

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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2024 Riots – Background info/explainers

“The 2024 Riots: One Year On”

HOPE not hate have produced a web resource¹ with four “features” to “[...] explore what happened, the extremist ideology that fuelled it, the state’s response, and the lessons we must learn.”

The resource includes:

“Seven days that rocked Britain: the riots one year on”²

“Over the week of 29 July to 5 August 2024, the United Kingdom endured the largest outbreak of far-right rioting and disorder of the post-war period.”

HOPE not hate monitored all this and concluded that:

“Our analysis also showed that some of the towns and cities worst affected by the anti-Muslim, anti-migrant riots were the same locations that had been repeatedly targeted by far-right activists over the previous three years.

However, despite many of the protests and riots looking extremely similar, with near-indistinguishable targets, slogans, iconography and chants, it became clear that there was no central organiser or organisation behind this national wave of riots. Rather, they were first and foremost a product of the ‘post-organisational’ far right. Most of these disturbances emerged organically and primarily involved local people who are not members of any formal far-right organisations, but were plugged into decentralised far-right networks online.”

Looking at the response, the investigations found that:

YouGov polling in the immediate aftermath of the riots was damning. The results suggested that ‘opposition to the riots [was] near-universal across every part of the public’, highlighting the widespread contempt for the thuggery that upturned many towns around the country.

Unsurprisingly, the far right quickly sought to play the victim, claiming to be the target of ‘two tier’ policing. Another narrative to quickly emerge, echoed by elements of the right wing media, tried to reframe the violence as outpourings of ‘legitimate anger’. These were not people inspired by far-right ideology, this narrative ran, but ‘concerned patriots’ angered by the horrific Southport attack. This has been particularly brazen, given the manner in which mobilisations moved swiftly from anger at the attack to targeting both Muslims and immigration more broadly.”

¹ “The 2024 Riots: One Year On”, HOPE not hate, 2025, <https://hopenothate.org.uk/riots-one-year/>.

² See: <https://hopenothate.org.uk/seven-days-riots/>.

The HOPE not hate analysis shows that, one year on:

“[...] the anger and prejudice that led to those riots is still bubbling away under British society. This summer we have already seen anti-migrant rioting in Ballymena and a Loyalist bonfire in the village of Moygashel, Co Tyrone, topped with effigies of refugees in a boat.

Just last week, we saw ugly violence break out at The Bell Hotel in Epping, Essex as an anti-migrant protest spiralled into disorder. A string of smaller protests have followed, accompanied by alarmist headlines in the media.”

As we have seen very recently in the media, the “legitimate anger” narrative continues to be used – and trumpeted by some politicians.

“The lingering lessons from the 2024 riots”³

As Misbah Malik argues:

“A swift criminal justice response quickly put a stop to the physical violence but, one year on, the problems that spurred it are anything but fixed. The riots may have dropped off media circuits, but the wider issues they bore must remain on the political agenda. The riots exposed broader vulnerabilities to far-right agitation, giving us insight into how we can and should build community resilience to this sort of activity in the future.”

She draws a theme from this:

“From the swathes of online mis- and disinformation about the identity of the Southport attacker emerged one clear narrative – ‘multiculturalism has failed’. Offline, we saw people smash mosque windows with bricks in the name of defending against the ‘threat’ of Muslims, migrants and multiculturalism.

Previously confined to the fringes of the far right, this narrative has become increasingly normalised, a result of deliberate vilification by the radical right ecosystem. Unsurprisingly, HOPE not hate polling shows that support for multiculturalism has dropped over the last few years, after stabilised improvements over the last decade. The far right were so successful at instigating violence during the riots because they were able to tap into this preexisting hostility, and exacerbate it.

Immediately post-riots we saw a spike in hatred towards Muslims, migrants and multiculturalism. Despite the physical violence fizzing out after a few weeks, attitudes remain hostile one year on.”

To have an effect on this, we need to:

³ Misbah Malik “The lingering lessons from the 2024 riots”, see: <https://hopenothate.org.uk/one-year-on-lessons/>.

