

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 ...?

- *Museums Journal* – page 2
- *The School Librarian* – page 3

Community cohesion – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

- *Protecting what matters: towards a more confident, cohesive, and resilient United Kingdom* – page 3

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

- The “Hodge Review” – page 9

Abbreviations and acronyms – page 10

Did you see ...?

Museums Journal

The Mar/Apr issue¹ includes:

- Geraldine Kendall Adams “A new England” [“Analysis” column] [pp4-5], which outlines the findings of the Hodge Review, with “sector reaction”
- Rob Sharp “Casualty of war” [“Analysis” column] [pp8-9], reports on attempts to collect and preserve material relating to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- Huw Jones “Working life” [“People” column] [p10]:

“Huw Jones is the manager of the Pen Museum, Birmingham. He is also an ADHD UK ambassador, and has developed a Duke of Edinburgh-compliant programme for neurodiverse students to gain experience in the heritage sector”²

- Beth Jones “Co-curated practice is worth the risk” [“Comment” column] [p12], which looks at the work developed at the Museum of Oxford to embed community-centred practice.³
- Serena Iervolino “Class action” [pp22-25], which looks at some work going on to address class differences in museums, whilst highlighting some of the questions around definitions:

“One of the reasons professionals struggle to engage with the concept of working class is the lack of a straightforward definition or operational mechanisms in societies that deny the very existence of class [...]

Research confirms that people in middle-class jobs still identify as working class due to their upbringing, cultural ties and parental socialisation. This remains the case even when their current occupation and lifestyle align more closely with middle-class norms. More troublingly, individuals from privileged backgrounds often misidentify as working class to downplay structural privilege and frame their success as meritocratic. Class misrecognition is a valid concern for museums aiming to diversify their workforce.

One of the main challenges in museology is developing a workable and multi-layered definition of working class, which can guide museum practices.” [p24]

¹ *Museums Journal*, Jan/Feb 2026.

² Taken from: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/people/2026/04/working-life-being-in-a-museum-setting-allows-neurodiverse-creativity-to-truly-flourish/>.

³ See also: <https://museumofoxford.org/community-and-learning/community-partnerships/>.

The School Librarian

The Spring 2026 issue⁴ includes:

- Morgane Grummert “More than just books: transforming secondary school libraries for diversity and inclusion” [pp12-13], which argues that the best way of developing change in secondary school libraries is to use four “pillars” – audits, CPD, engagement with the local Schools Library Service, and establishing clear policies.
- Gareth Evans “News fact-checkers and their educational value for UK secondary schools” [“Digital” column] [pp32-33], which is a useful round-up of three popular fact-checking services.

Community cohesion – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

Protecting what matters: towards a more confident, cohesive, and resilient United Kingdom

This revised “Call to Action”⁵ “[...] sets out the steps government is taking to improve social cohesion and protect what matters.”

It emphasises the need for the following “pillars” to be in place:

1. Confident communities, to include:
 - Restoring pride in place. Includes: “further support for local media, reviving our high streets, and tackling crime and environmental harm.”
 - Bringing people together. Includes: “We will strengthen oversight of home education by raising legal standards. Education reforms will strengthen citizenship, British history, and religious education.”
 - Teaching our values and history. Includes: “We will mandate citizenship classes in schools and teach digital literacy to help young people navigate the modern world. We will improve the national curriculum’s teaching of our nation’s history and ensure Holocaust awareness stays a compulsory topic in schools.”
 - Celebrating faith and belief communities. Includes: “The government will also deliver the £92 million Places of Worship

⁴ *The School Librarian*, 74 (1), Spring 2026.

⁵ *Protecting what matters: towards a more confident, cohesive, and resilient United Kingdom*. MHCLG, updated 28 Apr 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-what-matters-towards-a-more-confident-cohesive-and-resilient-united-kingdom/protecting-what-matters-towards-a-more-confident-cohesive-and-resilient-united-kingdom>.

Renewal Fund to protect religious heritage buildings and support community cohesion.”

