The Network Newsletter – Ebulletin 445, 26 October 2026

Events

Events have been added to the Courses & Events pages on The Network website – see: https://seapn.org.uk/events/.

National Year of Reading 2026

"Beyond the bookshelves: how libraries are creating new routes into reading during the National Year of Reading "
https://dcmslibraries.blog.gov.uk/2026/10/16/beyond-the-bookshelves-how-libraries-are-creating-new-routes-into-reading-during-the-national-year-of-reading/
Just in case you haven't seen the latest DCMS blogpost (by The Reading Agency) which looks at how National Year of Reading microgrants are "[…] supporting projects across 72 library authority areas facing high levels of deprivation, weaker social infrastructure and low library engagement. The grants are providing library teams the resources and capacity to develop locally-led activities that can reach new audiences and open up more opportunities to enjoy reading."

Cost of living crisis/poverty/NEET – Other Agencies

"Time to Make the Youth Guarantee Real: A Promise and Plan for Every Young Person"
https://www.fenews.co.uk/exclusive/time-to-make-the-youth-guarantee-real-a-promise-and-plan-for-every-young-person/?mptk=4e8cd868fac524fac5a0c72f512c2c42cc59cb608b66f27b0e88fc4a5b2d4a01ed2ab82b32cca4720d9b89ca32814ca1_e1fb6652a89bcef4c3971b2bb31d64a1
(Source: Learning and Work Institute *Newsletter*, Oct 2026)
Call to action from the Learning & Work Institute, which:

> "[…] sets out five priorities, including a national goal to reduce youth disengagement, stronger local leadership, reforms to skills and apprenticeships, and better support through the welfare system." [Taken from *Newsletter*]

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

Press release: "Time to end class squeamishness: first government unit to improve life chances for working class"
https://www.gov.uk/government/news/time-to-end-class-squeamishness-first-government-unit-to-improve-life-chances-for-working-class
(Source: email from The Equality Trust, Oct 2026)
Just in case you missed this announcement:

> "New Class Unit to focus on improving lives of low-income families, disadvantaged communities and rooting out child poverty […]
>
> The new unit will bring social mobility work into the heart of government, with the Social Mobility Commission (SMC) closing as part of the

government's wider review of arm's length bodies to ensure work is delivered as effectively as possible.

It will sit within the Office for Equality and Opportunity alongside units on race, women, LGBT+ and disability, reflecting the role of class in how people are treated and the opportunities they have in life.

This will also include a focus on working class people's experiences of public services, health disparities and access to employment.

One of the unit's early priorities will be the introduction of the socio-economic duty – a new power in the Equality Act that will legally require public bodies to consider how to improve the lives of lower-income families as part of decisions around issues like transport, services and budgets."

"Early years disadvantage attainment gap widens for third year running"
https://www.cypnow.co.uk/content/news/early-years-disadvantage-attainment-gap-widens-for-third-year-running?utm_campaign=Weekly%20RoundUp%2023%2F10%2F26&utm_content=&utm_term=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cypnow.co.uk%2Fcontent%2Fnews%2Fearly-years-disadvantage-attainment-gap-widens-for-third-year-running&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Children%20%26%20Young%20People%20Now
(Source: email from Children & Young People Now, 23 Oct 2026)
DfE's latest figures show that:

"The early years attainment gap between children eligible for free school meals and their peers has widened for the third consecutive year, government figures show."

Health & Wellbeing issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

Supporting the mental health of the record keeping workforce: guidance for organisations and managers
Web version: https://www.archives.org.uk/mental-health-guidance
Pdf:
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60773266d31a1f2f300e02ef/t/6ac76d0093e0f6521681af85/1791454464863/ARA_Mental_Health_Guidance_October_2026.pdf
(Source: email from Deborah Mason, ARA to archives-nra@jiscmail.ac.uk, 15 Oct 2026)
Important, helpful new guidance.

"In addition to general workplace issues, recent community surveys have highlighted a number of mental health challenges that are specific to or disproportionately affect those working in the record keeping sector. Additionally, mental health issues have been shown to create barriers for those looking to enter the field and can impact on career development and progression.

