

AN EVALUATION OF JRF'S MINIMUM INCOME STANDARDS PROGRAMME

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Helen Barnes and Heather Rolfe

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An Evaluation of JRF's Minimum Income Standards Programme

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Abstract

This report independently evaluates Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Minimum Income Standards (MIS) programme 2008 to date.

It concludes:

- MIS to be well known, highly valued and used amongst key stakeholders;
- Website, email marketing and bulletins to be the most effective means of engaging stakeholder audiences of MIS, as well as traditional and social media;
- There is a variety of views on its influence, impacts and subsequent achievements. The most specific and concrete impact of MIS is its contribution to the analytic base and hence the success of the Living Wage campaign.

This report recommends the programme:

- improves how it tailors communications to different audiences, for example by offering analyses of greater or lesser depth depending on the use made of MIS;
- ensures greater transparency in its methodology;
- directly and pre-emptively addresses or clarifies the nature of 'controversial' basket items;
- explores the possibility of introducing a "destitution" or "basic decency" standard;
- makes more use of descriptions of the "lived experiences" of lower income families in presenting the findings of the programme.

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Executive Summary

This report presents findings from an independent evaluation of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's (JRF) Minimum Income Standards programme from 2008 to date.

The original intent of the programme was to inform, challenge and enhance debate by providing policy makers, practitioners and other key stakeholders with an annual benchmark of how much income households need to afford a minimum socially acceptable standard of living in the UK. Over the medium term, the programme has aimed to affirm MIS as a credible benchmark, using targeted dissemination and timely analysis to engage with stakeholders. As such, the programme's objective has been to promote the use of MIS in stakeholders' campaigning, advocacy and research work, as well as to influence politicians and policymakers to incorporate MIS into their decision-making. The ultimate goal of the programme has, and continues to be, to help support an adequate income for all, beginning with those furthest below the Minimum Income Standard. This evaluation assesses how far these objectives have been achieved.

The evaluation took place between February and April 2016, and comprised four strands of activity:

- Telephone interviews with 36 key stakeholders;
- Discussions with the current JRF programme manager, as well as interviews with key internal and external staff involved in the past, present and potential future design, implementation and dissemination of MIS;
- A review of media coverage, website performance and social media activity;
- Email survey of UK-based charitable organisations.

The evaluation focuses on six key stakeholder groups:

- academics and think-tanks;
- politicians and policymakers;
- employers and intermediary organisations;
- poverty and other advocacy and/or campaigning organisations;
- charities, pensions funds and grant makers;
- media and wider commentators.

The key findings of the evaluation are as follows:

Media and Communication

- **Media:** Media coverage of MIS' various outputs has varied significantly from year to year, with MIS main reports typically gathering the most attention. Media coverage has clustered around report launch dates, with straight news reporting making up the majority of coverage (totalling 587 references between 2009 and 2015). Despite media attention being dependent on a number of external forces, MIS has consistently achieved good coverage, and has been frequently and consistently featured in a number of national newspapers, as well as on mainstream broadcast news outlets.
- **Website:** Data provided by the JRF indicate that MIS generally performs well in terms of overall page visits and downloads. MIS has consistently been in JRF's top 5 in terms of report downloads. Full reports have consistently outperformed summaries in terms of downloads. Visits to MIS' topic page and to the Minimum Income Calculator website increased sharply

between 2009 and 2013, but then experienced significant decline in website traffic in 2014, which has continued through into 2015.

- **Social Media:** The impact of JRF's recent proactive media strategies is largely unknown because of difficulties in collecting and analysing meaningful historic social media data. Internal analyses provided by the JRF provide positive signs, indicating an improving conversion rate from Twitter, particularly in terms of summary report downloads.
- **Academic and Parliamentary Citations:** Academic citations of MIS have varied significantly across the programme's different outputs; MIS main reports generally have performed well, albeit with some variation over time. There have been 19 separate references to MIS in parliamentary debate between 2010 and 2015. These references to MIS have largely centred on discussions regarding welfare reform, but have also featured in debates surrounding the Living Wage, rural communities and asylum support.

Awareness of MIS

- The evaluation identifies high general awareness of MIS and its main reports across all stakeholder groups. The vast majority of participants demonstrated good knowledge of the programme, and were able to describe its purpose, development and main findings. Knowledge of MIS' spin-off projects and critical policy accounts was much more variable. Stakeholders who tended to have better awareness of MIS spin-off reports were typically from the academic or campaigning stakeholder groups, and tended to be those who were already engaged in their focus.
- Stakeholder knowledge of the details behind the programme was highly variable. Those with a closer working relationship with MIS recounted an impressive level of detail, and tended to be from academic or research institutions, campaigning organisations or central government, and tended to be involved in analytic work.
- Email marketing and bulletins from the JRF were consistently identified by participants across all stakeholder groups as their main source of information. They identified few alternative channels of communication, although launch events were mentioned by some campaigning organisations and parliamentarians. Charitable organisations had also gained information about MIS through conference events. Participants' own use of social media heavily determined their awareness of JRF's recent social media strategy. Low levels of awareness of JRF's social media strategy reflected their own limited involvement with this form of communication. At the same time, participants recognised the importance of its role in raising public awareness of MIS and saw further potential for coverage, in particular through human interest stories.
- While the majority of stakeholder groups were content with the current nature and level of MIS communication, stakeholders within the media indicated room for improvement and wanted to see the JRF build a closer relationship.
- Many participants expressed a reliance on JRF's summaries of MIS, often due to the length of main MIS reports. Stakeholder groups expressed varied preferences over the length and detail contained in MIS reports. For some, methodological issues and the analytic base for MIS are key; for other, broader and policy-focused audiences, a more broad-brush approach was seen as more appropriate.

Engagement with MIS

- Overall, stakeholders described variable engagement with MIS, with clear dividing lines between those who were currently engaged in research, campaigning or grant-making and those who were not. Stakeholders from academic and campaigning organisations typically described using MIS as a benchmark, as a persuasive tool to use at conferences and as evidence to committees. Some also described making use of the high-level of detail provided by MIS.
- Parliamentarians, civil servants and local authorities were engaging with the programme though often to a lesser extent than other stakeholders. The programme was typically described as something in the background, and tended to be identified as one of many measures that informed general thinking.

Perceptions of the Minimum Income Standards Programme

- MIS, overall, was recognised as a highly-respected programme. It was described by the vast majority of participants as valuable to debate, with many believing its methodology is robust and widely accepted.
- A small number of participants, across a variety of stakeholder groups, questioned the transparency of the programme, feeling more information should be readily available on its methodology in order to enable stakeholders to make their own judgements of the programme's worth. This was particularly true for some of the programmes' qualitative elements, where participants described a need for clarification on the extent of within-group consensus
- Overall, stakeholders described the relationship between JRF and CRSP in positive terms, in combining credibility with academic prestige. Awareness of CRSP, however, varied widely between different stakeholder groups.

Influence and Impact of Minimum Income Standards Programme

- Stakeholders consistently accredited MIS with having stimulated and informed social policy debate, frequently describing the programme's positive contributions in the way in which it has conceptualised and operationalised income inadequacy in the UK.
- Many participants questioned the extent to which the programme had been able to bring about actual policy or political change. A number of campaigning organisations said MIS had helped bring about specific policy changes, such as the recent reversal of cuts to tax credits and consideration of childcare costs in Universal credit. This is a notable achievement for MIS given that JRF has produced only three pieces of policy analysis relating to the programme. While the vast majority of participants perceived MIS' role to be at best in providing a useful background and context to changing policy, its impact suggests scope for further influence on policy making.
- Campaigning organisations explained MIS' perceived limited political and policy influence with reference to the recent unfavourable social, economic and political climate. A

minority, across, stakeholder groups, suggested MIS has limited credibility and traction with politicians and policy-makers. Counter to this, interviews with politicians and policy makers indicated high acceptance of the programme as a contribution to the debate, but described a need for MIS to better signpost in terms of where it stood in relation to poverty issues and other measurements. Politicians and policy-makers from Wales and Scotland described the programme's influence much more positively. These participants, however, said they would like to see more engagement by JRF/CRSP with senior ministers in order to help develop solutions to policy problems.

- While some campaigning organisations perceived MIS to have real influence in terms of getting the issue of living standards on low incomes in the public eye, some also reflected there could be drawbacks in its challenge to public beliefs around poverty. In particular, many stakeholders referenced specific basket items that continued to be an easy focus of opposition, for example holidays and mobile phones, weakening the programme's influence.

Direct use of MIS

- MIS' ability to improve the living standards of the unemployed (i.e. through increasing benefit levels) was often described as limited. However, participants often described the programme as making a significant contribution to tackling in-work poverty through the Living Wage. MIS' contribution to the Living Wage campaign was identified as a key achievement of the programme.
- The programme was also seen to have increased standards of living through acting as a threshold for grant-giving among charitable organisations. Many of the charitable organisations described using or planning to use annual MIS figures to set the broad parameters of their services users' financial eligibility.

The Future of the Minimum Income Standards Programme

- The vast majority of stakeholders were supportive of the continuation of MIS, for two key reasons. A number of stakeholders, across groups, considered it crucial that MIS continue to be rebased and reassessed for it to provide an in-time point of comparison to developments within social policy, and particularly within welfare reform. Second, it was felt that MIS was essential in setting rates for the Living Wage. The campaign's recent success made it particularly undesirable to discontinue MIS. Stakeholders identified a real potential reputational risk to JRF were MIS not to be granted on-going funding and support.
- There was a strong consensus across stakeholder groups that however useful it is now, in the longer term, it is appropriate for JRF to review MIS to ensure that it is not subject to "diminishing returns". Many stressed that the programme should not continue in the longer term out of inertia, but rather JRF should consider the programme's value for money, and whether it could achieve more with different kinds of investments.
- Stakeholders suggested several areas for future development. In particular, many suggested MIS might integrate some kind of minimal standard of destitution or "basic decency". Stakeholders also provided several suggestions for the type of spin-offs MIS could develop in future, and saw greater potential in MIS being applied at international scale. This, however, was frequently caveated by a potential tension between MIS carrying out more detailed,

targeted analysis, and the programme being able to maintain its coherency and consistency in providing a benchmark over time.

- Many participants expressed a view that there should be more narrative and fewer statistics in communications about MIS, in order to convey more of the lived experience of life on a low income. Stakeholders, across groups, described this potential lever for change, by engaging the general public as well as strengthening the policy argument.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- There is a high level of general awareness of MIS. There is somewhat less awareness of the full range of MIS outputs. Our findings indicate that JRF could tailor its communications more closely to the needs of different key audiences. For some, methodological issues and the analytic base for MIS, as covered by reports, are key; for other, broader and policy-focused audiences, a more broad-brush approach, such as through shorter bulletins, may be more useful.
- Due to some misconceptions and concerns regarding MIS' methodology, the programme should ensure greater transparency on its methods, particularly the qualitative element.
- In the light of some controversy consistently surrounding particular basket items, MIS should directly address or clarify these in order to promote the programme's influence.
- In order to promote better public awareness and further elicit influence on policy and practice, the JRF should use more descriptions of the "lived experiences" of lower income families in presenting the findings of the programme.
- In light of stakeholder consensus on the benefits of continuation of MIS, the programme should seek to continue to develop, as long as it is of value. In particular the programme should explore the possibility of introducing a "destitution" or "basic decency" standard. This does bring the risk of detracting from MIS' key messages; however, the MIS methodology and approach is well suited to developing such a metric, and could make a major contribution to aspects of the public debate at present. JRF has very recently published a report on destitution¹ which addresses some of these issues, including how it should be defined. This is likely to help meet this particular need identified by some stakeholders.

