

A UNITED NATION

How to Fix Broken Britain

September 2024



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About the Centre for Social Justice

Established in 2004, the Centre for Social Justice is an independent think-tank that studies the root causes of Britain's social problems and addresses them by recommending practical, workable policy interventions.

The CSJ's vision is to give people in the UK who are experiencing the worst multiple disadvantages and injustice every possible opportunity to reach their full potential. The majority of the CSJ's work is organised around five "pathways to poverty", first identified in our ground-breaking 2007 report Breakthrough Britain. These are: educational failure; family breakdown; economic dependency and worklessness; addiction to drugs and alcohol; and severe personal debt.

Since its inception, the CSJ has changed the landscape of our political discourse by putting social justice at the heart of British politics. This has led to a transformation in Government thinking and policy. For instance, in March 2013, the CSJ report It Happens Here shone a light on the horrific reality of human trafficking and modern slavery in the UK. As a direct result of this report, the Government passed the Modern Slavery Act 2015, one of the first pieces of legislation in the world to address slavery and trafficking in the 21st century.

Our research is informed by experts including prominent academics, practitioners, and policymakers. We also draw upon our CSJ Alliance, a unique group of charities, social enterprises, and other grassroots organisations that have a proven track-record of reversing social breakdown across the UK. The social challenges facing Britain remain serious. In 2024 and beyond, we will continue to advance the cause of social justice so that more people can continue to fulfil their potential.

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to the individuals and organisations who have kindly given up their time and shared their knowledge and expertise with us during our Social Justice Commission research over the past year and a half. Their work is vital in the fight against poverty, and we are thankful for their time, expertise and guidance.

Firstly, we would like to thank those who hosted the Social Justice Commission for a visit including: Back on the Map; Caritas; Chess Homeless; Community Campus 87; Family Toolkit; Ferries Family Group; Foundation Years Trust; Hetty's; Home Group; Involve; Koala NW; Lads Need Dads; Livin; Llanhilleth Miners Institute; NuCastle Foundation; Oasis Community Centre; Oasis Community Housing; Rush House Rotherham; Really Neet Project; Shaftesbury Youth Club; Shared Health Foundation; Tempus Novo/HMP Leeds; The Link Community Hub; Trevi Women; Valleys Kids; WEB Merseyside; and Wirral Borough Council.

We would also like to thank those who gave evidence to the Commission through a virtual meeting or virtual roundtable including: Blackpool Council; Boathouse Youth; Boxwise; Bristol Council; Centre for Fun and Families; Crispin School; Cumbria Youth Alliance; Dallaglio Rugbyworks; Everton FC; Football Beyond Borders; Greater Manchester Police; Greenhouse Sport; Khulisa; Love4Life; Manchester City Council; Norfolk Council; Passion for Learning; Queen's Crescent Community Association; Schools Wellbeing Partnership; Sheffield Council; Staffordshire Council; The Salvation Army; and West London Zone.

We would also like to thank the following people who shared their expertise with us: Cornwall Council; Out of the Shadows; Patrick Parkinson; Recruitment Junction; School Home Support; Thrive at Five; Truro Foodbanks, and the Wales Centre for Public Policy.

We are grateful to those who hosted a focus group with those with lived experience, including: Clean Slate Solutions; Family Gateway; Key Community; North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission; The Moses Project, and Young Women's Outreach Project. We are also grateful to those with lived experience who took part in the two focus groups in Essex and Plymouth.

We would like to thank those who kindly shared their stories with us contributing to the in-depth case studies.

We would further like to thank those who responded to our call for evidence, including: Action for Children; Building Futures Together C.I.C; Cardiff People First; Caring & Sharing Trust; Children North East; CPAG; Christians Against Poverty; Citizens Advice; Citizens Advice Newcastle; Clean Slate Training and Employment; Coalfields Regeneration Trust; Crisis; Daniel Reast; Eric Wright Charitable Trust; Good Faith Partnership; Growing Zone; Home Office; Impact Organisations; In Kind Direct; Larches Highschool; Magic Breakfast; Paddy Radcliffe; Reflection's House; St Mary's Catholic School Chesterfield Governors Board; Sense; Tots to Travel; Understanding Society and University of Essex; Warning Zone Children's Centre, and Wesley Hall Community Centre.

