

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.

Contents List

Did you see ...?

- *ARC Magazine* – page 2
- *Books for Keeps* – page 2

The 'hostile environment'

- *A hostile environment: language, race, surveillance and the media (phase two)* – page 2

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

- *The power of prevention: the economic and wellbeing impact of library activities for mental health and older adults* – page 4

LGBTQ+ issues – Other Agencies

- *Trans segregation in practice: experiences of trans segregation following the Supreme Court ruling* – page 6

Broader issues – Other Agencies

- "Culture wars" – page 7
-

Did you see ...?

ARC Magazine

The Nov/Dec issue¹ includes:

- Hannah Murphy “Archives and institutional histories of slavery” [pp24-28], which looks at the development of the London’s Records of Slavery Network which brings “[...] together librarians, curators and researchers from 24 financial and educational institutions: museums, libraries, and non-profits that have completed or are currently undertaking research into their historical involvement in transatlantic slavery.” [p25] The network has also created a toolkit which will be launched in 2026.

Books for Keeps

Apologies, I missed this issue out when I last looked at *BfK*.

The July 2025 issue² includes:

- Pam Dix “Rights, activism, protest”, which looks at illustration in children’s information books on rights issues [pp14-17]
- Darren Chetty and Karen Sands-O’Connor “Beyond the Secret Garden: Science, Science Fiction, and Children’s Books”, which looks at “[...] universal access in science-fiction writing for children.” [pp18-19]

The ‘hostile environment’

A hostile environment: language, race, surveillance and the media (phase two)

This important report³:

“[...] the second in the Runnymede Trust’s project on the ‘hostile environment’ [...] shows how the increase in reactionary politics and the backlash against anti-racism has legitimised the targeting of people seeking asylum, who are largely people of colour. Racist discourse from the highest levels of UK society, including politicians and the media, is used to frame immigration and Channel crossings as an existential threat to the British way of life – reproducing Islamophobic and racist tropes

¹ *ARC Magazine*, 404, Nov/Dec 2025.

² *Books for Keeps*, 273, Jul 2025, <https://booksforkeeps.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/BfK-273-July-2025.pdf>.

³ Camila Montiel-McCann and Maka Julios-Costa. *A hostile environment: language, race, surveillance and the media (phase two)*. Runnymede, 2025, [https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/61488f992b58e687f1108c7c/688b6bacccebeb036f9e0f022_A%20hostile%20environment%20Phase%20Two_v6%20\(1\).pdf](https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/61488f992b58e687f1108c7c/688b6bacccebeb036f9e0f022_A%20hostile%20environment%20Phase%20Two_v6%20(1).pdf).

which associate violence (including terrorism) and the erosion of 'British culture' with migrants. This works to justify ever more hostile immigration policies, [...]" [p6]

Its key findings make some important points:

- "From 2019 to 2024, migrants continued to be associated with crime and illegality. In fact, the word 'illegal' has become an even stronger word association with the terms 'migrant' and 'immigrant' in both news and parliamentary debates than it was in the 2010–14 period. 'Illegal' remains the number one association for 'immigrants' and has moved up from fourth to second most strongly associated term for 'migrant' in the news data. This shows that the defining characteristic of migrants has been cemented as illegality over the past decade.
- 'Immigrant' typically refers to a person of colour, with the strongest nationality associations with the term being 'Mexican', 'Chinese' and 'Indian'. The strongest religious associations with the term are 'Muslim' and 'Jewish'. This reconfirms Phase I findings and facilitates the idea that to be an immigrant is to be definitionally 'non-white' (another key word association for the term). This shows how discourse surrounding immigrants has been racialised.
- A distinction has emerged in both news and parliamentary debate in which 'refugees' are more humanised, whereas 'asylum seekers' are largely negatively represented. This suggests a strategy to normalise the 'securitisation' of people seeking asylum (whose lack of status can be weaponised) by maintaining appearances of concern for refugees (who have status). As 'asylum seekers' become associated with a lack of genuineness and threats to national security, they become distinct from 'refugees' and so it becomes acceptable to large sectors of the public to deny them their rights to refuge in the UK.
- Word associations for 'asylum seekers' show a preoccupation in news and parliamentary debate with accommodation. In August 2024, riots broke out across the country in which hotels housing largely people of colour, seeking asylum, were violently attacked by supporters of the far right. This could have been a result of negative news media coverage of accommodation policies for people seeking asylum during this time, which perpetuated false narratives about 'asylum seekers' taking the country's resources, stoking up public anger and making accommodation such as hotels a clear target.
- People from Albania are over-represented in immigration detention, and people from Brazil and Romania are over-represented in enforced returns (deportations) from 2019 to 2024. People from Albania, Brazil, China and India are overrepresented in figures for voluntary returns during this period. This shows that both detention and deportation appear to disproportionately impact people from countries with large populations of people of colour and people from Eastern Europe, who are ethnically minoritised and racialised in the UK, as shown in the first report.³