¹ Fitzpatrick, S., Bramley, G., Sosenko, F., Blenkinsopp, J., Johnsen, S., Littlewood, M., Netto, G. And Watts, B. (2016) Destitution in the UK, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk

1. Introduction

This report presents findings from an independent evaluation of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's (JRF) Minimum Income Standards (MIS) programme, conducted in partnership with the Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP) at the University of Loughborough. The evaluation was commissioned by the JRF to provide an overall assessment of the influence and impact of MIS from 2008 to date, with the aim of making recommendations which could inform how the programme might be developed for the future.

In the introduction, we provide an overview of the programme, outlining its origins, intended outcomes, development and dissemination. We then outline the focus, aims and methods of our evaluation, before outlining the structure of the report.

Overview of the JRF's Minimum Income Standards programme

Minimum Income Standards (MIS) is an ongoing research programme funded by the JRF and conducted in partnership with CRSP that produces annual figures on how much income households need to afford a minimum socially acceptable standard of living in the UK. First developed in 2008, the programme uses a consensual method, which blends expert advice with detailed public consultation. The programme has run continuously ever since, and is routinely updated through a process of rebasing, uprating and reviewing to provide up-to-date annual baseline budgets and reports (Appendix One).

In addition to these annual reports, the programme has also produced several other outputs. These include:

- Annual quantitative analyses of the number of households living below MIS (since 2013).
- Occasional studies on how minimum budgets vary in different places and for different groups. Examples include the development of minimum income standards for Northern Ireland (Smith et al. 2009), rural households (Smith et al. 2010), and older pensioners (Hartfree et al. 2013), as well as a report on reducing the environmental impact of MIS (Druckman et al. 2011).
- Critical policy analysis reports, which have addressed key policy questions. Examples include whether there is a 'couple penalty' in the tax and benefit system (Hirsch 2012), whether Universal Credit enables households to reach a minimum income standard (Hirsch and Hartfree 2013), and what impact the 2015 Summer Budget will have on living standards in 2020 (Hirsch 2015).

Since 2011, MIS has also provided the methodology behind annual calculations for the Living Wage outside London, which are used by the Living Wage Foundation to accredit Living Wage Employers¹. JRF has also produced a website to provide a minimum income calculator tool, aimed at individuals who might want to see how their incomes compare with wider social norms (<http://minimumincome.org>).

The original intent of the programme was to offer policymakers, practitioners and other key stakeholders the opportunity to not only incorporate MIS into their decision-making, but also to improve understanding of how changes in society have altered views on what constitutes a minimum socially acceptable standard of living. The programme has therefore been intended to complement, rather than replace or supplant, official poverty statistics such as the international standard of 60% of median equivalised income, in order to provide a benchmark from which to inform, challenge and enhance debate.

The aim of MIS, set out in the JRF's theory of change, is to continue to affirm MIS as a benchmark for policymakers and practitioners and to influence others in order to promote the use of MIS in their campaigning, advocacy and research and therefore help support an adequate income for all, beginning with those furthest below the Minimum Income Standard. As such, the JRF currently produces annual Minimum Income Standard figures, and uses them to influence policy, practice and debate through targeted dissemination and timely analysis.

Aims and scope of the evaluation

Our independent evaluation aimed to provide an overall assessment of the influence and impact of JRF's Minimum Income Standards programme. More specifically, it aimed to assess:

- awareness of MIS;
- engagement with MIS, including how the minimum income standard and/or related messages are being taken up and used in different contexts;
- the credibility and relevance of MIS;
- the influence and impact of MIS;
- how MIS is being used as a direct tool to improve living standards.

The evaluation focused on six key stakeholder groups:

- academics and think tanks;
- politicians and policymakers;
- employers and intermediary organisations;
- poverty and other advocacy and/or campaigning organisations;
- charities, pension funds and grant makers;
- media and wider commentators.

In line with the remit of the JRF to reach policymakers and practitioners across the UK, the evaluation incorporated the views of stakeholders from across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Design and methods

The evaluation took place between February and April 2016. Using qualitative methods, it comprised four strands of activity:

- Discussions with the current JRF programme manager, as well as interviews with key internal and external staff involved in the past, present and potential future design, implementation and dissemination of MIS.
- A review of media coverage, website performance and social media activity, including:
 - Media coverage from July 2008 to March 2016, focusing on MIS report release dates
 - Performance of the programme on the JRF website (including publication page visits, report downloads, summary downloads, work area/topic page visits, Minimum Income Calculator website visits)
 - Performance of social media in raising the profile of MIS
- Telephone interviews with 36 key stakeholders using contact details provided by the JRF and supplemented by the evaluation team. Purposive sampling ensured sufficient stakeholder and geographical coverage. Participants were guaranteed anonymity to encourage open discussion. A full sampling table is provided in Appendix Two.

- A short email survey of UK-based charitable organisations, identified through the Association of Charitable Organisations (www.aco.uk.net/content/MembersIndex.aspx). A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix Three. Participating organisations have been anonymised.

Although not completely comprehensive or exhaustive, the different strands of activity contained within this evaluation were designed to provide a basis for making an assessment of how far the MIS programme is known, used and valued among the identified stakeholder groups. It is important, however, to acknowledge the evaluation's limitations, both in terms of its methodologies and sample sizes, which do not allow for quantitative assessment of MIS's success.

It is also important to acknowledge that the results of this evaluation are inevitably prone to some self-selection bias, as some potential respondents declined to participate on the grounds that they lacked sufficient knowledge of MIS. Although we cannot judge the extent of this, declined invitations were not concentrated within any particular stakeholder group.

The findings of the evaluation are subject to the inherent difficulties of attributing causation to assessments of the influence and impact of MIS. We do not claim our evaluation provides a formal impact analysis of JRF's Minimum Income Standards programme. However, it does gather and synthesise a sufficient amount of evidence to produce a reliable summary of what can in practice be known about its influence and impact.

Structure of the report

We have introduced the JRF's Minimum Income Standards programme and the aims and scope of the evaluation.

Section 2 provides an overview of MIS media coverage, website performance and social media activity.

Section 3 explores stakeholder awareness and engagement with MIS. We provide a summary of the quantity and quality of stakeholder awareness, critically discussing variations between different stakeholder groups as well as between the programme's different elements and outputs.

Section 4 explores perceptions of MIS. We present findings on the programme's reputation and views on its methodological underpinnings and credibility.

Section 5 presents stakeholder views on the influence, impact and subsequent achievements of MIS, critically discussing the relative salience and importance of these among different stakeholder groups, as well as within different parts of the UK.

Section 6 explains direct uses of MIS. This section outlines the ways in which MIS is being used to improve living standards, drawing conclusions on the extent to which the programme is being used to achieve adequate incomes.

Section 7 presents views on the future of MIS. It outlines different stakeholder groups' views on JRF's future investment in the programme, as well as providing specific examples of how the programme might be developed for the future.

Finally, Section 8 provides a summary of findings, critically discussing their value within the parameters of the evaluation's research design. It then presents some recommendations for the continuation of the programme.

2. Media and communications

This section provides an analysis of media coverage, website performance and social media activity surrounding MIS.

Media coverage

Analysis of media coverage collated and analysed by the evaluation team shows 587 non-unique references² to JRF's MIS in the national, trade and regional press, journals, weeklies and TV and radio transcripts between July 2008 and March 2016³ (see Appendix Four). As shown in Graph One, media coverage of MIS' main reports (2009 to 2015⁴) has varied significantly from year to year. There was an upward trend until 2012, a significant spike in 2013, a dramatic reduction in 2014, and then a partial resurgence in 2015. Media coverage of MIS' main reports has ranged from a minimum of 13 non-unique references in 2014, to a maximum of 248 in 2013, with more intense periods including large volumes of web coverage, facilitated by publication by multimedia news agencies.

Variation in media coverage resulted to some extent from the rebasing, uprating and reviewing schedule of MIS and related variation in the content of the annual MIS reports. For example, the years when MIS was only updated by inflation resulted in the loss of social affairs media content, such as stories about what is included in the 'basket'. Coverage was also dependent not only on the MIS reports' inherent 'newsworthiness', but also on the extent of competition from other stories in the news agenda, as well as the timing of the reports. For example, as JRF internal analyses conclude, MIS' 2013 spike in media coverage was explained by the high profile of the cost of living in the political agenda, as well as the specific attention given to the critical analysis report *Does Universal Credit enable households to reach a minimum income standard?* (Hirsch and Hartfree 2013)

Coverage of other MIS reports has also been variable. MIS' annual quantitative analyses of the number of households living below MIS (since 2013) attracted very little coverage in 2013 and 2014, but it significantly increased in 2015 and 2016 (Appendix Four). MIS spin-off projects attracted relatively little media coverage (Appendix Four). *A minimum income standard for rural households* (Smith et al. 2010) attracted the most, achieving 15 non-unique references. Coverage of critical analysis reports has also been variable. *'Does Universal Credit enable households to reach a minimum income standard?'* (Hirsch and Hartfree 2013) and ['Will the 2015 Summer Budget improve living standards in 2020?'](#) (Hirsch 2015) achieved a great deal of coverage (241 and 267 non-unique references respectively). However, *'Does the tax benefit system create a 'couple penalty?'* (Hirsch 2012) did not (3 non-unique references).

As might be expected, press coverage of all MIS reports has tended to be clustered around report launch days. In line with this, media coverage of MIS has tended to be short lived, often lasting only a few days. Circulation data shows a very high level of potential reach. Such information, however, is far from robust, providing only an indication of potential readership. Although robust readership data would have been useful in providing an indication of the success of the programme in terms of generating awareness, it is the quality of coverage that more efficiently represents the potential reach of MIS.