- Develop a centralised cohesion strategy, as well as local authorities developing their own locally
- Focus on communities and individuals in hardship: “The riots highlighted the link between economic deprivation and vulnerability to far-right agitation. 12 out of the 23 local authorities where violence took place were in the top decile for deprivation and over half of those charged with offences from the riots came from the most deprived 20% of neighbourhoods.”
- Restructure/rebuild relationships between “people and power”
- Strengthen community resilience: “National strategy and guidance that strengthens the social economic and political fabric of communities, and empowers and invests in local ownership and delivery of this work, is essential to support communities to play the pivotal role they can play in resisting the far right.”

“Southport: a new form of terror”⁴

Nick Lowles investigates what the FBI have described as “Nihilistic Violent Extremism” which “[...] refers to ‘individuals who engage in criminal conduct within the United States and abroad, in furtherance of political, social, or religious goals that derive primarily from a hatred of society at large and a desire to bring about its collapse by sowing indiscriminate chaos, destruction, and social instability’.”

He argues that the public – and the police – have been slow to become aware of this new form of terrorism, something that has not been helped by the far-right media suggestions that the Southport killer was an Islamist.

“Holding on to hope: how communities across the UK came together to pick up the pieces after the riots”⁵

Finally, Georgie Laming identifies signs of hope:

“It’s almost unbelievable to think that a year has passed since the horrific events in Southport and the worrying scenes of rioting and violence across the country.

Much of the focus and attention has rightly been on the minority of people who took to the streets, vandalised community buildings, and attempted to set fire to asylum seeker accommodation. These events rocked this country to its core and challenged how we see ourselves.

⁴ Nick Lowles “Southport: a new form of terror”, see: <https://hopenothate.org.uk/one-year-on-southport/>.

⁵ Georgie Laming “Holding on to hope: how communities across the UK came together to pick up the pieces after the riots”, see: <https://hopenothate.org.uk/holding-on-to-hope/>.

However, that's not the whole picture. In communities across the UK, the grief of Southport and the riots was turned into hopeful action. Good people refused to be defined by hatred and division."

As we'll remember, one particular target of the riots was Spellow Hub Library:

"A huge community fundraiser raised over £100,000 to 'replenish books destroyed and help get Spellow Library back on its feet' and volunteers at Fans Supporting Foodbanks collected book donations. The library had been torched by rioters."

This is a very important resource, and one that we need to keep returning to, as the conditions that created the fertile ground for the spread of misinformation and, ultimately, riots have not gone away.

LGBTQ+ issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

"EHRC guidance risks discrimination, says Museums Galleries Scotland"

According to this article⁶, MGS thinks that the EHRC "[...] proposed guidance on sex and gender does not 'uphold the spirit of inclusion' and is 'unfeasible' in practice."

For example:

"MGS raised concerns around the evidence a person would be required to show to prove their sex, and said the process of asking would put undue pressure on front-of-house staff.

Its response said: 'When there is a need to 'prove' your sex, what proof will be acceptable given gender recognition certificates are not, nor are altered birth certificates – but how would you know?

'It is likely this role would fall on front-of-house staff, which we believe puts undue pressure on them to do this 'in a sensitive way which does not cause discrimination or harassment'."

In addition, "MGS also described the practical application of 'policing toilets' as unfeasible."

According to the article:

⁶ Geraldine Kendall Adams "EHRC guidance risks discrimination, says Museums Galleries Scotland", MA, 25 Jul 2025, https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2025/07/policing-toilets-risks-discrimination-says-mgs/#msdynmkt_trackingcontext=0938e9de-081c-48e1-ad53-991c7da60300.

“The response concluded: ‘We strongly encourage the EHRC to review their processes around this guidance and take the necessary time to understand the impacts and needs of trans individuals and organisations committed to trans inclusion.’”

“National Library of Scotland investigates censorship claim”

This article⁷ looks at claims that the NLS decided to exclude “[...] a book by gender-critical feminists from its centenary exhibition.”⁸

According to the article:

“Members of the public were invited to recommend books for display in the exhibition, and 200 titles were chosen out of 523 nominations.

Four people nominated *The Women Who Wouldn’t Wheesht*, a collection of essays by some of the women involved a five-year campaign against the Scottish Government’s Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill, which they argued would adversely affect women’s rights under the Equality Act. Contributors to the book include the author JK Rowling, former MSP Joanna Cherry and poet Magi Gibson.

The library has been accused of censorship after Freedom of Information requests showed that the national librarian, Amina Shah, reversed a decision to select the book for display following concerns raised by the library’s LGBT+ staff network.”

