MP

Robert Buckland was elected to Parliament in 2010. He professes to be a 'One Nation' Tory and is a vice-president of the Tory Reform Group, which seeks to represent One Nation Conservatism in parliament. He also served as Joint Secretary of the 1922 Committee between 2012 and 2014, and as Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism. He lists disability issues amongst his main political interests.

Guto Bebb MP

Guto Bebb was elected to Parliament in 2010. He served on the Public Bill Committee for the Welfare Reform Bill, and lists welfare reform amongst his main interests. He was a member of the Public Accounts Select Committee from 2012.

Conor Burns MP

Conor Burns was elected MP for Bournemouth South in 2010. He has served on several select committees, including Education and Administration, and was also briefly Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Northern Ireland office, resigning in order to vote against the House of Lords Reform Bill in 2012. He enjoyed a close friendship with Margaret Thatcher in the later years of her life.

Neil Carmichael MP

Neil Carmichael was elected to Parliament in 2010. He views himself as a 'One Nation' Conservative, and is a patron of the Tory Reform Group.

Philip Davies MP

Philip Davies entered Parliament as MP for Shipley in 2010. He served on the Executive of the 1922 Committee from 2006 to 2012. He has claimed to be a libertarian conservative, and is a council member of the Freedom Association, a centre-right libertarian think-tank. Davies was one of the most rebellious MPs in the 2010 – 2015 and has often courted controversy in his remarks to the House, for example when he suggested withdrawing the National Minimum Wage from disabled workers in 2011.

Sir Roger Gale MP

Sir Roger Gale was elected to Parliament in 1983, and represents North Thanet constituency. He was vice Chairman of the Conservative Party under Iain Duncan Smith's leadership, from 2001-2003. He has expressed considerable scepticism towards aspects of the Conservative 'modernisation' agenda, notably voicing strong reservations on same-sex marriage in 2013.

Kris Hopkins MP

Kris Hopkins was elected as MP for Keighley in 2010. He was appointed as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in 2013, with responsibilities including homelessness and housing. It was during this reshuffle that the post of housing minister was downgraded from a minister of state level post, prompting speculation that housing had become a lower priority issue for the Coalition. Housing is one of his key campaigning issues, and he also lists an interest in pensions.

Kwasi Kwarteng MP

Kwasi Kwarteng was elected as MP for Spelthorne in 2010. He is a member of the Conservative Free Enterprise Group and has published several policy-focused books, including *Britannia Unchained* (2012) and *After the Coalition* (2011) with fellow MPs Elizabeth Truss, Priti Patel, Chris Skidmore and Dominac Raab, both of which reflect on future options for welfare and social policy. Kwarteng served on the Work and Pensions Select Committee from 2013 to 2015.

Tim Loughton MP

Tim Loughton was elected MP for East Worthing and Shoreham in 1997. Since then he has held a number of positions in the Conservative Party, including Shadow Spokesperson for Health, Shadow minister for Children, and Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Education. He also served on the Health Select Committee from 2014.

John Penrose MP

John Penrose was elected to Parliament in 2005, representing Weston Super Mare. He served as Parliamentary Private Secretary to Oliver Letwin MP who was, at the time, responsible for leading David Cameron's policy review. He was a member of the Work and Pensions Select Committee between 2005 and 2009, was appointed as a Whip in 2013, and as Parliamentary Secretary to the Cabinet Office in 2015.

John Stevenson MP

John Stevenson was elected as MP for Carlisle in 2010. He is the Chairman of the Blue Collar Conservative group, founded in 2012, which seeks to improve the Conservative Party's appeal to blue-collar voters.

Gary Streeter MP

Gary Streeter was elected to Parliament in 1992. He took a strong interest in debates over the direction of Conservative social policy after Thatcher, and published an edited book entitled *There is Such a Thing as Society* in 2002 containing contributions from, amongst others, Iain Duncan Smith and Oliver Letwin.

Charles Walker MP

Charles Walker was elected as MP for Broxbourne in 2005, and has since served on several select committees. He has a strong interest in mental health, and has received awards and praise for his parliamentary work relating to this, from organisations including *The Spectator, The Guardian*, and the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

Labour

Dame Anne Begg MP

Dame Anne Begg was MP for Aberdeen South from 1997 to 2015. She served on the Scottish Affairs Committee from 1997 to 2001, and the Work and Pensions Select Committee from 2001 – 2015. She was elected as Chair of the Committee in 2010.