2. Cohesive communities, to include:

- Integration based on values. Includes: “We know that migration needs to be managed to support communities and cohesion. The government will implement reforms to the points-based system, continue our efforts to reduce irregular migration, whilst restoring order to the asylum system so that it operates swiftly, firmly and fairly. This will include ending the use of asylum hotels and returning them to local communities. We will also implement reforms to bolster Community Sponsorship to put power in the hands of local communities to be directly involved in welcoming and supporting those seeking refuge. We will set clear expectations for integration (including English language proficiency and participation in work) and develop a cross-government integration strategy. Efforts will focus on removing barriers to participation, supporting underrepresented groups, and fostering a shared sense of values across the UK.”
- Tackling hate and discrimination. Includes: “We will ensure hate crimes are prosecuted with the full force of the law. We will provide further protective security funding for faith communities and also take forward a series of actions to tackle religious hatred.”

3. Resilient communities, to include:

- Protecting institutions from extremist abuse. Includes: “We will embed the 2024 extremism definition across government, working closely with frontline partners such as the police. We will update and embed the 2024 engagement principles so that public bodies do not confer legitimacy, funding or influence on extremist groups. We will publish an annual State of Extremism report setting out the nature of the foreign and domestic extremist threat to the UK and government’s response. We will connect our local and national networks to ensure a coordinated and effective response. Across specific sectors, we will strengthen Charity Commission powers to tackle extremist abuse, including the power to shut down charities. We will also introduce measures to tackle extremism in university campuses, including strengthening monitoring and oversight of Prevent compliance issues to enable enforcement action where necessary.”
- Disrupting wider extremist influence and activity. Includes: “We will work with the Crown Prosecution Service and the Police to ensure robust use of existing hate crime and public order legislation on harmful extremist conduct, and terrorism legislation wherever conduct meets the appropriate threshold. We will also ensure the Police are equipped to respond to those who try to intimidate,

threaten and harass others for so-called ‘blasphemy’ related incidents.”

- Securing online spaces. Includes: “We will make use of robust powers to require platforms to mitigate risks related to their algorithms. We will give people greater control over what they are exposed to online and reduce accidental exposure to hateful content. We will increase transparency about how online platforms operate and how they comply with the Online Safety Act. We will give independent researchers access to platform data so they can help to build the evidence base to hold companies to account.”

There seem to me to be a number of issues with this plan, the most glaring of which is the lack of any real, coherent discussion of what ‘community cohesion’ actually means.

The original work on community cohesion was developed in 2001:

“During the spring and early summer of 2001, there were a number of disturbances in towns and cities in England involving large numbers of people from different cultural backgrounds and which resulted in the destruction of property and attacks on the police. Whilst these disturbances were rightly condemned by all sides of the communities affected, the Government made clear its determination to establish why these disturbances took place.”⁶

and this Independent Review Team report included the particularly useful Appendix C, “An analysis of the concept of community cohesion”⁷, which explored the shifting meaning of the term in greater depth.

A good example of this is the Appendix’s starting-point:

“Initially, community cohesion was defined largely in economic terms. Now, however, it is clearly accepted that to achieve community cohesion it is necessary to consider a broad range of issues including access to education and employment, poverty and social inequalities, social and cultural diversity, and even access to communication and information technologies.” [p69]

I feel that this original work, plus its longer discussions of social capital, its importance and why/how to build it, argued a far stronger case for why community cohesion is so essential.

In parallel, back in 2001, the Home Office also published the “Report of the Ministerial Group on Public Order and Community Cohesion”⁸. This included a

⁶ John Denham “Foreword” in *Community cohesion: a report of the Independent Review Team, chaired by Ted Cantle*. Home Office, no date [2001], <https://tedcantle.co.uk/pdf/communitycohesion%20cantlereport.pdf>, p2.

⁷ Rosalyn Lynch “An analysis of the concept of community cohesion” in *Community cohesion: a report of the Independent Review Team, chaired by Ted Cantle*. Home Office, no date [2001], <https://tedcantle.co.uk/pdf/communitycohesion%20cantlereport.pdf>, pp69-75.

list of key issues which managed to be both highly critical and in agreement in highlighting the most important factors:

- “the lack of a strong civic identity or shared social values to unite diverse communities;
- the fragmentation and polarisation of communities – on economic, geographical, racial and cultural lines – on a scale which amounts to segregation, albeit to an extent by choice;
- disengagement of young people from the local decision making process, inter-generational tensions, and an increasingly territorial mentality in asserting different racial, cultural and religious identities in response to real or perceived attacks;
- weak political and community leadership;
- inadequate provision of youth facilities and services;
- high levels of unemployment, particularly amongst young people;
- activities of extremist groups;
- weaknesses and disparity in the police response to community issues, particularly racial incidents; and
- irresponsible coverage of race stories by sections of the local media.”
(p11)

