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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Tackling social exclusion – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

Social justice: transforming lives

This major new report[1] was presented to Parliament in March 2012. In a sense, it serves the same purpose as the flurry of reports produced in 1997-1998 (for example, *Bringing Britain together*[2]), highlighting the dire situation faced by some communities and individuals; pointing up the hoped-for effects of a change of political direction; and setting out a comprehensive work programme.

Interestingly, *Transforming lives* is not as critical of developments under the Labour administration as *Bringing Britain together* had been about the previous Conservative administration (but that may be because there are strong similarities between the Coalition and Labour policies).

The report begins by defining social justice:

> "Social Justice is about making society function better – providing the support and tools to help turn lives around." [p4]

This is a limited definition, although it is expanded by the inclusion of a new set of principles that inform their approach, including:

- "A focus on prevention and early intervention
- Where problems arise, concentrating interventions on recovery and independence, not maintenance
- Promoting work for those who can as the most sustainable route out of poverty, while offering unconditional support to those who are severely disabled and cannot work
- Recognising that the most effective solutions will often be designed and delivered at local level
- Ensuring that interventions provide a fair deal for the taxpayer." [p4]

The two underlying principles are described by Ian Duncan Smith, Secretary of State, in his foreword as "fundamental":

> "First, **prevention** throughout a person's life, with carefully designed interventions to stop people falling off track and into difficult circumstances. This starts with support for the most important building block in a child's life – the family – but also covers reform of the school and youth justice systems, the welfare system, and beyond to look at

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[1] DWP. *Social justice: transforming lives.* Cm 8314. TSO, 2012 (ISBN: 9780101831420). Available to download as a pdf (2350 kb) from: http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/social-justice-transforming-lives.pdf.
[2] Social Exclusion Unit. *Bringing Britain together: a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal.* CM 4045. TSO, 1998.
Opportunity for all: tackling poverty and social exclusion – a summary of the first annual report 1999. TSO, 1999.

how we can prevent damaging behaviours like substance abuse and offending.

Second, the strategy sets out our vision for a 'second chance society'. Anybody who needs a second chance in society should be able to access the support and tools they need to transform their lives.

Delivery must be focused on providing these services. **Early intervention, social investment, payment by results, multi-agency delivery – these should be the watchwords for every government department, local authority and private or voluntary sector provider in the coming years.**"
[p1 – emphasis theirs]

The report then goes on to draw together outline statistics that demonstrate the scale of the problem, for example on worklessness; family issues; education; drug and alcohol dependency; debt; and crime (these are very useful reminders of just how much there is to tackle).

The report particularly wants to focus attention on multiple disadvantage; it mentions the 120,000 'troubled families', but clearly shows that this is only a small proportion of those who actually need support[3]:

"8. On a wider definition, analysis from household survey data found that 11 per cent of adults (5.3 million people) in the UK experience, at any one time, three or more of six areas of disadvantage (education, health, employment, income, social support, housing and local environment) ... This population is constantly changing, with people moving in and out of disadvantage and poverty according to the impact of these economic, social and environmental factors.

9. It is clear that the number of people facing multiple disadvantages which damage their life chances, and those of their children, is unacceptably high." [p8]

The report recognises that other factors also come into play:

"10. We know that in some cases these disadvantages can be exacerbated by factors like ethnicity, gender or disability. For instance, disabled people are substantially more likely to experience material deprivation than people who are not disabled ... This strategy does not focus on these factors as themes – rather it looks at the areas of disadvantage and how best to tackle them. This is not to ignore the role that factors like these can play in contributing to multiple disadvantages, however, and the importance of changing that picture …" [p8]

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[3] There is also growing doubt about the number of 'troubled families' – and criticism of the use of the term which "encouraged public hostility to the poor as well as justifying punitive policies", according to Ruth Levitas, see:
http://www.bristol247.com/2012/05/21/pm-deliberately-misrepresenting-data-on-troubled-families-36190/.