- Hostile immigration policies such as charging some migrants for NHS treatment mostly impact people from Eastern Europe and from countries with large populations of people of colour. People from Nigeria are charged 245 per cent more on average than people from white-settler former colonies such as the USA.
- Data-sharing between police forces and Immigration Enforcement continues to place migrant victims at risk. The police continue to share the data of victims of domestic abuse who have irregularised immigration status with the Home Office for immigration control, with the majority of such referrals being from Pakistan.” [pp8-9]

Very important background to so much of what continues today ...⁴

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

The power of prevention: the economic and wellbeing impact of library activities for mental health and older adults

This key report⁵ was published in Nov 2025:

“This report is about the value and impact of public library activities, in financial and social terms, in supporting older people and mental health. It provides evidence we hope will be used by senior decision makers in public services, and methods of data collection we hope will be adopted by other library services.” [p3]

It focuses on “[...] the impact of three activities common to all library services: regular arts and crafts; volunteering; and activities which alleviate loneliness.” [p3]

For each of the activities, the report outlines the services and activities that libraries offer; calculates the financial benefits accrued; and, based on case study interviews with participants, describes the impact that the activities have on individuals.

The report is good at highlighting the range of things that a modern library can offer, which are of benefit to older adults – from these, there will be initiatives that other libraries could develop. There will be readers of this report who do not have a library connection, and it is valuable to highlight what libraries can do.

However, there are some areas which I would have liked to see developed further.

⁴ Source: email from the Runnymede Trust, 2 Aug 2025.

⁵ Shared Intelligence and Moresight. *The power of prevention: the economic and wellbeing impact of library activities for mental health and older adults*. Libraries Connected, 2025, <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-11/The%20power%20of%20prevention%20Nov25.pdf>.

For example, it would have been useful to have included more about how to engage people and get them involved (especially people who, for a range of reasons, cannot or do not want to get involved with libraries). A lot of this work is quite intensive – how should we take this forward in the current economic climate? Do public libraries have the proper staffing levels (paid staff and/or volunteers) to support a lot of this work?

It would also have been helpful to have had a bit more analysis: for example, in talking about volunteering, the report says that it is a vital pillar of people's wellbeing "in the absence of work":

"It became very clear from all our discussions that, in the absence of work, volunteering is a vital pillar of a person's wellbeing, not just providing a task to complete, but also enhancing life satisfaction, mitigating isolation, and supporting wellbeing." [p15]

Does this mean that the people interviewed wanted to work but can't? Are they too frail? Or is there not enough available employment? I think it would have been clearer if some more background had been given.

I understand the significance of work to calculate value:

"This research demonstrates how public libraries deliver social impact with an economic value, and it proves they can produce HM Treasury 'Green Book' [6] standards of evidence." [p3]

but am not sure whether calculating the value really makes a strong case for the work that public libraries do ... or, rather, perhaps, the report itself does not make this case which I would have expected it to. Linked to this, the report makes several recommendations, but it would have been useful to have had some recommendations that didn't relate to financial impact.

To support and develop this work, Libraries Connected has established a Social Value Impact Programme community of practice, and there is information in the report about how to join this.

Once the Impact Programme starts to roll out across other parts of the UK, it will be interesting to see a follow-up that illustrates how people have engaged, and, more widely, how this approach bears fruit for public library services.

⁶ "The Green Book is the government's guidance on options appraisal and evaluation. It supports proper consideration of the costs, benefits, and trade-offs of alternative options for delivering policy objectives." Taken from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/the-green-book-and-accompanying-guidance-and-documents>.

LGBTQ+ issues – Other Agencies

Trans segregation in practice: experiences of trans segregation following the Supreme Court ruling

This report⁷ from TransActual⁸ was published in Aug 2025, but, as the issues from the ruling are still very much with us, I thought it was important to highlight it here.