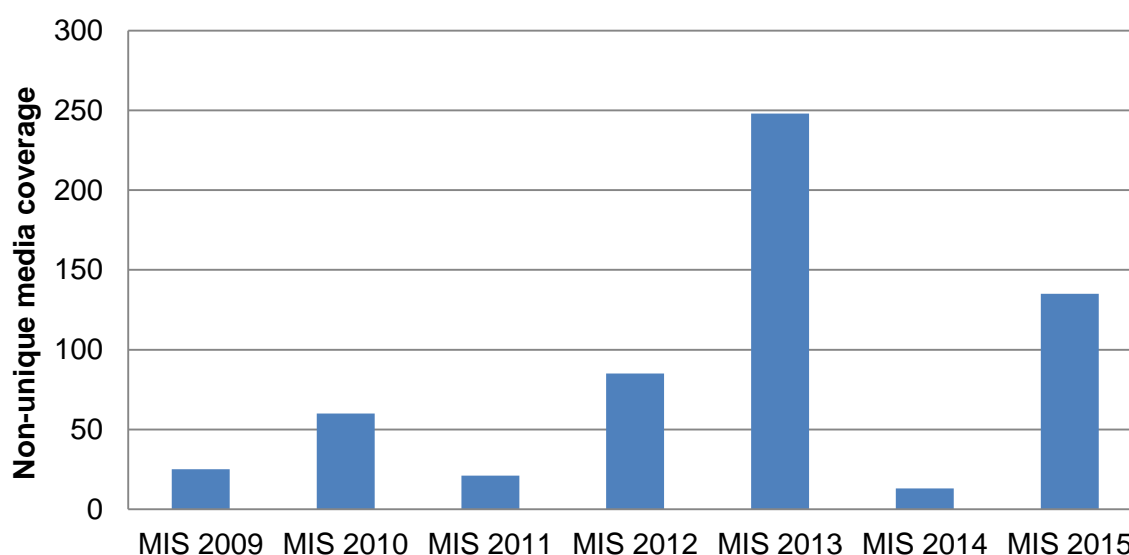
The limited timeframe of the evaluation meant it was not possible to conduct an in-depth analysis of the nature and quality of MIS media coverage. Internal communications evaluations provided by the JRF for MIS main reports (2010 – 2015), however, provide useful insight. These evaluations identified that while the quantity of MIS main report coverage varied from year to year, the programme continues to consistently feature in a number of national newspapers, as well as on mainstream broadcast outlets such as the BBC, Radio 2, Radio 4, Sky News Radio and LBC Radio. National coverage was identified as particularly valuable, acting as a significant catalyst to large amounts of

follow-up coverage, as well as instant traffic and interest on the JRF website and social media channels (see Section 3).

In addition to this, JRF internal evaluations identified the tendency for news coverage to provide an overview of MIS reports, rather than focus on particular elements or provide a particularly critical account. There have been, however, some notable exceptions. This includes the moderate coverage achieved in 2010 by the specific finding that a computer and internet connection were deemed necessary for all working-age households ([The Guardian 2010](#)).

Interviews with JRF staff indicate a significant amount of investment in devising and executing plans for communicating MIS. As such, although levels of media coverage were described as not always correlating with the amount of effort put in, this type of attention was identified as only one part of the JRF's plans for communication. For example, the JRF make significant investment in digital marketing, as well as public affairs activity. These are discussed throughout the report.

Graph One: Media coverage of minimum income standards (2009 to 2015)



Source: www.meltwater.com/uk/

Search terms: (("joseph rowntree") or ("JRF")) and (("minimum income standard")).

Searches were conducted to identify media coverage two weeks after each JRF MIS report was released. A full list of searched reports can be found in Appendix Four.

Website performance

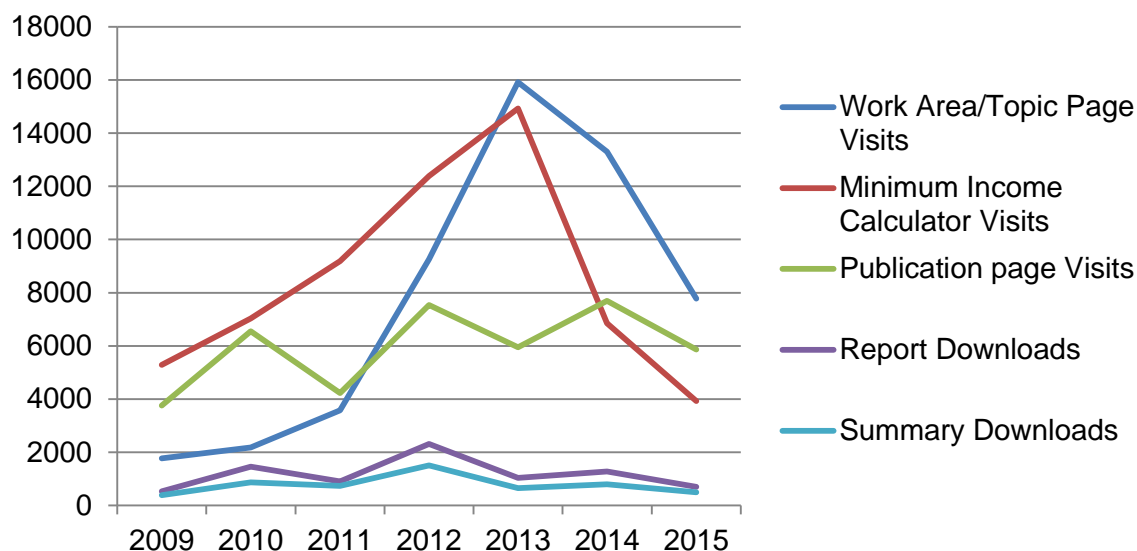
Analyses of visitors to the JRF's website (collated and analysed internally by the JRF) offer a broad indication of the total number of people reached by the MIS programme.

Data provided by the JRF indicate MIS generally performs well in terms of overall page visits and downloads (Graph 2). In particular, visits to MIS' topic page and to the Minimum Income Calculator website increased sharply between 2009 and 2013. It is, however, unclear whether this growth reflects increased interest in the programme or simply the growth of the internet and easier access, particularly through mobile and tablet devices and social media. The JRF's internal analyses, however, identified a significant decline in website traffic in 2014, which continued into 2015 (Graph 2).

Publication page visits have generally increased overtime. This provides some evidence of a consistent and growing baseline readership. Full reports have consistently outperformed summaries in terms of downloads. Report summaries are, however, provided on MIS' webpage, arguably

reducing the need to download. Summaries provided by the JRF suggest MIS to be one of its most popular reports, with the MIS main reports (2009-2015) consistently featuring in the JRF's top 5 downloads.

Graph 2: Minimum Income Standard website performance (2009 to 2015)

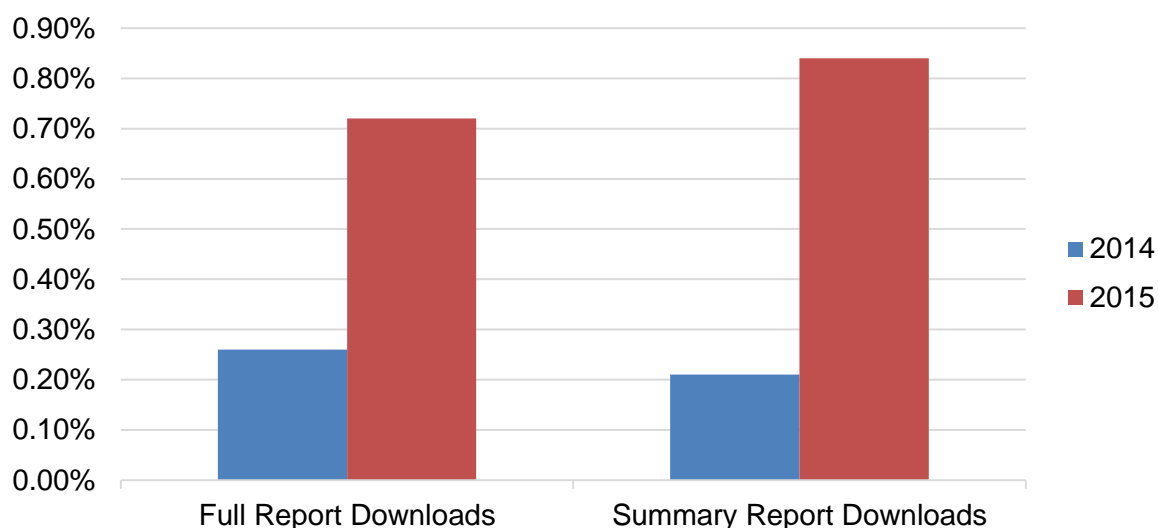


Social media

As well as publishing formal reports, the JRF MIS team has also sought to stimulate wider engagement through the use of social media. In particular, the JRF adopted a proactive social media strategy between 2013 and 2015, which focused on the use of interactive info-graphics to highlight important points, spread key messages and drive people towards reports on the JRF's website.

Due to the difficulties of collecting and analysing meaningful, historic social media data, the impact of the JRF's recent strategy on raising awareness of MIS is largely unknown. Internal analyses provided by the JRF, however, do indicate an improving conversion rate from Twitter during this time, particularly in terms of summary report downloads (Graph 3).

Graph 3: Conversion rate via Twitter for MIS main reports (2014 – 2015)



Given the limited amount of data available on the performance of the JRF's social media strategy, stakeholder interviews sought to explicitly identify views on MIS' promotion and reach through social media (Section 3).

Academic and Parliamentary citations

There have been 19 separate references to MIS in parliamentary debates between 2010 and 2015 (Appendix Six). These references largely centred on discussions regarding welfare reform, particularly during the ascent of the Welfare Reform Act 2012. Other areas of debate where MIS was referenced included:

- the uprating of social security benefits
- the Living Wage / the National Minimum Wage
- rural communities
- asylum support
- housing and planning.

Citations of MIS in journal and conference papers, theses and dissertations, academic books, technical reports and other scholarly literature have varied significantly across the programme's different outputs: MIS main reports have generally performed well, albeit with some variation over time⁶ (Appendix Five). The original 2008 MIS (Bradshaw et al. 2008) achieved the highest number of citations overall, at 110. This is followed by '*A minimum income standard for the UK in 2014*' at 77. Non-main MIS reports have not performed so well. When comparing all spin-off reports, annual series reports and critical policy analysis reports, '*A minimum income standard for rural households*' (Smith et al. 2010) garnered the most attention, with 21 separate citations. The number of citations attracted by non-main MIS reports, however, has generally been between 2 and 5.

3. Awareness of the Minimum Income Standards programme

While analyses of media coverage, website performance and social media activity are useful in outlining general trends in the broad take-up of MIS, they say little about the programme's reach to different stakeholder groups. We now explore stakeholder awareness of MIS, outlining the ways and extent to which the programme and its related message have been and continue to be engaged with. Table One provides an overview of stakeholder awareness of MIS using our own broad categorisation (Appendix 7).

Stakeholders generally had a high awareness of the programme. The vast majority of participants demonstrated good knowledge of the programme, and were able to describe its purpose, development and main findings. The consensual method that underpins MIS proved to be a defining feature of stakeholder awareness, with the majority able to not only recount the programme's broad methodology, but also articulate its contribution and unique position in debate. This high level of general awareness extended across all stakeholder groups, with many participants describing a familiarity with the programme among their peers:

"The majority of established social policy academics would be aware of the Minimum Income Standards programme."

