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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Did you see …?

The School Librarian

Following on from the item in the last Newsletter, Alison Hicks has just shared a copy of her article, "'It does make me reflect … on the nature of the profession': experiences of book banning and censorship in school libraries", via Google Docs[1], and the research was also picked up by *The Guardian* on 14 Apr in an article[2] that reports on the research with additional comments from CILIP, Libraries Connected and the SLA. The article includes:

> "Requests to remove books from library shelves are on the rise in the UK, as the influence of pressure groups behind book bans in the US crosses the Atlantic, according to those working in the sector.
>
> Although 'the situation here is nowhere [near] as bad, censorship does happen and there are some deeply worrying examples of library professionals losing their jobs and being trolled online for standing up for intellectual freedom on behalf of their users', said Louis Coiffait-Gunn, CEO of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (Cilip).
>
> Ed Jewell, president of Libraries Connected, an independent charity that represents public libraries, said: 'Anecdotal evidence from our members suggests that requests to remove books are increasing.' The School Library Association (SLA) said this year has seen an 'increase in member queries about censorship'."

The article concludes:

> "One cause for concern in the UK is the 'lack of robust evidence' about how widespread censorship is, said Coiffait-Gunn. 'It's hard to evidence what doesn't happen and which books are not available.' The government does not tally how many school libraries or librarians there are, 'let alone track book bans'.
>
> Most UK libraries follow the Cilip ethical framework, which states that published materials should not be restricted on any grounds but the law, said Jewell. 'That gives them the confidence and assurance to reject demands' for censorship.
>
> 'What we must guard against is a climate where libraries avoid stocking certain books – or holding talks or activities – for fear of negative publicity, threats or intimidation,' he added. 'It's vital that libraries feel

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[1] See: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AqmWn7k_5ONihVEB_KO0pcYRKrWFdyVoTGttQzkJk-Q/edit?pli=1&tab=t.0.

[2] Ella Creamer "Librarians in UK increasingly asked to remove books, as influence of US pressure groups spreads", *The Guardian* 14 Apr 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/apr/14/librarians-in-uk-increasingly-asked-to-remove-books-as-influence-of-us-pressure-groups-spreads.

able to provide access to a wide range of perspectives if they are to facilitate the free exchange of ideas.'"

Black Lives Matter

"Museums' approach to decolonisation scrutinised in British Museum debate"

Apologies for being a bit slow in picking up on this report[3] of an event at the British Museum organised by *The Times*.

To be honest, it all sounds a bit odd, as though a group of eminent historians, artists and writers was at an event that they hadn't wanted to go to!

It does show that there are still many misunderstandings about looking at our past and learning from it (and I was particularly disappointed by Grayson Perry's reported comments, eg: "'Quite often the tone of a lot of political engagement with the culture these days is a little bit scoldy, a little bit finger waggy,' he said.")

However, I liked the more realistic approach from Margaret Casely-Hayford who said that:

> "[…] for museums to engage with contemporary and societal issues, it was a question of 'being grown up about it'.
>
> 'It depends how you do it of course. You don't force it down,' she said.
>
> Casely-Hayford referenced her own family history as the descendant of a slave trader from County Clare and a Ghanaian chieftain's daughter.
>
> 'My family has [the slave trader], as well as the people who fought against him, as well as the anti-colonial pan-Africans. I'm quite comfortable about looking at both sides and saying "this is me, this is who I am".'"[4]

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[3] Gerladine Kendall Adams "Museums' approach to decolonisation scrutinised in British Museum debate", MA, 4 Mar 2025, https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2025/03/museums-approach-to-decolonisation-scrutinised-in-british-museum-debate/#msdynttrid=mpzgiydKbmjFN-JZq9WGbG16NpfOBfRTKQAvk9CehdY.

[4] Source: Museums Association email updates, 4 Mar 2025.