“Since the Supreme Court’s ruling on the Equality Act in April 2025, TransActual have heard from hundreds of people (cis as well as trans) about the very immediate impact the ruling has had on their lives. Many businesses and organisations have, contrary to their legal obligations and potentially in breach of anti-discrimination protections, adopted extreme policies of banning trans people and those who look ‘wrong’ from facilities.” [p4]

The report brings together a range of testimonies which make grim reading – for example:

- “Trans and cis people continuing to use the spaces they belong in have faced harassment and threats of violence from both venue staff and vigilante toilet police, including men coming into the women’s bathroom in order to harass someone they suspect is trans.
- Many butch cis lesbians and intersex people in particular reported increased instances of harassment and exclusion due to not ‘looking like a woman’.” [p4]

In addition:

- Being forced out of work and social spaces and being outed
- Inconsistent, abusive and privacy violating, or reluctant enforcement.

This report covers the practical impact of the ruling. However, it also notes that:

“But the consequences of the political and policy rhetoric about trans people is more far reaching than that. Much damage is done through the fear and anxiety felt and the ways in which trans people limit their lives and public participation as a result.” [p5]

⁷ *Trans segregation in practice: experiences of trans segregation following the Supreme Court ruling*. TransActual, 2025, <https://transactual.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Trans-Segregation-in-Practice.pdf>.

⁸ “TransActual are a UK based, trans led and run organisation. We’re a national advocacy and education organisation focussed specifically on working for trans adults in the UK. Our work is broad ranging, but we have a particular focus on healthcare and trans people’s legal protections. We seek to raise trans people’s voices and raise awareness of trans people’s lived experiences.” [Taken from: <https://transactual.org.uk/who-are-transactual-uk/>].

For those of us that can remember, this has all the feel of the impact of Clause 28 in 1988.

In addition:

“TransActual have collected views from across the LGBTQ+ community on how they felt in the immediate aftermath of the Supreme Court ruling [...]” [p5]

and these views have been collected into a sister publication⁹.

Broader issues – Other Agencies

“Culture wars”

I was struck by this discussion of the media coverage of the death of Brigitte Bardot and the debates following it.

According to *Left Foot Forward*¹⁰:

“The anti-woke commentariat seized on the death of Brigitte Bardot to score some culture war brownie points.

‘Bardot proved that, in France, you can be anti-woke and still be a national treasure,’ declared the *Telegraph*.

Britain, it argued, demands ideological conformity and ritual apology. France, by contrast, respects ‘unrepentant individuals.’ [...]

Bardot may indeed remain a cultural icon in France and beyond. But to launder decades of racial incitement as evidence of healthy resistance to ‘wokeness’ is surely irresponsible journalism, not cultural analysis.

And the claim that only France continues to venerate ‘anti-woke’ right-wing figures doesn’t hold up either.

Britain, too, has long produced right-wing or reactionary ‘national treasures.’ [...]

And talking of ‘national treasures,’ Gary Lineker, who is, for many, a genuine national treasure, is castigated in right-wing circles for expressing concern about the scapegoating of migrants by senior

⁹ *A community living in fear: LGBTQ+ people's responses to the Supreme Court Ruling on the Equality Act*. TransActual, 2025, <https://transactual.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Community-living-in-fear-final.pdf>.

¹⁰ Gabrielle Pickard-Whitehead “Woke bashing of the week: who gets to be a ‘national treasure’? Brigitte Bardot and the Telegraph’s selective war on ‘wokeness’”, *Left Foot Forward* (“Right Wing Watch”), 11 Jan 2026, <https://leftfootforward.org/2026/01/woke-bashing-of-the-week-who-gets-to-be-a-national-treasure-bridget-bardot-and-the-telegraphs-selective-war-on-wokeness/>.

politicians, or for offering what he himself described as ‘a little opinion’ on the mass murder of children in Gaza.

So, let’s be clear about what’s really going on. It is apparently acceptable for Brigitte Bardot to spend decades whipping up racial hatred and still be celebrated as a national icon, perhaps helped by glamour, distance, and nostalgia. But it is unacceptable for Gary Lineker to voice contemporary moral objections to cruelty and injustice.

Sigh. The culture warriors have begun 2026 exactly where they left off in 2025, repackaging a crusade against ‘wokeness’ as a defence of free expression.”

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