Following concerns raised about including the book in the exhibition, “[...] the NLS carried out an Equality Impact Assessment on the book choice before eventually deciding not to feature it in the exhibition.”

As the article goes on to report, this whole matter was picked up by *Index on Censorship*. In her piece⁹, Jemimah Steinfeld argues that open discussion about such books is vital, and concludes:

“Instead of continuing with the message that you can face professional risks either way, we should be asking how we can hold space for difficult conversations, without silencing people on either side. Because this isn’t

⁷ Geraldine Kendall Adams “National Library of Scotland investigates censorship claim”, *MA*, 22 Aug 2025, <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2025/08/national-library-of-scotland-investigates-censorship-claim/#>.

⁸ “To mark our 100th birthday, the National Library of Scotland presents a special exhibition, ‘Dear Library’.

Made in collaboration with partners across the country, this love letter to libraries will intrigue, energise, and galvanise you. You’ll leave with a whole new perspective on how libraries can help you, and how you can help them.”

See: <https://www.nls.uk/whats-on/dear-library/>.

⁹ Jemimah Steinfeld “The National Library of Scotland: When curation becomes censorship”, *Index on Censorship*, 19 Aug 2025, <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2025/08/the-national-library-of-scotland-when-curation-becomes-censorship/>.

just about one book, or one exhibition. It's about a moment in which institutions are being pushed and pulled by opposing forces, and trying, often imperfectly, to chart a course through it all.

Ultimately, we need space for discomfort, for disagreement, and above all, for empathy. That's how democracies grow – not by hiding books away, but by reading them, debating them and understanding why they matter.”

This is such a complex subject ... and not one I can really do justice to in a few lines.

It's important to stress that, yes, room for discussion and empathy is very important, but that working in a busy library or museum frequently doesn't allow the luxury of proper discussions – what happens then? If someone picks up such a title without any discussion, then they could assume that the library or museum has approved it for inclusion in a collection or exhibition ... so how do we get across the magnitude of this sort of issue?

A topic worth coming back to.

Banning of LGBTQ+ books and other library materials [continued] and Protests against Drag Queen Storytimes

“Drag artist takes legal action against ‘abuse and false accusations’ following Belfast library event”

According to a story¹⁰ in *GCN*,

“Two performers were subjected to a campaign of online abuse after a drag storytime event in a Belfast library was interrupted by agitators.”

“The event was organised by charity organisation EastSide Partnership as part of the Eastside Arts Festival. Taking place at the Hollywood Arches Library, it featured two drag performers, Lady Portia, who read storybooks to children, and Miss Dora Belle, who interpreted the stories into British Sign Language (BSL).

However, while the event was taking place, a number of agitators gathered outside the public library, resulting in the event being cancelled early. A video circulated online shows the two drag performers being escorted out of the building by police due to safety concerns [...]

Following the incident, the two drag performers faced heated backlash online and Northern Irish politicians also got involved in the controversy. DUP Communities Minister Gordon Lyons claimed that the event was

¹⁰ Beatrice Fanucci “Drag artist takes legal action against ‘abuse and false accusations’ following Belfast library event” *GCN* [*Gay Community News*], 7 Aug 2025, <https://gcn.ie/drag-artist-legal-action-abuse-belfast-library-event/>.

‘not appropriate for children’ and that it ‘should not have taken place and it has compromised the perception of our public libraries as a welcoming and inclusive space for all’.”

However, CILIP has helpfully intervened¹¹:

“Louis Coiffait-Gunn, CEO of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), has called for decision-makers to ‘support, not undermine, inclusive storytelling in libraries’ [...]

Coiffait-Gunn told *The Bookseller*: ‘Public libraries exist to serve every member of their community, fostering learning about the world in a respectful, inclusive way. Drag Queen Story Hour has been shown to boost children’s reading and engagement, offering a creative, centuries-old storytelling tradition that celebrates imagination, diversity and literacy.

‘Public libraries must remain safe and welcoming for all, especially children and families. We defend the right of staff, performers and users to take part in inclusive events free from harassment. Such initiatives nurture empathy, self-acceptance and belonging – the foundations of a fair, vibrant society. We urge decision-makers to support, not undermine, inclusive storytelling in libraries.’”

LGBTQ+ issues – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

Timeline of EHRC capture and turn to anti-trans ideology

This research¹², covering the period 2020-July 2025, outlines the change in direction of the EHRC.