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

Written evidence submission by Libraries Connected [to the] Independent Commission on Community and Cohesion

> "The UK is a thriving, multi-ethnic and multi-faith democracy where most people in towns, cities, and rural areas get on with each other. But we are also experiencing challenges to our community and local lives, with fresh expressions of old tensions – and new ones – emerging.
>
> In some cases, this includes a decline in trust between neighbours, declining community connections, a growing sense of isolation and loneliness, or a feeling of not belonging either to the UK as a whole – or to England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.
>
> In other cases, it includes social exclusion, prejudice, hate crimes, extremism, and the emergence of so-called culture wars – sometimes revealing a society in which a shared understanding of the nation is lacking.
>
> Much of the modern story of our country traces back to the post-war years – a moment of profound social change, including the creation of the NHS, the modern welfare state, and Commonwealth immigration.
>
> Now, 80 years on, we find ourselves at a crossroads. We're faced with generational questions – including how we live well together, and of our vision for the kind of country and the kind of communities we are trying to build. The riots across the country last summer have increased the urgency of answering these questions.
>
> The Independent Commission on Community and Cohesion is a non-partisan, time-limited commission tasked with answering these questions […]"[5]

In Mar 2025, Libraries Connected submitted evidence to the Commission, emphasising that

> "It is clear that public libraries are already ideally positioned to play a major part in the work of the Commission. However, for libraries to continue supporting community cohesion, and for that role to develop in line with a new national strategy, they must be funded adequately."[6]

The written evidence outlines the role that public libraries play in general and then goes on to look at ways in which they support/foster community cohesion:

> "Public libraries contribute to community cohesion and a variety of ways:

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[5] Taken from: https://www.livingwelltogether.org.uk/.
[6] Taken from: https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/news/libraries-connected-submits-evidence-commission-community-and-cohesion.

• acting as shared spaces for the whole community
• welcoming refugees and asylum seekers
• championing media and information literacy
• providing volunteering opportunities
• fostering local pride and shared celebrations." [p2]

The evidence briefly expands on each of these points; for example, in relation to welcoming refugees and people seeking asylum:

> "Public libraries provide critical support to refugees and people seeking sanctuary in our communities. This could be through providing English language classes or conversation groups, dual and first-language reading materials, or information on local services such as education, housing and health. Many libraries also offer free food, toiletries, clothes, bedding and school essentials to those who need it, including refugees. As all public libraries provide free wi-fi and PC use, they are frequently used by new arrivals to keep in touch with family and friends." [p3]

It notes the growth of libraries recognised as Libraries of Sanctuary, and then also states (helpfully):

> "The important function of public libraries in welcoming refugees is particularly significant in dispersal areas. As the *After the riots* report, published by British Future, Belong and the Together Coalition [7], puts it: 'Integration should be promoted in dispersal areas through welcoming hubs that crease social contact between newcomers and receiving communities, offering activities such as English language conversation clubs and sport, advice and mentoring'. Libraries are well placed to fulfil this role – and in many ways already do – but need the right funding and support, particularly when it could make them a target for criticism or even violence." [p4]

Important reiteration of the role that public libraries can play in community cohesion (with a welcome addition about the resources required).[8]

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Other Agencies

Social capital 2025: the hidden wealth of nations

This new report[9] from Demos:

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[7] Jill Rutter, Sunder Katwala, Andrew Dixon, Jamie Scudamore, Emeka Forbes and Brendan Cox. *After the riots: building the foundations for social cohesion – policy priorities for cohesion and resilience.* British Future/Belong/Together, 2024, https://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/After_the_riots_report.Final_.pdf.

[8] Source: *Public Libraries News*, 14 Apr 2025.

[9] Andy Haldane and David Halpern. *Social capital 2025: the hidden wealth of nations.* Demos, 2025, https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Social-Capital-2025_The-Hidden-Wealth-of-Nations.pdf.