The Rt. Hon. Frank Field MP

Frank Field has been the MP for Birkenhead since 1979. He has published on welfare reform and surrounding issues throughout his parliamentary career. He was a Minister for Welfare Reform under Tony Blair in 1997, but resigned the post after one year. In 2010, he was appointed as a 'poverty czar' by David Cameron, and led the Coalition's *Review of Poverty and Life Chances.*

Sheila Gilmore MP

Sheila Gilmore was MP for Edinburgh East in the 2010 to 2015 parliament. She has served on the Work and Pensions Select Committee since 2011.

Glenda Jackson MP

Glenda Jackson was elected as MP for Hampstead and Kilburn in 1992, and will stand down at the 2015 general election. She served on the Work and Pensions Select Committee between 2010 and 2015.

Teresa Pearce MP

Teresa Pearce MP was elected to Parliament in 2010, representing Erith and Thamesmead. She was a member of the Work and Pensions Selection Committee from 2010, and the Treasury Committee from 2011.

Appendix 2

Sample interview schedules

MPs

General

1. Thinking back to 2010, what were the main issues and challenges in the area of welfare policy?
   - What ideas did you have on how to address these?
   - What resources did you have at your disposal to address these/how did you use them?
2. Would you have identified these same issues at an earlier point in time – for example, 2005?

New Labour

3. To what extent would you say your approach to welfare policy differs from that of the New Labour years? What are the differences and similarities?

Strategy

4. Where do you feel welfare policy sits within the Conservative Party's broader electoral strategy/'modernisation'?
   - Has this changed since 2005? If so how and why?
5. Would you say that the Conservative party is still trying to develop a form of 'compassionate' Conservatism?
6. Where do you feel David Cameron's approach to welfare sits in relation to other post-war Conservative traditions?
7. Do you feel that being in Coalition has significantly impacted on Conservative plans for welfare reform?
   - If so – how and why? If not, why not?

Think-tanks

8. What are your views on the proposals for welfare policy put forward by the Centre for Social Justice?

9. How influential do you feel that the CSJ has been in developing the Conservative party's welfare policies?
    - In what ways has it been influential (in terms of general ideas, or more direct influence on specific policies)?
10. How do you feel that the recommendations put forward by the CSJ have translated into policy? Did you feel that the recommendations could be implemented?
11. What do you see as the main differences between the policy recommendations and the policy outcomes? How would you explain these differences?
12. Are there any other groups that you would say have been particularly influential? Which ones and how?

The financial crisis

13. Do you think that the financial crisis affected the Conservative party's approach to welfare? How and why?
14. How consistent do you think that the approach has been between 2005 and now?

The welfare state (future of)

15. In terms of outcomes, what do you think is indicative of effective welfare policy?
16. Ideally, what would you like the Coalition to have achieved in relation to welfare by the next election?
17. What do you think will be the main issues in the area of welfare policy over the remainder of this parliament?

Civil servants

General

1. What do you see as the main policy issues that the DWP has been trying to address since 2010? What are the key challenges associated with these?
2. Have these issues changed since 2005? If so, how?
    - Prompt on spending: was the level of welfare spending a concern before the financial crisis?

New Labour, Coalition, civil service

3. What do you think are the main similarities and differences between New Labour and the Conservatives/Coalition in terms of policy priorities?
4. What about in terms of how policy is made? Has the role of outside groups changed, for example?
    - The Centre for Social Justice has been consistently identified as a key influence on IDS. Would you agree?
    - How usual/unusual is this kind of relationship, and do you feel it has influenced the DWP's agenda?
5. How would you characterise the relationship between the DWP and the Treasury under the Coalition? Has this changed since New Labour were in power?
6. Can you describe the relationship between the civil service and Conservative ministers in this policy area?
    - Prompt on Treasury/DWP 'tensions'.
7. How has working with a Coalition as opposed to a single-party government impacted on your work?
    - Prompt on Coalition relations.

The financial crisis

8. Do you feel that the financial crisis has had a significant impact on your Department's operations? If so, how and in what way?
    - Prompt on financial crisis versus change of government as a driver of change.
9. How far is the reform programme shaped by the need to cut spending?

10. What are the key challenges of combining welfare reform with spending cuts, and how effectively have these been addressed?

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