

The Network Newsletter: tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries

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The Network's Website is at www.seapn.org.uk and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

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Coronavirus/COVID-19

Culture in crisis: impacts of Covid-19 on the UK cultural sector and where we go from here

This new report¹ from the Centre for Cultural Value:

“[...] summarises the findings of one of the world’s largest investigations into the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the cultural industries.” [p4]

It looks at the policy impacts and effects of the different stages: the initial lockdown etc March-Autumn 2020; the 2020-2021 Winter lockdown; and the ongoing, longer-term effects.

This is illustrated with case studies, including the Lowry, the BALTIC Centre, the British Library, Arts Collaboration Network, Northern Ireland.

The conclusions, implications and recommendations are important. These include:

- “We urgently need to develop a relatively straightforward means of identifying and supporting cultural freelancers.” [p67]
- “Mixed messages, delayed and contradictory government announcements and a divergence of approach between England and the devolved nations made decision making within the sector extremely challenging and stressful and may have contributed to the reluctance of audiences to return.” [p67]
- An urgent need for “[...] national and local governments to cohere and communicate clear public health and safety guidance to all cultural organisations at the onset of a health crisis or pandemic.” [p67]
- “There is an urgent need for a sector pay review and an ongoing need for training and development in areas of management, marketing, fundraising and HR.” [p68]
- “[...] digital distribution is not the great equaliser or diversifier that much of the sector was hoping it was and even claiming it to be.” [p68]
- “Whereas in-person engagement tends to be dominated by older people, the digital offer has a much younger (and more ethnically diverse) audience, with a distinct preference for more interactive, immersive experiences.” [p68]

¹ Ben Walmsley, Abigail Gilmore, Dave O’Brien and Anne Torreggiani (eds). *Culture in crisis: impacts of Covid-19 on the UK cultural sector and where we go from here*. Centre for Cultural Value, 2022.

Full report: <https://www.culturehive.co.uk/CV/resources/culture-in-crisis-impacts-of-covid-19/>.

Executive summary: https://www.culturehive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Exec_Summary_Culture_in_Crisis.pdf.

- “[...] digital culture is here to stay [...] Targeted investment in digital production, distribution and engagement therefore appears to be a policy priority and our evidence suggests that any investment should be directed at findability and encouragement of continued experimentation in digital-first and digital-blend content.” [p68]
- “Business models that embrace a hybrid strategy are likely to fare well as the sector slowly emerges exhausted from the pandemic. Digital innovation can make a positive difference, but only when embedded in a long-term strategy of audience and school engagement.” [p68]
- “The UK’s cultural sector is undoubtedly at an inflection point and facing imminent burnout as well as skills and workforce gaps. It therefore urgently needs to adopt regenerative modes of working. A regenerative approach would carve out time for the positive initiatives that we witnessed across the cultural sector during the pandemic [...]” [p68]

Recommended – and we need to start tackling some of these issues now.

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

Library and sector support of people living with no fixed abode: research review

This new report² from The Reading Agency and Libraries Connected:

“[...] offers examples of the current library services available to this customer group and suggests priorities for a framework for the public library offer in this field.”

It starts with an introductory overview of the need, looking at the scale of homelessness in the UK, the impact of COVID, and mental health needs.

The researchers carried out a call for information about public libraries’ current work with homeless people, and then organised a panel discussion in Oct 2021. The findings from both have been summarised in this report, and include:

- Elements of the ‘core library services’ meet the needs of homeless people, including: warm and safe spaces; the opportunity to engage with reading; digital access and training; opportunities for social and cultural engagement; signposting and referrals to specialist services

² *Library and sector support of people living with no fixed abode: research review*. The Reading Agency/Libraries Connected, 2022, https://tra-resources.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/entries/document/5697/Review_Libraries_work_to_support_people_living_with_no_fixed_abode_020222.pdf.

- “Specialist library services”, including: membership with no proof of ID required; support with basic needs, such as food, clothing and hygiene products
- Challenges – these include: finding ways of engaging with homeless people; ‘dismantling prejudices’; finding ways to support people with complex needs.

The report then looks at what the key elements of a public library offer might include: reading; information and digital; health and wellbeing.

This is followed by a reiteration of what public libraries may be able to offer:

- Universal access
- Skills development
- Mental health and wellbeing support
- Cultural and social engagement
- Support with basic needs.

In terms of the future:

“The next steps will be to hold a workshop with library representatives in early 2022 to explore these in greater depth, aiming to frame a sector-wide offer to people living with no fixed abode.” [p12]

The report is illustrated with very brief case-studies and examples of work being undertaken.

Recommended.