"[…] makes the case for a greater focus on social capital in policy and practice. It is the first in a series published by Demos in partnership with Local Trust and 3ni, called Social Capital 2025. The series examines social capital and the contribution that strengthening it makes to improving economic and social outcomes, including for children, improving health and wellbeing and reducing crime and antisocial behaviour." [p5]

The report includes "Why social capital matters":

"Our social networks provide us with emotional and practical support. They lend us an ear, find out information, and provide material support when times get tough. The scale and reach of your social network matters, but so does its quality. The more trustworthy your contacts – be they people you know directly or familiar strangers – the more valuable your network." [p8]

and argues that:

"Higher social capital appears to improve a range of other outcomes, as well as economic growth, including educational attainment; it seems to lower crime and fear of crime; and improve the efficacy of government. These may in turn further boost economic growth, as well as being of value in their own terms. In high social capital communities, kids skipping school get noticed and parents tell each other. Those children go on to have better educational outcomes, which over time will boost their earnings and wider economic growth. Importantly, social capital has demonstrable effects both at the individual level and at the collective level – for example, the 'collective efficacy' of a neighbourhood reduces crime for all its residents." [p9]

Part 2 looks at how social capital has changed, for example:

"The Covid pandemic appears to have affected levels of social capital, though different countries have been affected in different ways […] For many people, the narrowing effect of lockdowns was positive and brought us closer to our neighbours. Similarly, acts undertaken on behalf of others, like wearing facemasks, became highly visible expressions of collective responsibility.

In the UK, there were significant increases in informal volunteering. People had more meaningful conversations with their neighbours and felt more comfortable asking for help […]" [p14]

Part 3 asks how politicians can improve social capital. Part of the problem is that social capital straddles so many departments that it is often hard to focus on it:

"In the UK, both the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport might claim to hold part of the social capital portfolio, while others such as the Department for Education, the Department for Transport, and the

Department for Business and Trade (DBT) control levers that likely affect it.

Despite solid evidence of the effect social capital has on growth, inequality and opportunity, it remains curiously neglected by most economic ministries. The UK is no exception. Social capital does not feature at all, for example, in the UK Treasury or DBT's long-standing ("five-factor") model of economic growth. It did, however, play a prominent role in the last government's White Paper on levelling up, published two years ago [...]" [p15]

The report makes a number of suggestions for improving social capital – at a micro, meso and macro level – including, community development work; a review of social media use in schools; building neighbourhood networks and directories; doing more to build trust; and nurturing common experience and values.

The report concludes:

"We take for granted the lengths to which governments and citizens go to nurture human, natural and financial capital. Now, we must bring that same vigour to the most elusive capital of all: social capital. Though hard to measure and define, the evidence is clear – social capital is of profound value to individuals, communities and nations. **It's time to take it seriously**." [p18 – emphasis theirs]

A timely reminder of this important area of work.

Broader issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

"Contested heritage" and "Culture wars"

"Deep Dive: The Right-Wing Whitewash of American Libraries"

This article[10] on "Inkstick", a US blog, reports on the publication of *Cover to cover*[11], a report from PEN America, which looks at books banned in schools in the 23-24 School Year.

"According to PEN America's tally, schools around the nation banned more than 10,000 books and removed more than 4,200 unique titles from the shelves throughout the 2023-2024 school year.

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[10] "Deep Dive: The Right-Wing Whitewash of American Libraries", *Inkstick*, 11 Apr 2025, https://inkstickmedia.com/deep-dive-the-right-wing-whitewash-of-american-libraries/.
[11] See: https://pen.org/report/cover-to-cover/.

Despite the uproar over supposedly sexual content, PEN America found that just 13% of the banned titles included sexual descriptions 'on the page,' while fewer than a third had 'off the page' sexual descriptions.

'Sex-related content is one of the most commonly discussed and criticized subjects in books in school libraries today,' the report pointed out. 'The two states with the most school book bans last year – Florida and Iowa–both have legislation that, in part, targets books that include sex-related content.'

But if the most-cited talking point on book removals doesn't actually apply to the majority of the banned titles, then what kinds of books are schools actually removing?

Well, well. In PEN America's telling, more than a third of the books include a person of color or people of color as primary characters, while a quarter tell the stories of LGBTQ+ characters. Another 10% targeted books with neurodivergent or disabled characters."

Abbreviations and acronyms

CILIP = Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
SLA = School Library Association

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