In response, the Archives and Records Association (UK and Ireland) (ARA) has commissioned this guidance to help support their members and the wider record keeping community. It aims to provide a clear and practical framework for how organisations can support employees' mental health and to provide specific guidance for those in roles with line management responsibilities. It is hoped that it will help managers promote good mental health for the employees they supervise and to help them support those experiencing issues. For records keeping professionals, this should lead to reduction in the occurrence of mental health issues such as stress and burnout, whilst encouraging a greater sense of belonging and increase motivation and job satisfaction. From an organisational perspective this can, in turn, reduce presenteeism, absences, and increase productivity." [pdf, p3]

"This guidance has been prepared by Sharon McMeekin of Preserve Together with support and input from a working group of record keeping professionals with lived experience of mental health issues and providing support to employees." [web version]

Care-experienced children & young people – Other Agencies

PAC research summary: How do young people in care describe their relationships with the adults & services in their lives? How do those relationships shape their experiences of peer violence?

https://peeractioncollective.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/Pure-Insight_PAC-Research-Report-2026.pdf

(Source: The Young Foundation *Autumn Newsletter*, Oct 2026)

Important new research:

"The Peer Action Collective (PAC) is a £11.4 million youth-led peer research and social action programme which aims to understand what is needed to help young people live a life free from violence and put what is learned into action.

PAC is currently being delivered in 4 areas in England from 2025 to 2027 and is funded by the Youth Endowment Fund and the #iwill Fund (a joint investment between The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport). Previously it received funding from the Youth Endowment Fund, the #iwill Fund and the Co-op Group.

Pure Insight supports young people aged 16–28 leaving care across four local authority areas in the North West. We work directly with care-experienced young people (CEYP), local authorities and voluntary sector partners, to reach young people who have been in care or are on the edge of care. Through PAC, care-experienced young people (PAC Leads) help design, deliver and shape research, ensuring that social action is informed by lived experience and amplifies marginalised voices." [p2]

They summarise the research as follows:

> "Our research identified eight key themes that help explain how care-experienced young people experience relationships with adults, services and peers, and how these relationships can shape their vulnerability to peer violence and risky behaviour. This report discusses the most important of these in more depth using quotes from our interviews and focus groups. We also introduce two case studies that illustrate our key findings in the form of real stories from our participants." [p6]

The key themes are:

1. "Being care experienced makes young people more likely to be involved in exploitative relationships
2. Care experienced young people are criminalised from an early age and have negative relationships with the police Inconsistency of placements and support can cause instability later in life
3. Care experienced young people feel that services don't listen and make decisions without them, which leads to risky behaviour.
4. Gaps in trauma-informed, neurodiversity-aware and mental health support causes instability and risk of violence.
5. Consistent positive relationships with services that are honest and non-judgemental can prevent involvement in violence.
6. Foster care feels less regulated than other forms of care and is reported as unsafe by care experienced young people.
7. Care experienced young people face a reduction in support and increased vulnerability as they leave care." [p7]

Broader issues – Other Agencies

"Dolly Parton free book scheme to expand in London"
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ckwyz06qg983o
(Source: *Public Libraries News*, 19 Oct 2026)

> "Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, which posts children a free book every month until their fifth birthday, is to more than triple the number of London boroughs it covers […]
>
> The funding will cover Barking and Dagenham, Camden, Greenwich, Hackney, Lewisham, Newham and Wandsworth, with the scheme already running in Lambeth, Southwark and the City of London."

Brexit

"For Andy Burnham, getting closer to the EU could prove as tricky as exiting it – an expert explains"
https://theconversation.com/for-andy-burnham-getting-closer-to-the-eu-could-prove-as-tricky-as-exiting-it-an-expert-explains-294809?utm_campaign=the-daily-40075&utm_content=the-daily-40075_uk%7C2%7C40075%7C5ac6ca51&utm_medium=email&utm_source=braze&utm_term=For+Andy+Burnham%2C+getting+closer+to+the+EU+could+prove+as+tricky+as+exiting+it+%E2%80%93+an+expert+explains
(Source: *The Conversation*, 26 Oct 2026)
Useful reminder of how we have got to where we are … and possible ways of moving forward.