Activist Museum Award 2021-2022

“Four projects have been named as the winners of the Activist Museum Award 2021-2022 by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG), part of the University of Leicester’s School of Museum Studies.

The award was launched in 2019 to ‘celebrate and foster activist thinking and practice in the UK museum community’. The winners are awarded £1,000 each and tailored mentorship to support the development of their ideas.”³

The winners are:

- Jean Campbell: “Arts educator Jean Campbell will use the award to develop a series of podcasts and zines exploring and critically reviewing

³ See: https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2021/12/four-projects-win-activist-museum-award-2021-2022/?utm_campaign=2065402_21122021&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Museum%20Association&dm_i=2VBX,189OA,27LU0M,4RSVV,1.

the design, delivery and experiences of Trans-Atlantic slavery staff training.”⁴

- Museum of Homelessness: “The Museum of Homelessness is a community-driven, social justice museum, created and run by people with direct experience of homelessness. The award will support ‘Leave our Neighbours Alone – how to beat the hostile environment’ – two days of solidarity space in Glasgow and London that highlight, celebrate and connect the work of individuals, campaigners, communities and lawyers in challenging and winning against hate.”⁵
- People’s History Museum: “The People’s History Museum in Manchester has been working with campaigning organisations such as Together with Refugees to increase awareness of the Nationality and Borders Bill and how proposed change to it will impact on refugees and asylum seekers coming to Britain.”⁶
- Fast Familiar: “Digital story studio Fast Familiar will use its award to help deliver The Acquisitions Panel, a participatory artwork about the legacies of European colonialism that asks who gets to choose the stories we tell. The experience uses the case of a specific object as a prism to explore the non-neutrality of museums and to ask what role we want them to play in our increasingly fractured society.”^{7, 8}

Widening Engagement Action Plan 2022-25

This new action plan⁹ from Amgueddfa Cymru (National Museum Wales) and Arts Council of Wales has recently been published – it shows how they aim to broaden their reach among all communities.

It draws on work commissioned from three organisations:

- “Re:cognition, who focused on an area of semi-rural poverty
- Richie Turner Associates, who created a team focusing on deaf and disabled people
- Welsh Arts Anti-Racist Union, who focused on cultural and ethnic diversity” [p3]

⁴ See, for example: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jean-campbell-a8997464/?originalSubdomain=uk>.

⁵ See: <https://museumofhomelessness.org/>.

⁶ See: <https://phm.org.uk/>.

⁷ See: <https://fastfamiliar.com/artwork/the-acquisitions-panel/>.

⁸ Source: Museums Association email updates, 21 Dec 2021.

⁹ *Widening Engagement Action Plan 2022-25*. Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales/Arts Council of Wales, 2022, <https://arts.wales/sites/default/files/2022-01/Widening%20Engagement%20Action%20Plan%202022-25.pdf>.

The report outlines their “Guiding Principles” which are:

- Leadership and accountability
- Cultural democracy
 - “Cultural programmes are led and coproduced by communities.
 - Arts and Heritage are representative of the histories and creativity of culturally and ethnically diverse communities in venues and digitally.” [p5]
- Equality and the Welsh language
- Accessible services
- Workforce development, staff training and skills
- Communication and branding.

The report then summarises progress to date, followed by tables setting out the Action Plan – rather than randomly picking out examples here, I’d recommend having a look through these, there are some useful ideas for taking forward this work.

Finally, the report sets all this within the framework of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This includes the 7 wellbeing goals:

1. A prosperous Wales
2. A resilient Wales
3. A more equal Wales
4. A healthier Wales
5. A Wales of cohesive communities
6. A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language
7. A globally responsible Wales.

Of particular interest is how the report has tackled the “Ways of working” that lead on from the Act:

- Prevention: “The objectives have been informed by three intensive engagement studies with communities of interest. They aim to address inequality of access and to remove barriers which prevent engagement amongst specific communities.” [p22]
- Long term: including the very welcome “[...] long term commitment to delivery and resourcing [...]” [p22]
- Collaboration: “Strong partnerships with a range of different organisations already exist and these will be developed further as the plan is delivered. We anticipate new partnerships and collaborations forming as work progresses.” [p22]
- Integration: looking at ways to integrate developments across the ‘protected characteristics’ and other duties of the Equality Act 2020

- Involvement: “We are committed to engagement with people and communities in the further development of the plan and the design of projects, programmes and services that drive our objectives forward.” [p22]

Lastly, the report includes a useful Glossary.

This is a valuable coordinated approach to taking forward the engagement plan – and further implementing areas of the Equality Act 2020 – recommended.¹⁰

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

Levelling up the United Kingdom [continued]

There was a brief assessment of the White Paper¹¹ in the last Newsletter¹²: here are some further reactions and responses.