Academic

While general awareness was high, stakeholder knowledge of the details behind the programme was extremely variable. Those who described a closer working relationship with MIS recounted an impressive level of detail (categorised by us as high). These stakeholders tended to be from the academic / research institutions and campaigning organisations. Some participants from the parliamentary / civil service group also demonstrated detailed knowledge of the programme. These participants tended to be from central government, and had more analytical, data-based roles.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a number of participants in non-analytical roles acknowledged their peers' and their own lack of detailed knowledge about the programme:

"I'm very conscious of the fact that even though the people round the table might be a mix of think tanks, politicians, business and NGOs, and all of them advocate the use of MIS, I don't think nowadays there's any one person around the table who could in any way describe the make-up of MIS in any great detail."

Intermediary Organisation

This lack of knowledge about the details of MIS among participants not directly involved in analytical work is likely to be explained by their lack of ongoing involvement. Many respondents had been aware of MIS over a long period, and often relied on their formative knowledge of the programme during discussions, rather than its most recent updates. This was not, however, a process of disengagement, but rather a broad, early-days acceptance of the programme, which resulted in less active and critical engagement. For these participants, the awareness of the programme's 'nuts and bolts' had therefore declined overtime.

"I'd compare it to Marks and Spencer's sustainability plan, Plan A. Everyone accepts it, but very few would be able to name the 200 different targets that make up Plan A, or even 20 of them."

Intermediary Organisation

Table One: Stakeholder awareness of MIS⁷.

	High	Moderate	Low
Academic / research institutions	3	1	1
Campaigning organisations	4	3	1
Parliamentarian / civil Service	2	3	0
Charitable organisations	1	2	0
Other	1	3	0
Employers / intermediaries	2	0	0
Media	1	1	0
Local authorities	0	2	1
Total	14	15	3

Although participants across stakeholder groups demonstrated a high awareness of the ‘core’ outputs of the programme (i.e. MIS’ annual reports and the quantitative analyses of the number of households below MIS), knowledge of MIS’ spin-off projects and critical policy accounts was much more variable. Many had a broad recollection of variations of MIS; however, few could offer any particular details other than the populations or places they concerned. Participants who tended to have better awareness of MIS spin-off reports were typically from the academic or campaigning stakeholder groups, and tended to be those who were already invested in their focus. Despite this, many stakeholders recognised the benefits of these spin-off reports, as they served to acknowledge important variations in the costs of living. Stakeholders from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland described MIS spin-off projects as particularly important, specifically because of the urban/rural divide.

Although interviewees expressed high awareness of the Minimum Income Calculator, its use was described as limited. For the most part, stakeholders’ described it as an awareness raising tool, particularly around campaigning and for the public. Campaigning organisations overall identified the calculator as very useful in this respect, but described potential for broadening its use, such as within advice-giving services:

“It would be great if it [the calculator] was used by those who were giving advice in terms of people’s incomes and saying, ‘well, this is the kind of income that you would need to try and get’ and by individuals themselves.”

Campaigning Organisation

These findings on stakeholder awareness of MIS, however, are prone to self-selection bias, as participation in this evaluation would seem to be largely predetermined by at least a general awareness of MIS. This is demonstrated by a small number of respondents declining to participate due to their perceived lack of knowledge about the programme. Participants who declined to take part specifically and explicitly on these grounds, however, came from a variety of stakeholder groups. These included:

- 2 parliamentarian / civil service (1 central / 1 devolved)
- 2 academic / research institute
- 1 campaigning organisation
- 1 local authority.

Sources of information and communication

A key objective of the JRF, outlined by its theory of change, has been to develop and sustain high awareness of MIS, and to engage with stakeholders to promote the use of MIS in their campaigning, advocacy and research work. Identifying the best means of facilitating awareness across stakeholder groups was therefore a key aspect of this evaluation.

Email marketing and bulletins from the JRF were consistently identified as participants' main source of information, across all stakeholder groups. It was through these that the majority of participants identified the JRF website as their main channel to the programme, and expressed an appreciation for regular email alerts about reports and upcoming events. Stakeholders also mentioned the good accessibility of the MIS website, as well as the clarity and quality of MIS publications.

Few alternative channels of communication were identified by stakeholders. JRF launch events, identified by parliamentarians and civil servants, and conferences held by the Association for Charitable Organisations (ACO), identified by charitable organisations, were infrequent exceptions. These events were generally described very positively, and were seen as not only enabling a better understanding of the programme, but also acting as good conduits for further use of MIS.

"It's always easier to follow things if you've had a presentation rather than trying to read it."

Campaigning Organisation

"[Donald] was giving a lecture at an umbrella organisation called the Association of Charitable Organisations. I went up to him afterwards and said, 'hey, we're really thinking about this' and he was very, very accommodating and welcoming."

Charitable Organisation

In terms of the role of individual staff and teams promoting the programme, it was through CRSP that stakeholders tended to associate the most individual involvement. Although the programme was strongly linked to the JRF, MIS' promotion was not associated with any particular members of the JRF staff. One view was that there would be benefits in using the profile of individual staff members to promote the campaign more effectively.

"I wonder if there is a role for the spokespeople to give MIS a face.... It's probably one of their stronger tools, yet it's not promoted by them as individuals."

Intermediary Organisation

Many participants expressed an appreciation for JRF's summaries of MIS. These were identified by many as their sole point of reference, arguably providing some insight into participants' rather generalised knowledge of the programme. Some participants stated that it was the length of main MIS reports that led them to engage with the summary. In these instances JRF'S reputation of producing high quality summaries kept stakeholders engaged with the programme:

"What I tend to have is a reasonable kind of overview of what's happening to minimum income standards but I wouldn't pretend to be into the fine detail, which you would get from having read the whole report."

Local Authority

"I mean the one where JRF are really is they always do good summaries and I mean it's probably almost universally true that most people read the summary and not the full report."

Campaigning Organisation

However, stakeholders' views on the most appropriate length of MIS outputs were highly variable. Some participants, particularly from the media and campaigning organisations, expressed a desire for shortened summaries in order to facilitate quick and easy engagement.

"Sometimes just having a one-page sheet that has the top line information, but has it expressed visually and graphically, can be quite a helpful way of communication, and thinking about how different audiences might want to use the research as well."

Campaigning Organisation

Others, from across the stakeholder groups, expressed a wish for a mid-range level of detail, which is slightly more than is in some of the summaries, but less than the whole report:

"There's a lot to take in in figure terms. I do wonder sometimes whether even in the executive summary actually the odd table might be quite useful."

Campaigning Organisation

"I think that on occasion I thought it would be helpful to get a bit more upfront what the breakdown of some of the top line figures are and some kind of easier way of assessing, getting an idea of the difference between household types."

Charitable Organisation.

Awareness through Social Media

As would be expected, participants' own use of social media heavily determined their awareness of JRF's recent social media strategy. Given that a significant proportion of stakeholders described having limited or no involvement with social media (19 of 36), awareness of MIS on social media, for example, was relatively low. Within this context, some of these participants questioned their relevance and contribution to debate. This, at least in part, however, can be attributed to a general cynicism that surrounded many participants' views of social media generally, rather than its specific use within the programme:

"Things like info-graphics, and I know everyone gets terribly excited about them, but I would rather look at the report and just read the thing you know, and understand it."

Campaigning Organisation

Of those who described using Twitter in a personal and/or professional capacity (13), many described the importance of info-graphics and mobile-friendly materials in increasing awareness of the programme, particularly amongst the public, and communicating key messages.

"I think you know getting in people's mobile phones where they can see stuff straightforwardly, I think is really important."

Media

Some individual JRF team members were identified by a handful of participants as strong advocates for JRF's presence on social media. Few, however, made specific reference to individual blog pieces, or JRF's recent use of info-graphics. When asked directly about JRF's recent use of info-graphics, social media active participants across stakeholders groups described them positively, but subsidiary to the JRF's overall communications campaign.

Public Awareness of MIS

There was some variation among stakeholders in perceptions of MIS' familiarity with the public. Some participants, particularly those within the media, described that while the public may not understand the intricacies of MIS, they may well recognise its contribution to debate.

"I am not going to claim that MIS is something that the general public at large understand, but I think they do recognise these days that there is a difference between the minimum wage and a living wage, and I think that while they may not understand the intricacies of how MIS works."

Media

MIS' relationship with the Living Wage was identified as particularly important in this respect. As a tangible concept and application, it was seen as something that the public could understand and engage with.

"I think the way it does speak to the public is through something like a Living Wage and that kind of concept, so hanging it on that and talking about what people need to live on."

Charitable Organisation

Others, however, described MIS as being isolated to the realm of specialists, and felt that the programme could be better communicated. In particular, many participants, across stakeholder groups, saw great potential in the programme making better use of its qualitative data, and producing case studies to broaden public awareness.

"If somehow in the communication of it, it was then calculated and told for individual, real people, with real names and real stories, then that, I think, would help communicate it to a broader audience."

Campaigning Organisation

"I would like to see more of the qualitative MIS data used in future, to tell a richer story, and bring out people's voices, not just the numbers. Powerful to show how people's lives can be transformed by a relatively small amount of money and these human stories engage people. [JRF] have experience in participative work with people in poverty and know how to put these messages across effectively"

Campaigning Organisation

Scope for improvement

While the majority of stakeholder groups expressed being content with the current nature and level of MIS communication, one stakeholder working within the media indicated some room for improvement. They described wanting to see the JRF build a closer relationship with the media and, in particular, saw benefit in the JRF allowing them more time to find ways to integrate MIS into the news. This might include, for example, getting a particular angle or a human interest story. This seems particularly important, given that the longevity of MIS can undermine the programme's inherent newsworthiness.

"I am frankly going to struggle to do a story about minimum income standards, it's going to be a story about what the minimum income standard is telling us about contemporary society and what people regard as the sort of minimum required for a decent life."

Media

Engagement with MIS

Overall stakeholders described variable engagement with MIS, with clear dividing lines between those who were and were not currently engaged in research or campaigning. Stakeholders from academic and campaigning organisations typically described using MIS as a benchmark against the adequacy of welfare benefits, poverty thresholds and the national minimum wage (NMW), and often described it as a persuasive tool to use at conferences and as evidence to committees.

“I often draw on the latest publications to show how much money is needed in an average low income family and there’s a table that Donald & Co often produce which shows the, it compares MIS for different household types with, with the basic means tested income, income support and also the national minimum wage, and I find that quite a persuasive useful table to show.”

Academic

“I also have used them speaking in the House of Commons giving evidence to various committees. I’ve used them in lots of academic presentations and I use them in papers as well, they’re my benchmark reference always.”

Academic

The programme was identified as particularly important for campaigning for the Living Wage. Campaigning organisations described MIS as very persuasive for the Living Wage campaign, particularly amongst employers and the public. It was seen to not only provide clear examples of what constitutes a socially acceptable standing of living in the UK overtime, but was also seen to usefully rebut claims concerning the legitimacy of some basket items, in particular those seen as luxuries.

“I think it’s one of the key pieces of research that we use when we’re explaining what a Living Wage is, because, I think obviously the term “Living Wage” is, a lot of people see it as a good thing, but sometimes they haven’t really drilled down into what that means, and so for us to be able to explain that what that, what it really means is, it means having a present for your birthday. It means having shoes, but not designer trainers. It means having a holiday in the UK, but not having a holiday abroad. It means having a phone, but not a smart phone, and that it means accessing Broadband which it didn’t use to, under the previous MIS work.”