Finally, we would like to extend a special thank you to Matthew Ferrey and the Christopher Nieper Foundation, without whom this work would not have been possible.



Big Listens



The Big Listen events were supported by a grant from the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) and a donation from the Henry Smith Charity. We are hugely grateful to these organisations for enabling these crucial events.

Thank you to those who spoke at our Big Listen events; The Rt. Hon. Jonathan Ashworth MP (via video link), Rt Hon Sir Iain Duncan Smith MP, Jane Hutt MS, Carolyn Harris MP and Rt Hon Andy Burnham.

Thank you also to our Big Listen attendees, including:

Yorkshire

- Barclays
- Basement Recovery Project
- Better Leeds Communities
- Burmantofts Community Projects
- Calderdale Council
- Calderdale Smart Move/ Happy Days UK
- Channel 4 News
- Coalfields Regeneration Trust
- Damasq Ltd
- Dewsbury Community Outreach
- Fareshare Yorkshire
- Freedom4girls
- G.A.S.P.E.D (Greater Awareness and Support for Parents Encountering Drugs)
- Getaway Girls
- GIPSIL
- Impact on Urban Health
- Isabel Spence
- Leeds Community Foundation
- Leeds City Council
- Leeds Food Aid Network
- Leeds Building Society
- Leeds Homeless Charter
- Leeds North and West Foodbank
- Leeds Rhinos Foundation
- Leeds South and East Foodbank
- Little Hiccups
- Lloyds Bank Foundation
- Maggie's
- Mantality
- Mencap
- Mindwell
- Money Buddies
- National Lottery Community Fund
- NWY Asbah
- OutKast Panda Crew C.I.C
- Places for People
- Purple Patch Arts
- Redmayne Bentley
- Reflection's House
- Salvation Army
- Sense
- Sir George Martin Trust
- SNAPS
- South Yorkshire Community Foundation
- Stop Loan Sharks
- Tempus Novo
- The Craven Trust
- The Hey Smile Foundation
- The Growing Zone Group C.I.C
- The Hinge Centre
- The Hull Lighthouse Project
- The Linacre Institute
- The Link Community Hub
- The Really Neet Project
- The Snowdrop Project
- Tog24
- Transforming Lives for Good
- Unity in Poverty Action
- Verd De Gris Arts
- Voice 21
- Wakefield and District Health and Community Support
- West Yorkshire Community Chaplaincy Project
- Womble Bond Dickinson
- Wilderness Adventures
- Yes Your Event Solutions
- Zurich Community Trust

Wales

- Aberconwy Domestic Abuse Service
- Admiral Group
- Advance Brighter Futures
- Ategi
- Bedford Street Community
- Brighter Futures
- Bro Ddyfi Advice Centre
- Cardiff People First
- Cardiff YMCA
- Cathays and Central Youth and Community Project
- Community Foundation Wales
- Coalfields Regeneration Trust
- Credu Supporting Young and Adult Carers Ltd
- CREST
- cwmpas
- Dwr Cymru Welsh Water
- Empire Fighting Chance
- Enbarr Foundation C.I.C
- Faith in Families
- Family Fund Trust
- Foothold Cymru
- Geldards
- Gellideg Foundation Community Association
- Home4U
- Llanrumney Hall Community Trust
- Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales
- Oasis Cardiff
- Pencader Family Centre
- PAVO
- Plant Dewi
- Purple Shoots Business Lending Ltd
- Rekindle
- Resolven Building Blocks
- Safer Merthyr Tydfil
- Swansea Community Farm
- Tanyard Youth Project
- The CAE
- The Game Change Project CIC
- The Leathersellers' Company Charitable Trust
- The Mentor Ring
- The National Lottery Community Fund
- Awards for All Wales
- The Tudor Trust
- Thrive Women's Aid
- Touch Trust
- TRAC2
- Welsh Women's Aid