On 3 Feb, Equally Ours¹³ issued a statement¹⁴:

“Equally Ours is pleased that the Levelling Up white paper has been published. The focus on some of the most disadvantaged parts of the UK is important – we are one of the most geographically unequal countries in the OECD.

But to truly level up opportunities and outcomes for everyone, levelling up needs to tackle inequalities between people as well as places.

In the UK today discrimination and disadvantage continue to hold back millions of people, preventing them from reaching their potential. Women, disabled people, Black and ethnic minority people, over 50s and LGBT people face discrimination and structural inequality in the labour market and workplace, as well as barriers due to socio-economic disadvantage.

¹⁰ Source: Museums Association email updates, 4 Feb 2022.

¹¹ *Levelling up the United Kingdom*. [CP 604]. HMSO, 2022, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1052708/Levelling_up_the_UK_white_paper.pdf.

¹² *Network Newsletter*, 249, Nov 2021, <https://www.seapn.org.uk/uploads/files/Newsletter-NS-249.pdf>, pp2-6.

¹³ “Equally Ours (previously the Equality and Diversity Forum) is a UK charity that brings together people and organisations working across equality, human rights and social justice to make a reality of these in everyone’s lives.” [Taken from: <https://www.equallyours.org.uk/>].

¹⁴ “Equally Ours statement on the Government’s Levelling Up white paper”, Equally Ours, 3 Feb 2022, https://www.equallyours.org.uk/equally-ours-statement-on-the-governments-levelling-up-white-paper/?utm_source=Equally+Ours+Newsletter&utm_campaign=19ecdffb65-Newsletter+February+1+2022&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_104ed5022f-19ecdffb65-58965893.

Unless this is addressed employment rates and productivity won't change, and levelling up won't deliver for those who need it most.

We know how to do this. All programmes under EU funds were required to tackle discrimination, and advance equality and social inclusion. Equality was designed in from the outset. To build the fairer and more prosperous society that we all want, equality and social inclusion must be hard-wired into levelling up.”

In a blogpost¹⁵, Theo Clay, Policy Manager at NPC (New Philanthropy Capital) says that there is a number of points in the Paper that are very welcome, including:

- Focusing on a data-driven approach
- Setting ambitious targets for tackling crime, well-being, education and health inequalities
- A strong recognition of the role of civil society.

However, there also needs to be:

- An ambitious funding commitment
- A greater focus on poverty and homelessness: “Secondly, considering poverty and homelessness were number one and two on people’s measures of success for the levelling up agenda when we polled them in 2021, it’s jarring to see them given such short shrift here. Even though mission one is focused on raising living standards, the metrics announced are focused on productivity and median weekly pay. This could support those in the middle, but will not necessarily lift up those at the bottom. There is a danger here, therefore, that in levelling up an area, we could end up entrenching inequalities within it.”
- The involvement of a greater breadth of civil society: “Much depends on this Advisory Council, but it doesn’t appear to be independent from government, unlike the admired Climate Change Committee, so there is a danger it could be filled with friends and cheerleaders and offer little in the way of real scrutiny. Moreover, of the people announced to the council so far, only one could be classed as representing ‘civil society’.”

Broader issues – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

Political impartiality in schools

On 17 Feb, the Government issued this new guidance¹⁶, supported by an introductory pamphlet¹⁷.

¹⁵ Theo Clay “Grading the levelling up White Paper: shows promise but room for improvement”, NPC blog, 4 Feb 2022, <https://www.thinknpc.org/blog/grading-the-levelling-up-white-paper-shows-promise-but-room-for-improvement/>.

As the Introduction states:

“This guidance does not include any new statutory requirements and is based on legal duties on political impartiality that have been in place for many years, and which we know most school leaders, teachers and staff already consider in their work.”

The guidance goes on to say:

“Political issues are particularly important to cover in certain subjects, for example, citizenship or history. However, this might also be necessary in other subjects where there are fewer and less obvious political issues in the curriculum.”

It includes some scenarios to illustrate how this should happen, eg in Scenario A:

Teaching about climate change and the scientific facts and evidence behind this, would not constitute teaching about a political issue. Schools do not need to present misinformation, such as unsubstantiated claims that anthropogenic climate change is not occurring, to provide balance here.

However, where teaching covers the potential solutions for tackling climate change, this may constitute a political issue. Different groups, including political parties and campaign groups, may have partisan political views on the best way to address climate change.

This part of the topic should be taught in a balanced manner, with teachers not promoting any of the partisan political views covered to pupils.”