Whilst taking this approach may well make the report more manageable, it seems to avoid essential areas that should have been pursued – for example, as well as disabled people (mentioned in the above quote), we also know that race has an enormous impact on employment, and, when, later, the report comes to look at issues facing young people, it seems odd not to include any of these wider factors. More of that below …

The report then outlines why the Government believes that this new approach is necessary:

> "… Governments have spoken for many years about helping particular groups, including those experiencing multiple disadvantages, and some progress has been made. However, the debate around disadvantage has too often been narrowly focused on the number of people in relative income poverty, defined as 60 per cent of the median national income. This relative income measure is important, but it can also create perverse incentives.
>
> 12. Focusing on the relative income measure alone can encourage an emphasis on out-of-work welfare transfers, which may push a family just above the poverty line but do little to change the course of their lives. Between 1998/99 and 2009/10 the likelihood of being in relative poverty declined 1.5 times faster for children living in workless families than for children living in families where somebody worked …
>
> 14. This Government believes that this reinforces the need to tackle the root causes of poverty and provide support beyond the welfare support system, for example by helping those in work to lift themselves out of poverty." [p9]

Finally, in terms of an introduction, the report shows how the principles set out in it build on those in other strategies, such as the Child Poverty Strategy[4] and the Social Mobility Strategy[5].

We then come to the main part of the report which, through five chapters:

> "… follows a lifecycle structure, showing how Social Justice offers a new approach to preventing problems occuring [sic] at different stages in people's lives, as well as providing a second chance where disadvantages have already set in." [p13]

Chapter 1: Supporting families

The problem is identified as:

> "38. The family is the first and most important building block in a child's life and any government serious about delivering Social Justice must seek to strengthen families.

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[4] *A new approach to child poverty: tackling the causes of disadvantage and transforming children's lives*. DfE, 2011.
[5] *Opening doors, breaking barriers: a strategy for social mobility*. Cabinet Office, 2011.

39. So many of the early influences on a child relate to the family setting in which they grow up. When things go wrong, we know that this can increase the risk of poor outcomes in later life. Even more importantly, we know that family breakdown and other risk factors – worklessness, educational failure, mental ill health or drug and alcohol dependency – can feed off one another, compounding their effects, and leading to outcomes that can be very damaging for those affected and costly to society as a whole." [p15]

The new strategy includes the following:

- Tackling anomalies in the benefits system that penalise some couples
- Promoting positive relationships between parents (eg relationship support)
- A new emphasis on early intervention
- Cross-Government reforms that support parents and young children
- Tackling domestic and sexual violence
- Turning round the lives of the most troubled families
- Overhauling the adoption and care systems.

"85. These principles are driving our vision for the future, and the outcomes we want to see: more stable families – an increase in the number of families staying together, and conversely a reduction in divorce and separation rates, especially where children are involved; a reduction in conflict and an end to domestic violence, both within families and when families separate; fewer families experiencing multiple problems. Our aim is for fewer children being taken into care for preventable reasons, but, where they are, a narrowing of the gap between the achievement of looked after children and all other young people – an increase in educational performance and in the proportion of care leavers going on to higher education – and a reduction in the numbers of all children in, or leaving, care in contact with the youth justice system and criminal justice system.

86. But Government should not – indeed cannot – do this alone. As we explore further what more can be done, we want to widen the debate and engage not just statutory agencies and the voluntary and community sectors but also the wider population." [p25]

Chapter 2: Keeping young people on track

This chapter identifies key issues, eg troubled home-life; "ensuring young people do not fall out of mainstream provision and into criminal activity or the hands of gangs" (p27); there is also an underlying criticism of some schools. It then goes on to highlight what the Government is currently doing and planning to develop, including:

- Helping schools support those students in greatest need (eg via the Pupil Premium)
- Tackling bad behaviour and absenteeism
- Tackling the causes and impact of exclusion from school
- Working to transform mental health services for young people

- Dealing with "gang and youth violence" (p32)
- Overhauling parts of the Youth Justice System
- Reforming schools, vocational education, skills and welfare provision to help lessen the number of young people who are NEET.

