

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

Number 301, March 2026

(Formerly published as *Public Libraries & Social Exclusion Action Planning Network Newsletter*, issue 1, May 1999 – issue 29, September 2001)

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 ...?

Information Professional

The latest issue¹ includes:

- Carol Webb “Banned Books Week 2026” [pp40-41], which introduces the 2026 week of activities, organised by the Banned Books Week UK coalition that includes Index on Censorship, Hay Festival Global, The Bookseller, CILIP School Libraries Group, the International Publishers Association and Firefinch Publishers²
- Carol Webb “Step in the right direction for statutory school libraries” [pp38-39], which highlights the recognition by the HOC Education Select Committee in its Reading for Pleasure report³ of the importance of school libraries and librarians.

ARC Magazine

The latest issue⁴ includes:

- Philip Milnes-Smith “We lose the thread of who we are – and who we might become” [pp16-17], in which the author “[...] examines the UK Government’s new Strategic Vision for Archives and asks what more the record-keeping sector can do to improve accessibility and representation.” [p16]. In doing so, Philip makes some very important points about representation:

“Unfortunately, historically, archives haven’t been ‘about every single one of us’. With this year’s ARA Conference theme of authenticity in mind, it still bears repeating that while we can offer access to authentic records of the past, our collections are not well-placed to offer an authentic window into the past because decisions made then, and since, assigned value to some human lives but not others. These processes have not been meritocratic – for example, some non-disabled lives will have been over-valued, and some (most?) disabled lives under-valued. This has led to ongoing symbolic annihilation, with disabled lives manifestly less valuable in the culture because they are not only disproportionately absent but discoverable only with difficulty.” [p16]

Books for Keeps

The July issue⁵ was covered in *Network Newsletter* 299. However, subsequently, an interesting article has appeared, which the *BfK* website says is featured in issue 279 – except it doesn’t seem to be!

¹ *Information Professional*, Aug/Sep 2026 digital edition.

² For more info, see: <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/tag/banned-books/>.

³ See: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/54321/documents/302025/default/>.

⁴ *ARC Magazine*, 412, Sep/Oct 2026.

This is an interesting piece⁶, worth reading, which looks at the controversy around “The Queen’s Christmas Present”.

As Darren argues:

“So, who might be negatively impacted by this initiative? Those children for whom the book is not a suitable gift might find themselves on the outside of the envisioned reading community that forms around *Impossible Creatures*. Teachers and Headteachers will no doubt feel the pressure to use curriculum time to help include them [...] My personal view is that the National Literacy Trust itself may be most negatively impacted. Having offered sessions on inclusive libraries (sessions at which I have been paid to speak), it now suggests that inclusivity is merely a strand of work for the charity, rather than a value that informs key decisions. This might come as a shock for many who work with and for the charity. Having worked to broaden the view of what reading is and emphasised the agency of young people, this initiative appears to take us back to a view of reading as medicine, effectively communicating: ‘Here, take this. It’s good for you. I don’t care if you don’t like it.’ As Charlotte Hacking, Teacher Engagement Lead at the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Pedagogy, puts it, ‘Giving every child the same title risks missing the chance to connect some children with a book that could ignite a love of reading. It’s the right book reaching the right reader at the right time that can make all the difference.’”

The piece concludes:

“We often talk about the power of reading. But as educators we should be equally attuned to the reading of power. And when the beneficiaries of an initiative announced without any sense of a consultation process are shown to be some of the most powerful institutions in the world, we have a moral duty to ask questions. It may be churlish to look a gift horse in the mouth. It is downright irresponsible to fail to investigate potential Trojan horses.”

The latest issue⁷ includes:

- The Editorial reports that:

“Reflecting Disability has announced the results of its study into the representation of disabled people in children’s books [...]

[...] the study shows that 10% of children’s books feature disabled people in some way. This is the first project of its kind to offer a

⁵ *Books for Keeps*, 279, Jul 2026, <https://booksforkeeps.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/BfK-279-July-2026.pdf>.

⁶ Darren Chetty “On Royal Horses, Mickey Mouse, and Impossible Creatures”, *Books for Keeps*, <https://booksforkeeps.co.uk/article/on-royal-horses-mickey-mouse-and-impossible-creatures/>.