Campaigning Organisation

Some academics and campaigning organisations also described making use of the high-level of detail provided by MIS; expressing an appreciation that the data that underpins the programme was made available via CRSP. Its broad scope in calculating the costs of living was most often referred to by research-active stakeholders, and was seen to enable participants to drill down into a high level of detail and focus on more specific issues.

“because it’s so detailed it allows me, and I imagine a lot of other people who are working on very specific issues, to use the data..., that kind of level of detail is really, really useful.”

Campaigning Organisation

While, some participants working within the civil service described using MIS reports and detailed analysis to make evidence-based cases for policy, engagement with the programme was often described as much more second order. The programme was typically described as something in the background, and tended to be identified as one of many measures that informed their general thinking. This was a view that was also expressed by stakeholders within local authorities:

“I think it’s something kind of in the background, its informed general thinking about things like, as I mentioned earlier, things like the living wage, or in the context of the policy or aspiration to reduce poverty levels, but nothing more specific than that.”

Parliamentarian/Civil Service

“I’m aware of it, it’s something that we use as a benchmark, and something I know councils find very useful... in terms of understanding the dynamic within local communities and actually who might be defined as in need... I think councils find that helpful from the perspective of having a slightly more rounded view of poverty, but I think it’s seen as being a useful tool in the box, but not as a standalone, definitive measure.”

Local Authority

A very small number of participants described actively choosing not to engage with MIS. One reason given was that MIS figures were considered too aspirational, making their use unlikely to bring about realistic change:

“It feels like the 60 per cent poverty targets are stretching enough as it is and to have one that, I can imagine, I don’t know, but I can imagine DWP ministers looking at the MIS just being like well what could we do about that, like how, what use is that to us?”

Campaigning Organisation

Another was the programme’s perceived inability to influence government, where it was felt more beneficial to working within parameters set by government when trying to elicit policy response.

“We use the government stuff [measurements] because typically the people we’re trying to influence are government.”

Other (Consultancy Organisation)

Interviews with parliamentarian and civil service respondents, however, provided little support for this claim; instead describing an appreciation of MIS’ ability to provide an alternative perspective to debate.

“MIS does a very important job in keeping the idea of an alternative way of conceptualising low incomes and not being pushed into the narrow parameters of current policy definitions of poverty and low income.”

Parliamentarian / Civil Service

4. Perceptions of the Minimum Income Standards Programme

This section explores perceptions of MIS. We present key findings relating to the programme's reputation, as well views on its methodological underpinnings and credibility.

Stakeholder interviews identified MIS to be, overall, a highly-respected programme. MIS was described by the vast majority of participants as valuable to debate, with many suggesting its methodology to be robust and widely accepted.

"I think it's very solid. It's very clear about what it's doing and therefore I think it's pretty unassailable. You can, as with everything, you can criticise it and you can say it's what people think they need but that's what it says so I have no problem with that, and it was never challenged in parliament or anywhere else that I've used it."

Campaigning Organisation

Many participants across the stakeholder groups discussed MIS' comparative advantage to other official poverty statistics, suggesting its consensual basis provided a legitimacy that more technical measures cannot.

"Not only do I think it is robust, I think it's actually a more powerful measure than the standard poverty definition, because it relates to people's actual lived experience, and actual costs. So there's a narrative and a story that people can connect with. But having that doesn't detract from it being a robust methodology."

Campaigning Organisation

"I think that the part that convinced people is when Donald [Hirsch] spoke about the process that had been gone through to gather views on what was needed, that people could understand that process, it made sense to them. Whereas if you tried to explain fifty percent of median household income to people you know it clearly leaves them cold."

Campaigning Organisation

This legitimacy was thought to be strengthened by MIS' regular updates, with the programme valued for its capacity to accurately reflect real changes in the costs of living, as well as engage in critical policy debate.

"I'm very glad that it's updated every year and with all the kind of attention to detail about the consequences, the changes in taxation and social security claims and personal allowance."

Academic

A fairly widespread view, however, was that the programme could benefit from having discrete pieces of work in relation to quickly emerging trends (e.g. if rapid rise in food prices) and more regular updating, particularly in the context of recession. However, those closer to the demands of such research, felt that the programme's quality should not be sacrificed at the expense of speed or more regular analysis.

"The trade-off is timeliness or quality... I think timeliness is great, but quality is the most important. I'm happy with the level of rigour that's going into the work and I appreciate that comes with a cost of time."

Parliamentarian / Civil Service

MIS' longevity was identified by many stakeholder groups as a testament to its credibility and widespread acceptance. Participants from across stakeholder groups referred to MIS as being an integral part of debate, and saw benefit in its consistent publication.

"I think MIS has actually found itself very well placed because it's got a few years under its belt now, its proved itself academically rigorous, its methodology is pretty well accepted... I think MIS is part of the scaffolding now."

Media

Some, however, raised questions regarding MIS susceptibility to critique, suggesting the programme to be somewhat immune from evidentiary challenge, particularly as a result of its branding.

"The strength of the brand means that people don't challenge it, but when you look below the surface and start unpicking individual components, then there is the slightly uncomfortable feeling that if you aggregated all the pieces that were open to challenge it would be... it could be significantly adrift."

Employer

For example, several participants with high awareness of the programme, across the stakeholder groups, questioned MIS' true likeness to the consensual method, frequently interrogating the programme's focus groups' size and depth, and subsequent ability to truly provide a within-group consensus on minimum income standards of living.

"But actually those focus groups are quite restricted in scale aren't they? They're not vast and I think I did have to slightly readjust my expectations, I was expecting something being conducted on quite a grand, national scale. And whilst I truly do admire the scale of effort it was a little bit of a surprise to me that those focus groups are really quite small."

Charitable Organisation

There was some variation in views on how these criticisms could be addressed. Some stakeholders suggested MIS could be easily, and cheaply, improved by more extensive market polling. Many more, however, expressed an appreciation for the programme's rigour, and explicitly stated that they would not like to see this sacrificed to speed or a broad brush approach. In line with this, others recommended more targeted investment in the research, expanding the qualitative fieldwork to incorporate more views and/or adopt a multi-methods research design. They suggested the use of on-line polls, one-to-one interviews and additional focus groups, and greater coverage of certain geographical areas, particularly Scotland.

Some participants, across a variety of stakeholder groups, raised questions regarding the transparency of the programme. They felt more information was required on its methodology in order to enable stakeholders to make their own judgements of the programme's worth, as well as the appropriateness of its annual figures.

"Just really opening it up to scrutiny, being very clear, allowing yourself to get hammered and not just saying, well, this is what a group of representative people have said. It comes down to how they've asked the question, and actually getting into the debate is important."

Other (Consultancy Organisation)

"So the gas, electric, all the utility bills, there's a level of poverty premium that's paid by the low wage[d]. It's either not taken into account or it's not communicated that it is taken into

account. Travel costs I think are certainly open to challenge. And the ... is it household goods and household services? Those areas have changed quite a bit, and it's not ... it doesn't feel comfortable that it is transparent enough to know what's going on."

Employer

A small number of stakeholders also suggested there was a lack of clarity over whether the programme sufficiently reflected notions of social equity and social justice.

"It was always unclear to me whether this is something that the public would regard as applicable to anyone under any circumstance. I think in my view it's probably at the back of people's minds that this minimum income standard which would have certain conditions attached... I think there's probably some notion about just deserts... [such as] serious attempts to gain employment."

Parliamentarian / Civil Service (Devolved)

Since some of this type of evaluation work would seem to have already been done by the JRF, it would seem necessary for it to be more widely advertised in order to address stakeholder concerns.

"we did some work at studying the qualitative, the transcripts of all the qualitative research and looking at the rationales that people used and how the process by which things get included in the budget or not, so we have done things to try to check the rigour of it, and understand the process for how things go in or don't go in."

JRF

In December 2015 CRSP did produce a document outlining the methodological underpinnings of MIS (Davis et al. 2015). Therefore, the issue arguably may not be about the programme failing to address stakeholder concerns, but rather about sufficient communications.

JRF and CRSP

Stakeholder interviews showed that the JRF is widely viewed as an authoritative and trustworthy organisation that offers rigorous research. JRF's reputation for work on in-work poverty was identified by many stakeholders as particularly commendable, which was seen to serve MIS' reputation well.

"Certainly in terms of the JRF connection, JRF has got a very high profile... I think people hold very good opinions about JRF work in general".

Parliamentarian / Civil Service (Devolved)

JRF's impartiality was frequently described as fundamental to the reputation of the programme, as well as to associated campaigns and causes. Campaigning organisations, in particular, consistently praised MIS' positive, non-confrontational tone, which was seen to enable well-natured dialogue, even in areas where MIS would seem to be the most oppositional, such as when benchmarking against benefit levels.

"At the moment it's not a direct challenge to government. It frames very positively as "this is what people should be doing", and I think there is a risk if you're criticising the government about benefits levels, it could do some damage to the way it is perceived, if it was used as a stick to beat the government with."

Intermediary Organisation

In line with this, campaigning organisations frequently described JRF's role as providing the evidence, upon which it was their responsibility to then apply it to debate.

"I think we need the evidence, it's up to organisations like the one I work for to decide how we use that... how we decide to use that stick, whether it's as a prod or whether it's to beat someone, we need the evidence."

Campaigning Organisation

Although a few participants, within the academic and campaigning stakeholder groups particularly, expressed a desire for JRF to provide a more critical account of the current administration and policy agenda, the vast majority felt it important that JRF maintain its positioning as neutral and independent.

"JRF I know have worked very hard to retain its status as a neutral, non-partisan, non-campaigning, broadly non-campaigning, body which has tried to bring enlightening to us at a very disputed area."

Media

A handful of participants described JRF's reputation as being somewhat left leaning. This was, however, largely seen as non-detrimental, as the programme was seen as sufficiently objective to rebut any claims of associated biases.

"Anyone who says to me, well you know this is some tin pot organisation full of left-wing, deaf minded and wrong thinking individuals who are just doing their own thing, I will say hang on, wait a minute, this has been adopted, and has been increasingly adopted, and other countries are paying attention as well."

Charitable Organisation

Overall, stakeholders described the relationship between JRF and CRSP positively, combining credibility with academic prestige. CRSP's visibility, however, was highly variable between different stakeholder groups. Participants from the academic stakeholder group frequently made reference to CRSP, and saw great value in their involvement in terms of providing the programme with academic authority.

"As an academic it gives us strength that the data is collected and the calculations and, the work is done by people in an academic department because that has a notion of objectivity and peer review."

Academic

CRSP's involvement was also described very positively among charitable organisations, in part facilitated by CRSP's past involvement with the ACO.

"I think it is reassuring that a national institution such as JRF has aligned forces with an academic institution that appears to have quite an impressive track history on this particular aspect, namely the centre."