For the future:

> "121. Keeping young people on track and providing them with the opportunities they need is not a short term challenge – it will take many years to see the impact of our reforms work their way through, as today's children reach adulthood.
>
> 122. But we are clear that we are taking the right steps towards the long term outcomes we want to see: improved attendance and behaviour in school; fewer children dropping out of the mainstream system; better outcomes for disadvantaged children – significantly narrowing the achievement gap between children from the most and least disadvantaged backgrounds; and introducing more effective interventions to prevent young people from falling into the hands of gangs and the youth and criminal justice system, alongside credible exit routes for those who are already involved." [p35]

However, as noted above, this chapter in particular lacks the depth that could have been added had the report considered 'other factors'. For example, race, class, disability, bullying, sexual orientation all have a particular impact on young people – which may well affect, for example, their ability to go into higher education or to seek and gain employment – and, had these factors been added to the mix, we could have had a much more nuanced approach to the needs of young people.

Chapter 3: The importance of work

> "In this chapter we set out this Government's new contract with the British people on work and welfare, how we are ensuring every person facing disadvantage can move towards work, and why the Government believes that everyone who can, should work.
>
> That contract, as set out in *Universal Credit: welfare that works (*published 2010), is:
>
> - Those who are unable to work will be supported.
> - At the same time, this Government is unashamedly 'pro-work'. We believe in work and its wider benefits. We recognise work as the best route out of poverty, and we will reward those who seek a job.
> - Thirdly, this Government pledges to de*liver fairness for tho*se who fund the system: taxpayers." [p36]

This chapter challenges the culture of worklessness, for example by:

- The introduction of the Work Programme
- Supporting troubled families into work

- Supporting people with disabilities and health problems into work
- Improving skills.

For the future, one of the main aims is to create "… a change in attitudes. Work must be seen as desirable and something to be aspired to, and a life on benefits for those who can work must become unacceptable." [p46]

Chapter 4: Supporting the most disadvantaged adults

This chapter starts by outlining the problem, focusing particularly on people suffering multiple disadvantage. It also stresses the need for the Government and other agencies to work in a more joined-up way (often sharing data).

In addition, it outlines some new approaches to tackling multiple disadvantages, including:

- Preventing homelessness and improving outcomes for homeless people
- Improving outcomes for repeat offenders
- Tackling drug and alcohol dependency
- Overcoming health inequalities
- Overcoming financial exclusion and problem debt.

"We recognise that more can be done to support those who are least well served by current approaches. Through this strategy and the work that follows, we want to encourage local areas to design and commission interventions that are better coordinated and that deliver multiple outcomes." [p59]

Chapter 5: Delivering Social Justice

"Delivering Social Justice **will require strong leadership** at both national and local levels to champion the principles in this strategy and to deliver for those individuals and families experiencing multiple disadvantages. Delivering Social Justice will also require new and imaginative approaches to designing and funding services, and close partnership between the private, public and charitable sectors.

This chapter is addressed to the people who can help to make all this happen, in:

- national and local government,
- the voluntary and community sector
- mutuals and private companies; and
- amongst investors and philanthropists

In this chapter we set out how the Government is:

- Opening up public services and incentivising providers through payment by results
- Encouraging the development of innovative local solutions through projects like Community Budgets

- Building the social investment market and encouraging growth in philanthropy" [p60 – emphasis theirs]

All of this is intended to support the following aim:

"We want local leaders to embrace the Government's vision for Social Justice, to work with us in delivering it and to ensure we are making the most of the potential that exists within our communities." [p61]

"Over the next few months we want to engage delivery organisations, commissioners, local government, business leaders, service users and others in moving our vision of Social Justice forward. We want to ensure that as many people as possible have the second chances that those featured in the case studies in this strategy have been given, and that together we make real and lasting change to people's lives." [p68]

Commentary

This is an ambitious programme, and it does identify some of the major issues that need to be transformed.