⁷ *Books for Keeps*, 280, Sep 2026, <https://booksforkeeps.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/BfK-280-September-2026.pdf>.

comprehensive exploration of the extent and quality of disabled characters in picture books, fiction and non-fiction across a full year (2024) of UK children's publishing for 3-11 year olds.

With 90% of children's books not yet featuring disabled people in any way, the findings highlight opportunities for publishers and creators to build on the promising initial picture." [p2]

There is also an announcement that "Reflecting Disability will launch a toolkit later this year which will provide in-depth analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data and, most importantly, practical guidance to support publishers and creators." [p2]. More on this to follow.

- The Editorial also refers to "The Languages of Children's Books" conference – more on this to follow.
- Nikki Gamble⁸ "Journeys into Reading" [pp4-5] stresses the importance of focusing on readers rather than what young people are reading:

"They will present a diverse array of motivations for reading, indicating that there is more to their choice than simply following the crowd.

It is in the unique differences, rather than the big 'what children are reading' headlines, that we uncover the stories that lead us to connect with readers. They will reveal their 'hidden' reading. The reading done at home that they didn't think counted. I've seen more religious texts of all faiths than I had expected. I've seen children uploading books that are from their parents' childhood collection – a rich seam for further investigation. They talk about their passions and hobbies and how these feed in to their reading choices." [p5]

- Jenny Hawke "Bridging Communities and Books: the GLL Literary Foundation story continues" [p15]
- Darren Chetty and Karen Sands-O'Connor "Beyond the Secret Garden: Patrice Lawrence, UK Children's Laureate" [pp16-17], which celebrates the appointment of Patrice Lawrence as the new Waterstones Children's Laureate.
- Helen Jones and Lucy Starbuck Braidley "Comics in the Classroom: Meet Rochdale's Graphic Novel Reading Ambassadors" [pp20-21]: in this extract from their new book⁹, the authors "spotlight work happening

⁸ Nikki Gamble has recently relaunched "The Reading Journey": "The Reading Journey digital reading record allows teachers to see at a glance what their students are reading and their responses to what they read. Teachers can use these insights to better help guide children in finding great new books and to engage in informal book-talk with the class." [Taken from: <https://thereadingjourney.co.uk/blog/>]

⁹ *Comics in the classroom: boosting multiliteracies, creativity and collaboration through comics*. Routledge, 2026. Further info at: <https://www.routledge.com/Comics-in-the->

across a range of schools in Rochdale and the impact reading comics is having there.”¹⁰ [p20]

- “Letterbox Library Recommends: Books on Social Isolation and Loneliness” [p22], “[...] the Letterbox Library team look at the particular ways social isolation and loneliness are represented in inclusive children’s books”.

Equality, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

“Museums must recognise class inequality in their EDI work”

This is an important, brief article¹¹ that identifies issues for the cultural sector and makes some proposals for dealing with them.

As the article argues:

“The evidence is that class disadvantage is real, persistent and measurable.

White working-class boys eligible for free school meals have the lowest educational attainment of any major demographic group in England. They are least likely to progress to university, least likely to enter cultural professions, and least likely to visit museums.

These outcomes do not stem from EDI policies, they are the result of decades of economic change, deindustrialisation and declining social mobility. But because class is not a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, this disadvantage often sits outside the scope of our inclusion strategies.”

The article then argues that people become resentful if they do not see themselves reflected, leading to, for example, their experiencing:

- “status threat;
- alienation;
- a sense of cultural displacement;
- the belief that ‘equality is for everyone except us’.”

Alexander Goodger then identifies the challenge for museums:

[Classroom-Boosting-Multiliteracies-Creativity-and-Collaboration-Through-Comics/Jones-Braidley/p/book/9781041036180](https://seapn.org.uk/libraries-and-care-experienced-children-and-young-people/#cases).

¹⁰ “The Rochdale Graphic Novels Project” is featured on The Network website, see: <https://seapn.org.uk/libraries-and-care-experienced-children-and-young-people/#cases>.