In an accompanying blogpost¹³, TransActual¹⁴ state:

¹¹ Taken from: Lauren Brown “CILIP chief defends ‘inclusive and creative’ Drag Queen Story Hour after minister calls event ‘inappropriate’”, *The Bookseller*, 11 Aug 2025, https://www.thebookseller.com/news/cilip-chief-defends-inclusive-and-creative-drag-queen-story-hour-after-minister-calls-event-inappropriate?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook&fbclid=IwY2xjawMVY-FleHRuA2FibQlxMQBicmlkETBIZUtQSTgzS0NUOVVOVIY5AR4t9vquUR634W0vUN1N3wi7-iHlsUtl_tFF08qFPEu1pBeZHzQQSyavZn9Q_aem_Hjpl36r_gnu-OWsmg5_rbw#Echobox=1754926779.

¹² *Timeline of EHRC capture and turn to anti-trans ideology*. TransActual, 2025, <https://transactual.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/EHRC-Timeline.pdf>.

¹³ “What has the EHRC ever done for Trans people?”, TransActual, 2025, https://transactual.org.uk/equality-act-campaign/what-has-the-ehrc-ever-done-for-trans-people/?mc_cid=deb560c193&mc_eid=9173f12464.

¹⁴ “TransActual UK was founded by a group of British trans people in 2017 as a response to increasing press hostility, transphobia and misinformation. We are run by the trans and non-binary communities, with the trans and non-binary communities, for the trans and non-binary communities.

“So, what has the EHRC ever done for us? The short answer, of course, is loads. For younger trans folks and for those who have come lately to an awareness of the EHRC as one of, if not ‘the,’ most serious threat to the existence of trans folks in the UK today, it may come as some surprise to realise it was not always thus.

For years, trans people have been able to move around UK society, to participate and, even, to flourish, under guidance provided by the EHRC since the passing of the Equality Act in 2010. Their understanding closely paralleled that of pretty much every single person who had been involved in drafting the Gender Recognition Act (2004) and later the Equality Act.

Trans people counted as their identified sex/gender. And there’s an end to it.

Of course, if the decade or so from 2010 to 2020 had been beset by a catalogue of unfortunate events – trans people doing unspeakable things in loos, or streaking through changing rooms – there might have been some reason to look at the law again.

But no such evidence exists. Rather, the media hyper-focussed on the more difficult interfaces between trans and cis people. Prison is a fairly obvious one. Because while the presumption of goodwill within the general population may be taken as read, those in prison are, by definition, an outlier. Goodwill and honest intent may well be absent.

Meanwhile, anti-trans folks kept popping up with ‘concerns.’ That is, claims that things that had not happened *might happen* if there were not rules preventing them from happening.

For years, the EHRC would have no truck with this obviously exclusionary and anti-social discourse. It was in clear breach of the Equality Act. Not to mention that it constituted a clear breach of the human rights of trans people.”

In June 2020 we expanded our scope and remit to:

- share reliable information about trans and non-binary people’s lives and about trans rights in the UK, as well as dispelling common myths;
- amplify the voices of trans and non-binary people so that the wider world may hear the experiences of a wide range of trans men, trans women and non-binary people;
- educate people about trans and non-binary people’s lives and the issues we face;
- advocate for trans and non-binary people;
- empower trans and non-binary people to bring about change in their lives and in the community.” [See: <https://transactual.org.uk/who-are-transactual-uk/>]

TransActual have just published a key report, *Trans segregation in practice* (<https://transactual.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Trans-Segregation-in-Practice.pdf>) which will be assessed in the next Newsletter.

Then things changed ... the timeline highlights some of these important developments, well worth checking out.¹⁵

Abbreviations and acronyms

CILIP = Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals

EHRC = Equality and Human Rights Commission

GCN = *Gay Community News*

MGS = Museums Galleries Scotland

NLS = National Library of Scotland

This Newsletter was compiled by John Vincent, and all items are written by him, unless otherwise stated. Please send any comments or items for the next issue to:

John Vincent
Wisteria Cottage
Nadderwater
Exeter EX4 2JQ

Tel/fax: 01392 256045
E-mail: john@nadder.org.uk

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¹⁵ Source: *TransActual Supporters' Newsletter*, Jul 2025.