However, it is limited by choosing not to look at the way that specific factors (such as race, gender, class, sexuality) are likely to have an additional impact; and it is also somewhat tied by having to fit into an overall strategy of spending reductions and resizing of central and local government (whatever Coalition leaders say about these not being policy drivers!).

However, that said, it does give plenty of scope and direction for us to take forward work on promoting social justice, and, provided that there are not more major political changes in the short-term, should provide a 'route-map' for the middle-term, with clear Government priorities that we can 'attach' our work to.

One tiny niggle – the document does occasionally lapse into irritating jargon, eg "the requirement for the Work Programme is entirely 'black box', specifying only the outcome we want …" [p62]; I hadn't come across 'black box' as a term before, but, fortuitously, happened to read the same day "My little black box", a column by Fiona Blacke (of the NYA), which defines it:

"[The commissioner has] a specified amount of money to commission services to address [specific outcomes or solutions to particular problems] and the proposition to the provider is 'we don't care how or what you deliver as long as you achieve the outcome' – hence the black box."[6]

Background resources

One of the important roles of this document is to draw together the social justice strands of the Government's work, which are, inevitably, split amongst different departments.

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[6] See: http://www.nya.org.uk/news/my-little-black-box.

I thought that it might also be useful to include the major policies here to save you having to search for them.

Ministry of Justice. *Breaking the cycle: effective punishment, rehabilitation and sentencing of offenders*. Cm 7972. TSO, 2010. Available to download as a pdf (599.72 kb) from: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120119200607/http://www.justice.gov.uk/consultations/docs/breaking-the-cycle.pdf

HM Government. *Building engagement, building futures: our strategy to maximise the participation of 16-24 year olds in education, training and work*. DfE, 2011. Available to download as a pdf (719.76 kb) from: http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/building%20engagement%20building%20futures.pdf

Call to end violence against women and girls: action plan. Home Office, 2011. Available to download as a pdf (337.45 kb) from: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/crime/call-end-violence-women-girls/vawg-action-plan?view=Binary

HM Government. *Drug strategy 2010: reducing demand, restricting supply, building recovery: supporting people to live a drug free life*. Home Office, 2010. Available to download as a pdf (422.69 kb) from: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/alcohol-drugs/drugs/drug-strategy/drug-strategy-2010?view=Binary

Home Office. *Ending gang and youth violence: a cross-Government report*. Cm 8211. TSO, 2011. Available to download as a pdf (1050 kb) from: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/crime/ending-gang-violence/gang-violence-summary?view=Binary [Summary]

Families in the foundation years. DfE, 2012 – see: http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/earlylearningandchildcare/early/b0077836/introduction

DOH. *Healthy lives, healthy people: our strategy for public health in England.* CM7985. TSO, 2010. Available to download as a pdf (2290 kb) from: http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_127424.pdf

Charlie Taylor. *Improving alternative provision*. DfE, 2012. Available to download as a pdf (112.70 kb) from: https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/improving%20alternative%20provision.pdf

Improving outcomes and supporting transparency – Part 1: A public health outcomes framework for England, 2013-2016. DOH, 2012. Available to download as a pdf (516.41 kb) from: http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_132559.pdf

Ministry of Justice. *Making prisons work: skills for rehabilitation – review of offender learning*. BIS, 2011. Available to download as a pdf (360.64 kb) from: http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/m/11-828-making-prisons-work-skills-for-rehabilitation.pdf

A new approach to child poverty: tackling the causes of disadvantage and transforming children's lives. DfE, 2011. Available to download as a pdf (1520 kb) from: https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/CM-8061.pdf

HM Government. *No health without mental health: a cross-government mental health outcomes strategy for people of all ages*. DOH, 2011. Available to download as a pdf (704.9 kb) from: http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_124058.pdf

Opening doors, breaking barriers: a strategy for social mobility. Cabinet Office, 2011. Available to download as a pdf (2820 kb) from: http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/opening-doors-breaking-barriers.pdf

Positive for youth: a new approach to cross-Government policy for young people aged 13 to 19. DfE, 2011. Available to download as a pdf (2060 kb) from: http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/positive%20for%20youth.pdf

HM Government. *Vision to end rough sleeping: No Second Night Out nationwide*. DCLG, 2011. Available to download as a pdf (517.74 kb) from: http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/1939099.pdf

Working and workless households 2011: statistical bulletin. ONS, 2011. Available to download as a pdf (185.48 kb) from: http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_229480.pdf

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The equality strategy – building a fairer Britain: progress report

The Government published its equality strategy[7] in December 2010[8], and has now produced a progress report[9].