Returning to the current plan, I don't feel it has the same stance at all. For example, in Chapter 1, it includes an outline of the “potent mixture of factors which have brought rapid change”, including economic; technological; demographic; and extremism and wider geopolitics. However, in practice, this becomes a repeat of the current Government's fixation on migration, and, in my opinion, some of it worded in a very negative way:

“Immigration policy under the last government created a system that is unsustainable, and so too is the record level of net migration we inherited. Net migration reached a historic peak at 906,000 in June 2023, nearly 5 times the level recorded in 2019 [...] Since coming to office, this government has taken concrete steps to slow the pace of change, with net migration falling to 204,000 in 2025 [...] but there is more to do. Economic migration rose while training of the domestic workforce dropped and the proportion of UK residents in work fell. This rise in migration, particularly in lower skilled sectors, also saw an increase in the abuse and exploitation of workers, paid at wage levels that undercut reputable employers, and in many cases broke the law. For many living in the UK, the changes brought about by this surge in migration have been too much, too quickly and have put huge pressure on services and housing that were already struggling.”

In addition, I think this plan keeps missing the point! For example, it talks about:

“[...] the Pride in Place Programme, which announced up to £5 billion of funding and support over the next decade to 244 communities that have

⁸ *Building cohesive communities: a report of the Ministerial Group on Public Order and Community Cohesion*. Home Office, no date [2001], <https://www.tedcandle.co.uk/publications/005%20Building%20Cohesive%20Communities%20%28The%20Denham%20Report%29%202001.pdf>.

for too long been overlooked and left behind. At the heart of this programme is the simple idea that local people know best what change is needed to revive their neighbourhood – indeed, we see examples of this every day, from people taking care of local parks to picking up rubbish in their spare time. Local people should therefore be given the power, agency and resources to drive this change. This is a flagship programme that sees government working in a different way: not telling communities what to do, but putting them front-and-centre in determining their own futures, and providing the support so that they can achieve that vision.”

What it doesn't say is that, whilst it is a good sign that people want to care for their local communities, it's also a reflection of cuts and the impact of austerity that they need to care for parks or pick up rubbish themselves.

A recent assessment^{9, 10} for *The Conversation* argues that the plan does not include a clear idea of what social cohesion is.

It also goes on to say that:

“While there is acknowledgement of the effects of ‘visible deterioration of public services’, the word ‘poverty’ does not appear once. The plan frames division through religion, identity and Islamophobia, which are outcomes and proxies, not root causes.”

To emphasise this, the assessment also draws on some recent research¹¹ by More in Common, which found:

“[...] that 44% of Britons sometimes feel like strangers in their own country – a figure that could be read as evidence of cultural division. But More in Common's own analysis shows this alienation is concentrated in economically left-behind areas, not diverse ones. People do not feel like strangers because their neighbours look different. They feel like strangers because the institutions that once made them feel they belonged – clubs, pubs, unions and jobs – have gone.”

The Conversation assessment also argues that it is not being in an ethnically diverse neighbourhood that is significant so much as being in work:

⁹ Adam Coutts “What the government's plan for social cohesion gets wrong about community division”, *The Conversation*, 1 Apr 2026, https://theconversation.com/what-the-governments-plan-for-social-cohesion-gets-wrong-about-community-division-278702?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20April%202026%20-%203724038096&utm_content=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20April%202026%20-%203724038096+CID_11bc9538c61be32abbf7da8bc43f3be9&utm_source=campaign_monitor_uk&utm_term=What%20the%20governments%20plan%20for%20social%20cohesion%20gets%20wrong%20about%20community%20division.

¹⁰ Source: *The Conversation*, 2 Apr 2026.

¹¹ “Social cohesion: a snapshot”, More in Common, 19 May 2025, <https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/our-work/research/social-cohesion-a-snapshot/>.

“Work provides far more than income: it furnishes identity, routine and daily social connection. Unemployment is not merely an economic condition; it is an isolating one.”

