What is universal basic income?

KS3 KS4 Ages 11-16 ⏰ 2 min read

Universal basic income is exactly what it sounds like: a regular payment from the government to every citizen, regardless of whether they have a job, are wealthy, or are struggling financially. Think of it as pocket money from the state — except it's meant to cover your basic needs like food, housing, and clothes.

The idea is surprisingly simple. Instead of having dozens of different benefit programmes with complicated rules and forms to fill out, the government would just send everyone the same amount of money each month. Rich or poor, employed or unemployed, young or old — everyone gets the same cheque.

Why Would Anyone Want This?

Supporters argue that universal basic income would eliminate poverty by giving everyone enough money to survive. They also believe it would free people to take risks — like starting a business, going back to school, or caring for family members — without worrying about losing their benefits.

Think of it like a financial safety net at the circus. Right now, some people perform dangerous acts without any net at all, whilst others have different types of nets depending on their circumstances. Universal basic income would put the same net under everyone, so no one hits the ground hard if they fall.

There's also the argument about jobs disappearing due to automation. If robots and computers start doing more work, universal basic income could help people during the transition to whatever comes next.

What Could Go Wrong?

Critics worry about several things. First, the cost would be enormous — governments would need to find trillions of pounds to pay everyone. This might require massive tax increases or cutting other services.

There's also concern that free money might make people lazy. If you're guaranteed enough to live on, would you still bother working? Some economists argue this could

lead to inflation, as more money in people's pockets might just make everything more expensive.

Has Anyone Actually Tried It?

Several countries and cities have run small experiments. Finland gave 2,000 unemployed people free money for two years. Kenya has been testing it in rural villages. The results have been mixed — people generally reported feeling less stressed and more hopeful, but the economic effects varied.

Universal basic income remains one of the most debated ideas in economics and politics. Whether it's a brilliant solution to modern problems or an expensive mistake is still hotly contested. What's clear is that as work and society continue changing, we'll probably hear a lot more about it.

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