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[7] *The equality strategy – building a fairer Britain*. Government Equalities Office, 2010. Available to download as a pdf (881.34 kb) from: http://www.equalities.gov.uk/pdf/GEO%20Equality%20Strategy%20tagged%20version.pdf.

[8] Assessed in *The Network Newsletter*, 116, December 2010, pp4-8.

[9] *The equality strategy – building a fairer Britain: progress report*. Government Equalities Office, 2012. Available to download as a pdf (239.15 kb) from: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/equalities/equality-strategy-publications/progress-report?view=Binary.

This gives a very brief summary of the key points in the original report; then goes on to give an overview of progress to date; followed by "Next steps"; and then detailed updates on the key commitments.

It would be worth looking at just what has been achieved, but also noting the main points in the "Next steps" section (which may well have a major impact on this longer-term):

> "We have implemented the Equality Act 2010, where it is clear that its provisions are effective and proportionate; they reduce the burden of excessive red tape and are targeted on impact. The Red Tape Challenge (RTC) was an opportunity to examine the regulations in place and assess their effectiveness and relevance. On 15 May 2012 we announced the results of the Equality RTC review and announced our intention to scrap weak and ineffective measures like the Socio Economic Duty and Third Party Harassment and to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and burden on the public sector and the private sector …
>
> The combined effort of this Government through the Social Justice Strategy, Social Mobility Strategy, Child Poverty Strategy, our approach to Integration, forthcoming Disability Strategy, and this Equality Strategy, will help us achieve our objective of eliminating discrimination and creating an environment where everyone is able to reach their potential. The Inter-Ministerial Group on Equalities, chaired by the Home Secretary, will continue to drive concerted effort across government to tear down barriers to equal opportunity." [p11]

Broader issues – Other Agencies

Creating UK culture online

The Collections Trust has just published this 'celebration'[10] of online cultural developments.

> "The UK's museums, galleries, libraries and archives are embracing technology and social media to engage new and existing audiences, to provide access to their collections and to support learning and discovery. This report has been created by the Collections Trust, the independent international voice for cultural collections as part of its ongoing work to celebrate digital culture in the UK ...
>
> The projects and case studies included in this report highlight just a small part of the tremendously diverse digital work that is happening in museums, galleries, libraries and archives across the UK.

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[10] *Creating UK culture online.* Collections Trust, 2012. Available to download as a pdf (843.02 kb) from:
http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/media/com_form2content/documents/c1/a662/f6/CELEBRATING.pdf.

Looking ahead, there is an opportunity to bring a new and compelling cultural offer to the 'screens generation' – delivering rich cross-platform experiences which combine exciting content with authoritative knowledge." [p1]

This is a powerful snapshot of some of the current initiatives, grouped under the following:

- Delivering inspirational content
- Driving new research
- Promoting digital literacy
- Engaging new audiences
- Powering the digital economy.

The document ends with six "priority actions" – these are all important, but there are two key areas that seem to be completely missing from these recommendations: firstly, social inclusion/social justice issues have been omitted; and, secondly, nowhere is there any mention of the work that is going on (and which is, indeed, truly celebrated via the Jodi Awards) to harness digital technology to create/improve access to culture, especially for disabled people.

Odd – is social justice not part of the Collections Trust's remit?

Abbreviations and acronyms

BIS = Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
DCLG = Department for Communities and Local Government
DfE = Department for Education
DOH = Department of Health
DWP = Department for Work and Pensions
NEET = Not in Education, Employment or Training
NYA = National Youth Agency
TSO = The Stationery Office

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