Midlands

- Action Homeless
- b-inspired
- Carpenters Arms
- Centre For Fun And Families Ltd
- Charnwood Borough Council
- Chell Area Family Action Group
- Coalville CAN
- Double Impact Services
- Eagle's Nest Project
- Exaireo
- Falcon Support Services
- free@last
- Gamcare
- Grace Enterprises Nottingham
- Healing Little Hearts
- Helping Hands Community Trust
- Hettys
- Highfields Centre
- Jericho
- Leicestershire Cares
- Lincolnshire Action Trust (LAT)
- Loughborough Wellbeing Centre CIO
- Melton Learning Hub
- Menphys
- Midland Langar Seva Society
- POW Nottingham
- Reaching People (Leicestershire Voluntary Sector Resource Agency)
- Rebuild East Midlands
- Shama Women's Centre
- S.H.E. UK
- Sharewear Clothing Scheme
- St Anne's Advice Centre
- The Arc Community Hub (Grange Park Centre)
- The Baca Charity
- The Ebb
- The Marios Tinenti Centre
- The New Futures Project
- Trussell Trust
- Twenty:Twenty (Love4Life)
- Villiers Park
- Warning Zone
- Wesley Hall Community Centre
- Young Leicestershire
- Zinthiya Ganeshpanchan Trust

North West

- Abbots Moss Ventures
- AP Coaching and Mentoring Academy CIC
- Audacious Foundation
- Barnabus Manchester
- B Corp
- Beauty for Ashes Refuge
- BeeWell
- Caritas Shrewsbury
- Charity COMMUNITY
- Civic Power Fund
- Cheshire Community Foundation
- Coaching Inside and Out
- Community Arts by ZK CIC
- Cumbria Youth Alliance
- Diversity Matters North West
- Empowerment CIC
- Feedback
- Ferries Family Group
- Focused Care
- Forever Manchester
- Foundation Youth Trust
- GMCA
- GM Mayor's Charity
- Greater Manchester Housing First
- Greater Manchester Poverty Action (GMPA)
- Green Pastures
- Healthbox CIC
- Hope Central
- Hope Citadel
- Humans MCR
- Independent Community Action Network North (ICANN)
- Involve Northwest
- John Haynes Foundation
- Koala North West
- L30 Community Centre
- Lancaster District Community & Volunteering Solutions
- Lifeshare
- Liverpool Cares
- Manchester Credit Union
- Mustard Tree
- New Beginnings Foundation CIO
- Oasis
- Participate Projects
- Power2
- Pure Insight
- Recycling Ford
- Rochdale Women's Welfare
- Rushhouse
- Salford Foundation
- Salford Loaves & Fishes
- Shaftesbury Youth Club
- Shared Health Foundation
- Shoosmiths
- Signpost Stockport for Carers
- St Andrew's Community Network
- ST4ND
- Teardrops Supporting Your Community
- The Boathouse Youth
- The Bond Board
- The Counselling and Family Centre
- The Oasis Centre Community Project – East Manchester
- The River Manchester
- The Storehouse Project
- The Wishing Well
- Trust House Bury
- Tutor Trust
- We Mind the Gap
- Young Manchester
- Young People's Foundation Trust
- YPAC Manchester

London

- Alexandra Rose Charity
- Beam
- Beyond Food
- Camden Giving
- CAPE Mentors Charitable Trust
- Coach Core Foundation
- Dallaglio RugbyWorks
- Dot Dot Fire
- Drug FAM
- Family Links the Centre for Emotional Health
- Fat Macy's
- First Love Foundation
- Football Beyond Borders
- Future Men
- Hope at Home
- Hope Community Foundation
- It's Your Life
- Kalayaan
- Khulisa
- Power2
- ProxyAddress
- Restitute C.I.C
- Riverbank Trust
- Scene & Heard
- Sister System
- Spark Inside
- Steps2Recovery
- Universify Education
- Veterans Aid
- Your Dream Factory