And in Scenario H:

“When teaching about the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the UK, including the Sexual Offences Act 1967, it may be important to teach about the prejudicial views held by those that opposed the change.

Teachers are not required to present these discriminatory beliefs uncritically or as acceptable in our society today. They can and should be clear with pupils on the dangers of present-day sexist views and practices, including the facts and laws about discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.”

And in Scenario I:

¹⁶ See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/political-impartiality-in-schools/political-impartiality-in-schools#using-external-agencies>.

¹⁷ *What you need to know about political impartiality in schools*. DfE, 2022, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1050134/6.7731_DfE_Political_Impartiality_Guidance_Pamphlet_WEB_004_.pdf.

“When teaching pupils about racism, teachers should be clear that racism has no place in our society and help pupils to understand facts about this and the law.

Where schools wish to teach about specific campaigning organisations, such as some of those associated with the Black Lives Matter movement, they should be aware that this may cover partisan political views. These are views which go beyond the basic shared principle that racism is unacceptable, which is a view schools should reinforce. Examples of such partisan political views include advocating specific views on how government resources should be used to address social issues, including withdrawing funding from the police.

Schools should ensure this content is taught appropriately taking steps to offer pupils a balanced account of opposing views on these points. Partisan political views must not be promoted to pupils, including by encouraging pupils to support campaign groups advocating such views.”

The guidance also covers working appropriately with external agencies and campaign groups; how to handle public displays and communication (“There is no reason that schools cannot have public displays and communications, to mark significant awareness-raising or community events or for other reasons, provided they do not promote partisan political views.”)

There is continuing media coverage of so-called ‘woke’ teaching in schools; for example, the arguments around Brighton & Hove schools’ teaching about race:

“The council has been accused of telling schools to teach white privilege and inherited racial guilt to children.

Campaigners claim the council's ‘anti-racist schools strategy’ is illegal and creates ‘confusion, distress and division’.

The row centres on the use of critical race theory (CRT), which argues that racism is embedded within our laws and government institutions.”

The article continues:

“GB News anchor Andrew Neil questioned whether the approach may be illegal, based on a statement from the government’s equalities minister, Kemi Badenoch.

She said in 2020: ‘We do not want to see teachers teaching their pupils about white privilege and inherited racial guilt.’

‘Any school which teaches these elements of critical race theory, or which promotes partisan political views such as defunding the police without offering a balanced treatment of opposing views, is breaking the law.’”

There has been some discussion of the likely impact of this new guidance – including some controversy:

“Stonewall has said a recent story in *The Times* claiming that teachers have been asked to ‘avoid’ the charity in class is ‘factually incorrect’.

On Wednesday (16 February), *The Times* published an article with the headline: ‘Teachers ordered to avoid ‘biased’ views on BLM and Stonewall.’

The newspaper reported on government guidance for schools on ‘political impartiality’ issued Wednesday (16 February), which among other things advises teachers who are teaching students about race to ‘avoid advocating for specific organisations that have widely contested aims or views’ – widely seen to mean Black Lives Matter.

The Times, as well as *The Daily Mail*, also name-checked Stonewall, writing that ‘government sources’ claimed the move is ‘designed to combat the politicisation of sensitive topics such as race and gender by campaign groups’.

However, the guidance mentions neither ‘gender issues’ or Stonewall.”¹⁸

Branwen Jeffreys (the BBC Education Editor) has commented:

“Schools in England have been quietly navigating their legal duty not to promote partisan political views for decades.

So be in no doubt this is a very deliberate intervention by the government which sends a signal of greater scrutiny in future.

Why now? This is the era of so called "culture war", where polarised views are played out in shouting matches on social media.

Issues like climate change, racial injustices past and present, and food poverty are in the media streams of teenagers, not least through their heroes and influencers.

There are also the long-standing issues schools have to navigate, such as the tension between Israel and the Palestinians.

The question is whether this guidance will cool or fan the flames the next time a row blows up about what has, or hasn't, been said in a classroom.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Josh Milton “No, schoolteachers haven’t been ordered to ‘avoid Stonewall’ in class”, *PinkNews*, 17 Feb 2022, https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2022/02/17/stonewall-the-times-government-education-guidelines/?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=mypinknews&pne_spid=vOd5AnlANLkTiufAoimmF5aJvxauCZR5J7S2nfFhgkRm8R6wd73uJ3GwFVXNWul.aoYtCncNIA.

¹⁹ See: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-60405521>.

This is a major issue, and we will return to discuss it further in future Newsletters.

Abbreviations and acronyms

DfE = Department for Education
NPC = New Philanthropy Capital

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