Charitable Organisation

For other stakeholder groups, however, CRSP was largely invisible, with the programme's immediate branding attributed heavily to the JRF.

“Certainly for the NGO community, the link to JRF is very important. For the business community, CRSP is invisible.”

Employer

For those organisations whose knowledge of MIS was primarily through the Living Wage it would seem CRSP's involvement was at times too far removed to permit recognition. Two charitable organisations' responses to the evaluation's survey, for example, suggested they were not aware of CRSP's involvement in the development of the Living Wage, as they claimed to not be using JRF MIS in the process of grant-giving, but rather based assessments of eligibility on sufficient income as defined by the Living Wage. Whether attributing the programme more strongly with CRSP would improve awareness or reception to the programme outside of academia is unclear.

“Done by academics at Loughborough, obviously within the academic community it might be different, but in terms of the wider reception to the MIS I don't think that would matter one way or the other.”

Parliamentarian / Civil Service.

It would nonetheless seem appropriate for the programme to continue to ensure recognition of its major partner, including in communications to the media.

5. Influence and Impact of Minimum Income Standards Programme

This section presents stakeholder views on the influence, impact and subsequent achievements of MIS, critically discussing how these feature amongst different stakeholder groups, as well as within different parts of the UK.

Despite the evaluation suggesting a general consensus that MIS is known, used and valued amongst the different stakeholder groups, varying views on its influence, concrete impacts and subsequent achievements were noticeable.

Influencing Debate

Stakeholders consistently accredited MIS with the ability to stimulate and inform social policy debate, frequently describing the programme's positive contribution. Academic and campaigning organisations frequently described the importance of MIS defining the minimum living standards in terms of 'full social participation', perceiving there to be many social benefits in defining living standards in a way that considered opportunities and choices to participate in society.

"I think it's a very helpful as a reminder, a very credible reminder, of something a bit more aspirational, something which is about, actually "this is the kind of level of income that's needed for a decent standard of living" rather than for a poverty line level of living."

Academic

Participants, across stakeholder groups, also frequently described MIS' influence through the way it chooses to operationalise income adequacy. The introduction of a consensual method was described as providing a much needed alternative perspective to debate.

"I think as an academic interest, I think it is really useful to have a consensual basket in the mix when looking at low income generally. I think the considered consensus is that it's useful to have a suite of measures to be able to understand what's going on, in depth."

Parliamentarian / Civil Service

Influencing Public and Social Commentary Debate

While some campaigning organisations perceived MIS to have real influence in terms of getting the issue of living standards on low incomes into the public eye, others reflected how this could be undermined by public beliefs around poverty.

"It doesn't feel like it's become a widely used and very legitimate alternative to the poverty threshold and I don't really know why that is, given that it is designed by the public. I suppose perhaps because there are other issues at play when the public are thinking about poverty so the threshold is less relevant because people are bringing in other issues like blame, and whose fault it is that you're poor in the first place."

Campaigning Organisation

In particular, many participants referenced specific basket items that continued to be an easy focus of opposition (such as holidays and mobile phones suggesting they weakened the programme's influence).

"I do think the general public and possibly some journalists find it quite hard to believe that people need and I quote ... "that much money"... unquote in order to survive because basically most people don't have it."

Academic

"I think there's a group of people there who would say ... who are pretty well off, who would say, I don't have all of those things.... I think [that] weakens it."

Other (Consultancy Organisation)

It would seem useful that JRF addressed this issue directly and pre-emptively, addressing or clarifying the nature of 'controversial' items in order to speak to public concerns.

Policy Impact

Despite being seen as positively contributing to debate, many participants questioned the extent to which the programme had been able to bring about concrete policy or political change. Some campaigning organisations gave MIS some credit for specific policy changes, such as the recent reversal of cuts to tax credits and consideration of childcare costs in Universal Credit, and therefore perceived some real policy impact. Credit was also given to MIS for influencing the living wage. Most participants, however, perceived MIS' role to be at best as useful background and context, describing MIS' ability to influence government as fairly limited.

"I think that it's not got a huge amount of specific policy detail so it's not got an immediate input in the debate about in work tax credits or things like that. What I think that it does do is set a kind of background tug to some of those debates and helps with setting an idea about what our expectations or aspirations as a society should be."

Charitable Organisation

Some campaigning organisations suggested MIS had been influential in allowing debates to be had about the adequacy of benefits. However, only a few participants, across all stakeholder groups, thought this had translated into any substantive policy impact. Stakeholders identified several reasons for MIS' limited policy impact. Some suggested, possibly without justification, that MIS lacks credibility and traction with politicians and policy-makers, reinforcing the idea that the programme operates as a background influence to general thinking.

"I never really heard of people from like officials or even ministers even under the previous administrations really talking about it as a barometer for living standards or anything like that, it doesn't really feel like something that cuts through into political debates... it doesn't feel like a recognised standard that policymakers are trying to aim for."

Campaigning Organisation

"MIS doesn't have widespread acceptance, in particular from the government... which is kind of, again, partly due to the baseline, partly due to either a misunderstanding of what it is, both of which I think act against it."

Other – Consultancy Organisation

Counter to this, participants working in government actually indicated rather high acceptance of the programme as a contribution to the debate, but described a need for MIS to be better signposted in terms of where it stood in relation to poverty debates. In particular, UK government interviewees were clear that MIS should not be considered a poverty measure, and thought that it might be

helpful to have this spelt out more clearly in public debate. How this should be addressed was unclear. Some stakeholders suggested MIS would benefit from more actively engaging with or positioning itself in relation to government measures, for example, arguing there to be particular value in MIS being put forward as a direct alternative. Others, however, were more resolute to MIS' positioning to debate.

"It's never going to be regarded in the same way as in the government's own analysis. So just being aware where it sits in the wider pantheon of poverty measures."

Other (Consultancy Organisation)

In addition to this, many stakeholders suggested MIS' limited political and policy influence was largely a product of the recent unfavourable social, economic and political climate. Campaigning organisations, in particular, described a much more difficult political landscape, which in turn was described as making it difficult for MIS to have influence and/or impact.

"It is hard for JRF to have much direct influence on poverty and living standards at the moment. That doesn't mean that MIS isn't the right tool simply that we're in a very difficult political landscape."

Campaigning Organisation

"Ongoing dialogue between organisations that are like mine just doesn't happen anymore... so the opportunity to have the engagement with the civil servants in particular, and ministers, but particularly civil servants just isn't there to the same extent"

Campaigning Organisation

Parliamentarians / civil servants from Scotland and Wales, on the other hand, described the programme's influence much more positively, suggesting it to have a certain degree of influence on policy makers and politicians.

"I take it that the purpose of developing the MIS was to use it to influence government and its policy on poverty...I imagine that it has had some influence in that sense on central government, not so much the UK government. And as I say, I think probably it's had a degree of influence with policy makers and maybe politicians here [in Scotland]."

Parliamentarian / Civil Service

"In policy terms, MIS has been referred to in discussions with some of the policy makers; it's been referred to as a useful aspirational target. And I think it might have had some influence on the Welsh Government's desire to bring in a living wage, certainly within the public sector."

Parliamentarian / Civil Service

Participants from outside of England also made much more regular reference to MIS resulting in 'home-grown' research, which in turn had influenced debate:

"Where I think MIS has had a role is I've seen other kind of work that draws on that kind of idea of what families and households need to live on. So I think it's more influential in local work that's been done that people pick up locally, rather than MIS which is kind of a UK-wide being influential... MIS clearly has had some influence and that's then fed into some useful discussions"

Parliamentarian / Civil Service

Within this seemingly more amenable political environment, one stakeholder described a desire to see more evidence of engagement by JRF/CRSP with senior ministers in Scotland, in order to help develop policy solutions. This was seen as particularly important given the intricacy of MIS, in that sometimes the solutions needed are complex and/or counterintuitive.

6. Direct Use of the Minimum Income Standards Programme

The evaluation found generally positive views on MIS' influence on debate. At the same time a handful of participants, across stakeholder groups, expressed a certain level of scepticism toward the programme's ability to actually improve living standards.

"I imagine when looking at poverty and defining poverty that it comes in across the piece but I don't get an awful lot of sense about how the JRF programme specifically relates to getting people to MIS."

Campaigning Organisation

In this context, this section explores direct uses of MIS, outlining ways in which the programme is seen to be improving living standards.

The Living Wage

MIS' ability to improve the living standards of people who are unemployed (i.e. through increasing benefit levels) was often described as limited. However, participants frequently described the programme as making a significant contribution to tackling in-work poverty through its influence on the Living Wage, where it determined its rate outside of London. MIS' contribution to the Living Wage campaign was regularly identified as a key achievement of the programme, with a number of participants across stakeholder groups describing MIS as an important contributor to its success.

"I think it's fairly straightforward that it's been the tool in the background that has contributed to the success of the Living Wage campaign, which yes, I can tell them about the living wage campaign, but I think that's what I would say in principle. Certainly in terms of our work, that's where it's been most useful and powerful."

Campaigning Organisation

Several respondents felt that MIS has played a catalytic role in supporting the Living Wage, describing how the cost of living logic underpinning MIS fitted very well with the campaign's impetus. Furthermore, MIS was frequently described as bringing the various long-standing campaigns together, as it provided a single, credible, benchmark. Furthermore MIS was described as particularly useful in establishing credibility with employers and their stakeholders (internal and external), as it provided a credible and non-arbitrary basis for Living Wage calculations that was both coherent and reasonably easy to understand.

Grant-Giving

In addition to MIS' success in increasing living standards through supporting the Living Wage, this evaluation also identified evidence of the programme increasing standards of living through acting as a threshold for grant-giving.

30 organisations took part in this evaluation's short, open-ended email survey, of which 11 stated that they currently making use of MIS to determine need in the process of grant-giving. The way in which the programme was described as being applied was fairly consistent, with most organisations using annual MIS figures to set the broad parameters of financial eligibility. Organisations' use of MIS, however, was often described as only part of their assessment. The vast majority of surveyed organisations used MIS in conjunction with other indicators, which was often described as enabling organisations to maintain a certain level of subjectivity.

The majority of respondents who stated they did not currently make use of MIS most often attributed this to the very specific nature of their grant-giving, or the small-scale of their

organisation which negated the need for more robust means of assessment. Of the 19 who stated they did not currently make use of MIS, 12 expressed an awareness of the programme. Of this 12, 7 described the potential of, or indeed firm plans to, incorporate MIS into their operations for the future. Various rationales were provided for this intended use of MIS. For some, MIS provided an opportunity to better reflect the changing composition of poverty in the UK:

“We currently use take up of means tested benefits as a short hand to indicate financial need. However as the prevalence of the “working poor” has increased this is now an inadequate means of assessing financial need/quality of life. I would therefore like to find out more about the standard and see how we can use it in our assessment criteria for grants.”

Charitable Organisation

For others it presented the opportunity to make a broader case about the importance of social participation:

“I heard Donald Hirsch speaking at the Association of Charitable Organisations last year, where he made the point that MIS included the income needed to participate, with dignity, in society. Enabling participation and promoting dignity are concepts that are lacking in most political discourse at the moment.”