¹¹ Alexander Goodger “Museums must recognise class inequality in their EDI work”, Museums Association, 28 Sep 2026, https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/opinion/2026/09/museums-must-recognise-class-inequality-in-their-edi-work/#msdynmkt_trackingcontext=3801ec7d-6dbd-45b2-87e1-012d473b0200.

- “Where do working-class communities fit into our inclusion strategies?”
- Do our programmes reach the men and boys who statistically engage least with culture?
- Are we addressing the structural barriers that prevent them from entering our sector?
- Do our narratives reflect their histories, labour, and identities?”

and then suggests a way forward:

“Museums must expand inclusion without diluting it. Recognising class disadvantage does not mean reducing our commitment to other groups, it means strengthening EDI by making it more complete.

Museums can:

- Integrate class and socio-economic background into audience development
- Partner with schools and colleges serving disadvantaged communities
- Create pathways into museum work for young people who have never considered it- and with apprenticeships and not university courses.
- Tell stories of industrial heritage, labour history, and working-class creativity
- Ensure our spaces feel welcoming to people who may not see museums as ‘for them’”

He concludes with a very strong call for change:

“EDI has helped museums become more open, more representative, and more socially responsible. But if we want to build truly inclusive institutions, we must recognise that class inequality intersects with every other form of disadvantage, and that ignoring it leaves a gap in our mission.

White working-class men are not ‘the problem’. They are part of the public we serve.

They deserve to be seen, heard, and included – not because of political narratives, but because the data shows they are among the most disadvantaged groups in the country.

Museums can lead the way by acknowledging this openly and responding with empathy, evidence and action.

Inclusion must mean everyone – and that includes the people who have been left behind the longest.”¹²

¹² Source: Museums Association email updates, 29 Sep 2026.

Equality, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

“Race”

The Equality Commission Northern Ireland has just published “Our policy positions on ending racism and advancing equality in Northern Ireland”.¹³

It provides a straightforward checklist of actions that should be taken and is a useful reminder of what we all need to be involved in.

The list includes (with a handful of examples to give greater depth):

1. Leaders should demonstrate that racism is unacceptable

“Leaders in public life should set the tone by clearly and consistently calling out racism, supporting those affected, and demonstrating through action that it will not be tolerated.”

2. Removal of physical expressions of hate from public spaces
3. Counter misinformation and harmful narratives

Includes:

- Better understand how social media is being used to spread and amplify harmful narratives and take preventative action.
- During critical incidents, respond with clear, accessible and timely information to challenge misinformation
- Develop sustained, long-term approaches to improve public understanding and challenge harmful narratives.

4. Ensuring safety and support for all
5. Existing laws must be fully applied
6. Education is where prevention begins

Includes:

- Support teachers, educators and all those working in education settings with clear systems, guidance and procedures to respond effectively to racism.
- Children and young people should see themselves and their aspirations reflected in the curriculum, materials and wider school experience.

¹³ “Race”. Equality Commission Northern Ireland, no date [2026], https://equalityni.org/our-work/policy/race?utm_source=NewZapp&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Race_August_2026#11.-support-schools-and-education-providers.

- Equip teachers, children and young people to prevent and challenge racism, prejudice and stereotyping

7. Prevention must be systematic and sustained

“Preventing racism requires coordinated, long-term action by government. This includes education, open dialogue, and collaboration across communities, grounded in the principles of the equality duty under the Northern Ireland Act 1998.”

8. Delivery must be coordinated, measurable, transparent and accountable

9. Act to address inequalities in public services

“Public services must take targeted and coordinated action to address persistent racial inequalities based on accurate and comprehensive evidence. This includes improving access to housing, employment and justice, and ensuring fair outcomes for all communities.”

10. Reform legislation to ensure effective protection and remedies

11. Support schools and education providers

12. Embed equality in workplaces

“Equality must be embedded across workplaces. This requires removing bias from policies and practice, supporting staff, and ensuring access to clear, rights-based information. Employers should create welcoming workplaces that reflect the communities they serve.”

A timely reminder, worth reading and acting on.

Abbreviations and acronyms

ARA = Archives & Records Association

EDI = equality, diversity and inclusion

GLL = Greenwich Leisure Ltd

HOC = House of Commons

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March 2026 (published October 2026)