It also, quite rightly, highlights that different communities have different needs:

“New housing developments need parks and primary schools from day one: accessible spaces that create early encounters and establish trust between newcomers. Established but deprived communities need to restore what has been stripped away, whether the pub, the library or the community centre. Sports facilities build bridging connections across difference, faith buildings deepen bonds within communities and civic spaces create the linking ties between residents and institutions. The task is to match the infrastructure to the social capital gap, not apply a single template everywhere.”

The Conversation piece concludes:

“A serious approach would use existing schools, job centres and childcare settings as social hubs, and make public transport free for under-18s so that young people can move around their own towns. And, it would tackle the poverty, insecure work and collapse of institutions that once gave people a reason and the means to show up for each other. Build those foundations and what politicians call “cohesion” will follow. Nobody will use that word to describe what they feel when they step outside of their front door. They will just say it is a good place to live. That is enough.”

Surprisingly, there do not seem, yet, to have been many other reactions, apart from IPPR who says that it “[...] marks a genuine step forward – clarifying the role of the state in promoting community resilience.” However, they go on to say that “While the plan is welcome, questions remain about whether or not it is sufficiently equipped to deliver.” It specifically criticises the approaches to migration:

“Just a few days before the plan’s release, the home secretary announced that the baseline for settlement in the UK will increase from five to 10 years and refugee status will become temporary – moves that are likely to make it much harder for hundreds of thousands of people to build a life in the UK. It’s hard to balance that with the assertion that ‘millions of families will feel a stronger sense of community, unity and national pride’ [...]

What’s more, millions of pounds per day is still spent on asylum accommodation which is unfit for purpose.”

Clearly, these are very early days in terms of seeing any major impact of this plan, and we would do well to watch developments. However, at the same time, I do have concerns that none of this is going to lead anywhere, we just end up with greater polarisation and blaming, when what we need is understanding and leadership.

Coincidentally, a report¹² from The Young Foundation and KCL has also just appeared, which shows some practical and interesting ways in which greater community engagement can be achieved.

“The Undisciplined Spaces programme is one example of what a good doctoral training programme can look like.

Over the last three years (2023–2025), The Young Foundation in collaboration with King’s College London (KCL) delivered the innovative Undisciplined Spaces programme, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) through an Impact Acceleration Award to the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at KCL.

Each year, a cohort of students were trained in the principles of good community engagement and given a small amount of funding to undertake a project in collaboration with a community partner. The students would also deliver their own evaluation report, capturing the impact of their project. This process of ‘learning by doing’ – which blended theory, practice and reflection – supported students to deliver inspiring and innovative projects including AI art workshops for mental health service users, a pop-up carnival about decriminalising sex work, photography workshops for young refugees and migrants in South London, celebrations of Syrian heritage, bench-making in a community green space, and guided breathwork for artists and activists.

Undisciplined Spaces is proof of concept that – with modest funding, good facilitation, and a willingness to let students step outside their disciplines – a university can support genuine, mutually beneficial relationships between postgraduate researchers and the communities on their doorstep.” [p7]

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

The “Hodge Review”

In the last Newsletter¹³, there was brief coverage of the Government’s response to this report.

Now, DCMS has announced¹⁴ that it is starting work on a new strategic framework for museums in England (and will look further at some of the other recommendations, such as introducing charges for international visitors).¹⁵

¹² Jack Layton, Lily Owens-Crossman and Chelsea Mac Donnchadha. *Making space for community engagement: lessons from Undisciplined Spaces*. The Young Foundation, 2026, https://yf-sz.b-cdn.net/2026/04/KCL_Undisciplined_spaces_report_ACCESSIBLE.pdf.

¹³ *The Network Newsletter*, 295, Sep 2025, <https://seapn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Newsletter-NS-295.pdf>, pp6-8.

Abbreviations and acronyms

ADHD = Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)

CPD = Continuing Professional Development

DCMS = Department for Culture, Media and Sport

IPPR = Institute for Public Policy Research

KCL = King's College London

MA = Museums Association

MHCLG = Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

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¹⁴ Geraldine Kendall Adams "Work is starting on a new strategic framework for museums, DCMS confirms", MA, 23 Apr 2026, https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2026/04/work-is-starting-on-new-strategic-framework-for-museums-dcms-confirms/#msdynmkt_trackingcontext=95a3cd49-fa6f-4bc8-af3b-3b07ca1f0100.

¹⁵ Source: Museums Association email updates, 24 Apr 2026.