Charitable Organisation

Of those charitable organisations that described not using MIS, three described an explicit preference for maintaining more qualitative means of assessment. Such concern was also reflected by one charitable organisations interviewed for the evaluation:

“I think the most identifiable, substantive objection [from trustees] was the sort of computer says no objection. They didn't like the idea that our giving, as an organisation, would become more mechanistic, at least as it seemed to them. You fed the figures into the box and out came the answer and that was that.”

Charitable Organisation

When MIS was described as not being used by the responding organisations, alternative measures included:

- Government's Living Costs and Food Survey
- DWP Minimum Income Levels (i.e. the basic level of support provided by means-tested benefits)
- Money Advice Trusts Trigger Figures
- ONS Weekly Family Spending Figures.

7. The Future of the Minimum Income Standards Programme

The case for continuing MIS

Overall, the vast majority of participants were supportive of the continuation of MIS, for two key reasons. First, a number of participants across stakeholder groups considered it crucial that MIS continue to be rebased and reassessed for it to provide an in-time point of comparison to developments within social policy. This was described as particularly important for assessing the direction of current welfare reform.

"I think as a campaigner I think we'd lose a lot... there's still a lot that we can get out of MIS that we're not currently getting but I think what we'd lost would be quite significant."

Campaigning Organisation

Second, it was felt that MIS was essential from the point of view of the Living Wage, as it was considered particularly undesirable to discontinue MIS in the light of the campaign's recent success:

"[For the Living Wage campaign], it's absolutely essential that MIS continues."

Campaigning Organisation

In light of this, participants across the stakeholder groups tended to indicate a real potential reputational risk of JRF not continuing to support and fund MIS. However, there was also some agreement across stakeholder groups that it was appropriate for JRF to review MIS, to ensure that it was not subject to diminishing returns. Participants generally felt too far removed from the programme to make such an evaluation, but stressed that if this proved to be the case JRF should seriously consider the utility of future investment. In line with this, many participants, across stakeholder groups, stressed that the programme should not continue in the longer term out of inertia, but rather JRF should consider the programme's value for money, and whether it could achieve more with different kinds of investments.

"I just don't think [MIS] is changing hearts and minds necessarily, as much as it was. There's kind of an inertia issue, that it would be very easy for them to carry on doing what they've be doing for quite a while now."

Other - Representative Body

"just because something has worked in the past that doesn't necessarily mean that's the best use of resources to keep doing it again in the future and get diminishing returns."

Campaigning Organisation

Developing MIS

Several stakeholders suggested that MIS might integrate some kind of minimal standard of destitution or "basic decency" which no-one should fall below in an advanced, civilised economy. Such a measure, it was thought, might need to take account of whether someone is on a low income for a shorter or longer period of time. This was felt as potentially useful in the current climate, where welfare provision is being significantly cut back and destitution is more of an issue than it was when MIS was established. This has been addressed by JRF in a recently published report which defines destitution, its measurement and pathways (Fitzpatrick et al, 2016).

Stakeholders also provided several examples of the type spin-offs MIS could develop in future. These included:

- developing a Minimum Income Standard for the under 25s;
- developing a Minimum Income Standard for disabled people;
- developing more localised MIS, particularly to reflect variations in housing costs;

In addition to this, several stakeholders with an international brief stated that they would like to see MIS developed to link with broader debates about low incomes and adequacy in an international context, such as through encouraging the use of MIS throughout Europe, and aligning MIS to UN sustainable development goals, for example. Evidence from a number of stakeholders provided evidence of this currently happening. As such it would seem beneficial for this to be more widely communicated.

In the context of these suggestions, however, many stakeholders described a potential tension between MIS carrying out more detailed, targeted analysis, and the programme being able to maintain its coherency. Striking a balance between developing such spin-offs and safeguarding against the dilution of the core messages of the programme was identified as important by many participants.

Communicating MIS

Many stakeholders expressed a view that there should be more narrative and fewer statistics in communications about MIS. Many perceived MIS to be a technical solution to a technical problem, and therefore described greater potential to convey more of the lived experience of life on a low income in order to tap into the emotional aspects of income inadequacy in the UK. Such an approach was described as potentially a good lever for change, and was also largely thought to be a good means of promoting public awareness by telling a richer, more engaging story. JRF was described by number of stakeholders as having good experience in this field, lending a confidence in their ability to effectively put these messages across.

Some participants suggested JRF could do more in terms of events. Although only a handful of participants described previous attendance, the general consensus was that they were useful in improving their understanding of the programme, and getting across key messages. One participant described how JRF and CRSP could use these events to better promote the use of MIS, particularly by providing case studies of the programme's success in order to better signpost and expand its reach.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

This evaluation has explored the extent to which JRF's Minimum Income Standards programme (2008 to date) is known, used and valued amongst key stakeholder groups across the UK. As well as describing levels of awareness and engagement among different parts of the programme's audience, it has outlined perceptions of the programme's credibility, and provided an overview of the stakeholders' views on its influence and impact. It has also outlined direct uses of MIS, identifying its key achievements in improving living standards. This section provides a summary of key findings, and presents recommendations for the continuation of the programme.

What are the best channels of communication?

Despite being subject to a number of external forces that make media coverage highly unpredictable, MIS attracts a good amount of high-profile attention, albeit variable from year to year. This success is reflected in MIS' website performance, where the programme generally attracts high levels of activity in JRF's overall content. The success of MIS' recent proactive social media strategy is unclear, owing to the difficulties of collecting and analysing meaningful, historic social media data, as well as lack of engagement of many of our research participants with social media. A sustained strategy, however, would seem to have good potential with a number of stakeholders, across stakeholder groups, expressing its importance in promoting public awareness and conveying key messages. Stakeholders also commonly expressed a view that there should be more narrative and fewer statistics in communications about MIS, believing such an approach to not only be a potential level for change, but also a more engaging format for the general public.

Despite MIS' impressive media and online presence, it would seem that JRF's email marketing and bulletins continue to be the most effective means of communication. The vast majority of participants described these as their main source of information, identifying few alternatives. A few stakeholders, namely parliamentarians/civil servants and charitable organisations, also spoke highly of MIS events. One participant from Scotland described a demand for more bespoke meetings for policymakers, in order to develop policy solutions.

While the majority of stakeholder groups expressed being content with the current nature and level of MIS communication, stakeholders working within the media indicated some room for improvement. These participants said they wanted to see the JRF build a closer relationship with the media, in order to facilitate greater media coverage.

How much awareness is there of JRF's MIS?

This evaluation identifies good awareness of MIS across all stakeholder groups, with the vast majority of participants able to describe the programme's purpose, development and main findings. There are however, noticeable gaps in stakeholders' awareness of the details underpinning the programme. These gaps are not concentrated within any particular stakeholder group, but rather tend to be characteristic of those who are not involved in analytic work. The extent to which this lack of detailed knowledge about the programme is problematic is unclear. A lack of detailed understanding of the programme does not seem to dissuade stakeholders from its engagement or use (as described below), but arguably lends to some misconceptions regarding the programme's conceptual and methodological underpinnings. For this reason, promoting a greater level of more in-depth knowledge about the programme would therefore seem to be beneficial.

Many stakeholders described an overt reliance on the programme's summaries of MIS, often because of the length of the main MIS reports. Stakeholders' views on the most appropriate length of MIS outputs were highly variable, with some expressing a desire for shortened summaries in order to facilitate quick and easy engagement (i.e. media and some campaigning organisations), while others, from across stakeholder groups, wished for a mid-range level of detail.

Is MIS seen as a credible benchmark in debate?

JRF's aim to affirm MIS as a credible benchmark would seem to have been met, with the majority of participants recognising the programme to be credible and robust. The programme was heavily attributed to the JRF, which was widely praised for its rigour and impartiality. The role of CRSP in promoting the credibility of the programme varied between stakeholder groups. Whereas CRSP's involvement was described as important for improving the programme's credibility among academics, and some charitable organisations, it was not visible elsewhere. We can only speculate on the extent to which this represents a missed opportunity for the programme to further promote its credibility and subsequent potential use.

The findings of this evaluation suggest MIS' credibility could be improved further still. Many participants, across stakeholder groups, indicated a desire for the programme to promote greater methodological transparency. This was a criticism that was most frequently attributed to the programme's qualitative work, which some stakeholders saw as deficient. Given that JRF and CRSP have previously examined how the programme's methodology is understood, it would seem important that these are better signposted.

Do stakeholders engage with MIS in their campaigning, advocacy and research?

Stakeholders described variable engagement with MIS, with clear dividing lines between those who were currently engaged in research or campaigning and those who were not. Stakeholders from academic and campaigning organisations described highest levels of engagement, using MIS as a benchmark of income adequacy, at conferences and as evidence to committees, as the bases for campaigns – particularly around the Living Wage and by grant makers for setting thresholds.

Some academics and campaigning organisations also described making use of the high-level of detail provided by MIS, enabling them to drill down into detail and to focus on specific policy issues. While some participants working within the civil service also described using MIS' detail and data, their engagement with the programme was often described as something in the background; identified as one of many measures that informed their general thinking. This was a view that was also expressed by stakeholders within local authorities.

Has MIS informed challenged and enhanced debate?

MIS' contribution to debate was identified by many participants, across stakeholder groups, as one of its main achievements. Participants described how the programme has broadened debate among experts and policy makers by complementing official poverty statistics, offering an alternative conceptualisation of living standards to debate, and by pioneering the consensual method.

The extent to which MIS has informed the public, however, was less clear. While some campaigning organisations perceived MIS to have real influence in terms of getting the issue of living standards on low incomes in the public eye, some also reflected there could be drawbacks in its challenge to public beliefs around poverty. In particular, many stakeholders referenced specific basket items that continued to be an easy focus of opposition, weakening the programme's influence.

Has MIS influenced policy and practice?

The programme has to some extent been able to bring about changes in policy and practice... Stakeholders from campaigning organisations and academia frequently gave MIS credit for specific policy changes, such as the recent reversal of cuts to tax credits and consideration of childcare costs in Universal Credit for example. At the same time, many others perceived MIS' role to be at best as useful background and context. This was a view that was reflected by stakeholders in UK government who described MIS as one of many measures that informed their general thinking. Parliamentarians and civil servants in Scotland and Wales, however, described MIS as having a

greater degree of influence, albeit somewhat indirectly. The programme was described as encouraging local research, which in turn helped develop meaningful policy conversations.

A minority of participants, across stakeholder groups, suggested that the influence of MIS has been affected by limited traction with politicians and policy-makers. However, the majority attributed this to the recent unfavourable social, economic and political climate rather than to the programme itself

Has MIS improved living standards?

This evaluation identified that a key achievement of MIS is, undoubtedly, its contribution to the success of the Living Wage campaign and its subsequent positive impact on living standards. Many stakeholders described MIS' contribution to the Living Wage as significant, frequently accrediting the programme with providing a coherency to the Living Wage campaign, which in turn was seen to promote its take-up with employers.

This evaluation also found that MIS is being used by charitable organisations as a threshold for grant giving. A significant proportion of surveyed organisations described using the benchmark, or firm plans to use it, as part of their assessment.

What is the future of MIS?

The vast majority of participants were supportive of the continuation of MIS, given the success of the Living Wage campaign and recent developments within social policy, and particularly welfare reform. This support, however, was largely dependent on the utility of future investment, with stakeholders seeing it as important not to continue the programme in the longer term out of inertia. Within this context, participants suggested several areas for future development. Examples include developing a standard of destitution or "basic decency", as well as additional spin-off MIS reports.

Many stakeholders expressed a view that there should be more narrative and fewer statistics in communications about MIS. Many felt that MIS was portrayed as a technical solution to a technical problem. They believed there is greater potential to convey more of the lived experience of life on a low income by tapping into the emotional aspects of income inadequacy in the UK. Such an approach, by telling a richer, more engaging story, was described as a means of promoting public awareness and a good lever for change. JRF was described by number of stakeholders as having good experience in this field, creating confidence in their ability to effectively put these messages across.

Recommendations

In light of these conclusions, this report recommends the programme:

- improves how it tailors communications to different audiences. For some, such as academics, some campaigning organisations and some parliamentarians in analytic roles methodological issues and the analytic base for MIS are key; for other, broader and policy-focused audiences, such as within the media, a more broad-brush approach was seen as more appropriate. This suggests that JRF could offer pieces of greater or lesser depth to target audiences.
- ensures greater transparency in its methodology, in particular by providing more detail on the level of consensus achieved by focus groups, as well as on how precisely different basket items are included.
- directly and pre-emptively addresses or clarifies the nature of 'controversial' basket items, in order to promote the programme's influence.

- makes more use of descriptions of the “lived experiences” of lower income families in presenting the findings of the programme, in order to promote awareness of the programme and support change.
- explores the possibility of introducing a "destitution" or "basic decency" standard. This could build on JRF’s recently published research on destitution (Fitzpatrick et al, 2016). This does bring the risk of detracting from MIS’ key messages; however, the MIS methodology and approach is well suited to developing such a metric, and could make a major contribution to aspects of the public debate at present. There are obvious economies of scale and scope in doing this in conjunction with MIS.

Notes

1. The London Living Wage is calculated by the Greater London Authority, which covers all boroughs in Greater London.
2. Press mentions and references, some of which may be repeated, for example by press syndicates.
3. Non-unique media references to MIS during the two weeks immediately following each main MIS report.
4. No media coverage results were identified at the time of the first MIS report release (Bradshaw et al. 2008).
5. Meltwater.com uses a third party provider ComScore for the readership/reach values in our online editorial platform. ComScore tracks over 2 million users around the world and uses their information to build upon a regularly updated database.
6. Citation data for some reports is missing from the database. See Appendix Five.
7. Table excludes interviews conducted with internal programme staff.

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Padley, M. and Hirsch, D. (2016) *Households below a minimum income standard: 2008/09 to 2013/14*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Smith, A., Davis, A., Hirsch, D. (2010) *A minimum income standard for rural households*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

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Appendix One: Programme of MIS Research

Publication date	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Families with children									
Contents of budgets	Original research		Review		Rebase		Review		Rebase
Price of items	Pricing	Inflation	Inflation	Inflation	Pricing	Inflation	Inflation	Inflation	Pricing
Families without children									
Contents of budgets	Original research		Review		Review		Rebase		Review
Price of items	Pricing	Inflation	Inflation	Inflation	Inflation	Inflation	Pricing	Inflation	Inflation

Definitions

Rebase	Repeat original research to create new budgets from scratch
Review	Groups consider whether existing budgets need selective changes
Pricing	Identify current prices of individual items from suppliers

Appendix Two: Stakeholder Sampling Table

Stakeholder Group	Interviewees (n=36)	Group Description
Academic / Think Tanks	5	Academics / researchers from universities / research institutes. England only.
Campaigning Organisations	8	5 England; 2 Scotland; 1 Northern Ireland.
Charitable Organisations	3	England Only
Employer / Intermediary Organisation	2	1 employer (UK-wide) and 1 intermediary organisation (UK-wide)
Local Authorities	3	England only.
Programme Staff	4	3 JRF and 1 CRSP
Media	2	2 UK national media
Parliamentarian / Civil Service	5	3 from central government (2 separate departments); 1 Welsh government; 1 Scottish Government.
Other	3	2 Representative Bodies; 1 Consultancy Organisation.

Appendix Three: Survey of Charitable Organisations

“Does your organisation make use of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s Minimum Income Standards to determine need in the process of grant-giving?”

If yes, please could you provide a very brief explanation of whether MIS is used independently or in conjunction with other formal indicators? This could include information of individual’s financial situation and personal circumstances, for example.

If no, please could you provide a very brief explanation of how you assess need within your organisation?”

Appendix Four: MIS Media Monitoring Results.

Main Reports:

Report Title	Search Period	Hits
A minimum income standard for Britain in 2009	01/07/09 - 15/07/09	25
A minimum income standard for the UK in 2010	06/07/10 - 20/07/10	60
A minimum income standard for the UK in 2011	05/07/11 - 19/07/11	21
A minimum income standard for the UK in 2012	09/07/12 - 23/07/12	85
A minimum income standard for the UK in 2013	28/06/13 - 10/07/13	248
A minimum income standard for the UK in 2014	30/06/14 - 14/07/14	13
A minimum income standard for the UK in 2015	01/07/15 - 15/07/15	135

Spin-Off Reports:

Report Title	Search Period	Hits
A minimum income standard for Northern Ireland	29/09/09 - 14/10/09	3
A minimum income standard for rural households	23/11/10 - 7/12/10	15
Sustainable income standards: Towards a greener minimum	07/12/11 - 21/12/11	1
Minimum income standards and older pensioners' needs	28/01/13 - 11/02/13	1

Annual Series Reports:

Report Title	Search Period	Hits
Households below a minimum income standard: 2008/09 to 2010/2011	25/04/13 - 09/05/13	2
Households below a minimum income standard: 2008/09 to 2011/12	23/01/14 - 06/02/14	2
Households below a minimum income standard: 2008/09 to 2012/13	15/01/15 - 29/01/15	162
Households below a minimum income standard: 2008/09 to 2013/14	15/02/16 - 29/02/16	213

Critical Policy Analysis Reports:

Report Title	Search Period	Hits
Does the tax and benefit system create a 'couple penalty'?	18/06/12 - 02/07/12	3
Does Universal Credit enable households to reach a minimum income standard?	11/07/13 - 25/07/13	241
Will the 2015 Summer Budget improve living standards in 2020?	07/09/15 - 21/07/14	267

Source: www.meltwater.com/uk/

Search terms: (("joseph rowntree" or ("JRF")) and ("minimum income standard")).

Searches were conducted to identify media coverage two weeks after each JRF MIS report release. A full list of searched reports and results are provided in Appendix 4.

Appendix Five: Academic Citations of MIS

Report Title	Citations
A minimum income standard for Britain: What people think	108
A minimum income standard for Britain in 2009	24
A minimum income standard for the UK in 2010	N/A
A minimum income standard for the UK in 2011	42
A minimum income standard for the UK in 2012	77
A minimum income standard for the UK in 2013	N/A
A minimum income standard for the UK in 2014	77
A minimum income standard for the UK in 2015	42

Report Title	Citations
A minimum income standard for Northern Ireland	5
A minimum income standard for rural households	21
Sustainable income standards: Towards a greener minimum	3
Minimum income standards and older pensioners' needs	4

Report Title	Citations
Households below a minimum income standard: 2008/09 to 2010/11	N/A
Households below a minimum income standard: 2008/09 to 2011/12	3
Households below a minimum income standard: 2008/09 to 2012/13	18
Households below a minimum income standard: 2008/09 to 2013/14	N/A

Report Title	Citations
Does the tax and benefit system create a 'couple penalty'?	2
Does Universal Credit enable households to reach a minimum income standard?	12
Will the 2015 summer budget improve living standards in 2020?	2

Source: <https://scholar.google.co.uk/>

Database includes reference to journal and conference papers, theses and dissertations, academic books and other scholarly literature. Database sources from academic publishers, professional societies and university repositories, as well as scholarly articles available online. Each full report title was used for search.

Appendix Six: Reference to MIS in Parliamentary Debate

Date	Speaker	Source
26/10/10	Kate Green, MP (Lab)	Savings Accounts and Health in Pregnancy Grant Bill debate in Commons Chamber
13/06/11	Kate Green, MP (Lab)	Welfare Reform Bill debate in Commons Chamber
13/10/11	Baroness Lister (Lab)	Welfare Reform Bill debate in Grand Committee
13/10/11	Lord Freud (Con)	Welfare Reform Bill debate in Grand Committee
13/10/11	Baroness Sherlock (Lab)	Welfare Reform Bill debate in Grand Committee
27/02/12	Baroness Lister (Lab)	Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2012 debate in Grand Committee
09/01/13	Christopher Chope, MP (Con)	Living Wage debate in Westminster Hall
21/01/13	Helen Goodman, MP (Lab)	Welfare Benefits Up-rating Bill debate in Commons Chamber
05/03/13	Baroness Stowell (Con)	Welfare Benefits Up-rating Bill debate in Lords Chamber
05/03/13	Baroness Lister (Lab)	Welfare Benefits Up-rating Bill debate in Lords Chamber
02/07/13	Jim Cunningham, MP (Lab)	Recession (Standards of Living) debate in Westminster Hall
09/01/14	Sir Edward Leigh, MP (Con)	Rural Communities debate in Commons Chamber
01/04/14	Lord Kinnock (Lab)	National Minimum Wage debate in Lords Chamber
15/09/15	Kate Green, MP (Lab)	Child Poverty debate in Westminster Hall
15/09/15	Stephen Timms, MP (Lab)	Welfare Reform and Work Bill (Third sitting) debate in Public Bill Committees
15/09/15	Dr Eilidh Whiteford, MP (SNP)	Tax Credits debate in Commons Chamber
17/09/15	Kate Green, MP (Lab)	Welfare Reform and Work Bill (Fifth sitting) debate in Public Bill Committees
27/10/15	Baroness Lister (Lab)	Asylum Support (Amendment No. 3) Regulations 2015 debate in Lords Chamber
03/12/15	Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods, MP (Lab)	Housing and Planning Bill (Twelfth sitting) debate in Public Bill Committees

Source: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/>

Search term: “Minimum Income Standard”. Results sifted manually to ensure relevance and to remove duplication.

Appendix Seven: Defining Awareness of MIS

Low: General awareness of MIS (particularly of methodological underpinnings), but little demonstrable knowledge of programme's longevity and outputs.

Moderate: Good general knowledge of MIS, demonstrated by an ability to provide a broad description of the purpose, development and main findings of the programme.

High: Detailed knowledge of MIS, demonstrated by an ability to make explicit reference to the details of the programme. Examples include specific MIS figures, household coverage and methodological variations across basket items.