North East

- Age Concern
- Building Self Belief
- CC87
- Changing Lives
- Children NE
- Church Action on Poverty NE
- Churches Together South Tyneside
- Citizens Advice Newcastle
- Clean Slate Solutions
- Close-Knit
- Connected Voice
- Corner House Youth Project
- Crest
- Edge North East
- Eric Knows
- Family Gateway
- Foundation of Light
- Gateshead Citizens Advice
- Gateshead Community Bridgebuilders
- Home Group
- Junction 42
- My Sister's Place
- NE Youth
- Newcastle Rugby Foundation
- Newcastle United Foundation
- North Benwell Youth Project
- North East Child Poverty Commission
- North East Refugee Service
- Oswin Project
- Pendower Good Neighbour Project
- Penshaw View
- Recovery Connections
- Search Newcastle
- Sports Management Solutions
- Swansbuck
- The Children's Foundation
- The Moses Project
- The Recruitment Junction
- Wallsend Children's Community
- YWOP

With special thanks to our Social Justice Commissioners

Martin Ivens (Chair)

Martin Ivens is editor of The Times Literary Supplement and former editor of The Sunday Times from 2013 - 2020. He is a renowned political commentator and writes regularly on British political developments.

Josh Babarinde OBE MP

Josh is the founder and former CEO of Cracked It, a social enterprise smartphone repair service staffed by ex-offenders and at-risk youth for which he appeared on the Forbes 30 Under 30 Social Entrepreneurs List, and was awarded an OBE. Josh was elected as the Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament for Eastbourne in July 2024.

The Rt Hon. Sir Stephen Timms MP

The Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms is the Member of Parliament for East Ham. Sir Stephen was appointed as the Minister for Social Security and Disability in the Department for Work and Pensions in July 2024, and previously chaired the Work and Pensions Select Committee. Stephen became an MP in 1994 and held a number of ministerial posts under the previous Labour Government, including Chief Secretary to the Treasury and Financial Secretary to the Treasury.

Rt Hon Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester

Andy Burnham has been Mayor of Greater Manchester since May 2017. Responsible for shaping the future of Greater Manchester, Andy's priorities include building a London-style integrated transport system and ending rough sleeping. Before being elected Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy was MP for Leigh from 2001. In 2008 he became Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, before returning to Health as Secretary of State in 2009. In opposition, Andy has served as Shadow Education Secretary, Shadow Health Secretary, and Shadow Home Secretary.

Laurance Hancock

Laurance is the Founder and Chief Executive of The Boathouse Youth, Blackpool's leading youth charity, enabling around 1,200 children and young people per year to lead their best lives through participation in effective youth work provision. Laurance is also a strong advocate for the charity sector, particularly grassroots organisations, and has experience as a non-executive director in commercial business.

Miriam Cates

Miriam was the Conservative MP for Penistone and Stocksbridge from 2019 - 2024 and previously sat on the Commons Education Select Committee. Miriam co-established the New Social Covenant Unit in 2021 with the purpose of strengthening families, communities, and the nation.

Liz Earle MBE

Liz Earle is a successful entrepreneur and is the founder of Liz Earle Wellbeing and Liz Earle Beauty Co. Liz is also a Sunday Times No. 1 bestselling author and TV presenter, having hosted shows on both ITV and BBC networks.

The Rt Hon. The Lord King of Lothbury KG GBE DL FBA

Lord King was appointed to the House of Lords in 2013 as a crossbench peer. He is former Governor of the Bank of England from 2003 - 2013, steering the bank through the 2008 financial crisis, and holds the title of Emeritus Professor of Economics at the London School of Economics.

Mercy Muroki

Mercy is a policy advisor, columnist, and former broadcaster. She was previously a Policy Fellow to the Minister for Women and Equalities and served on the government's Commission for Race and Ethnic Disparities.

Tim Farron MP

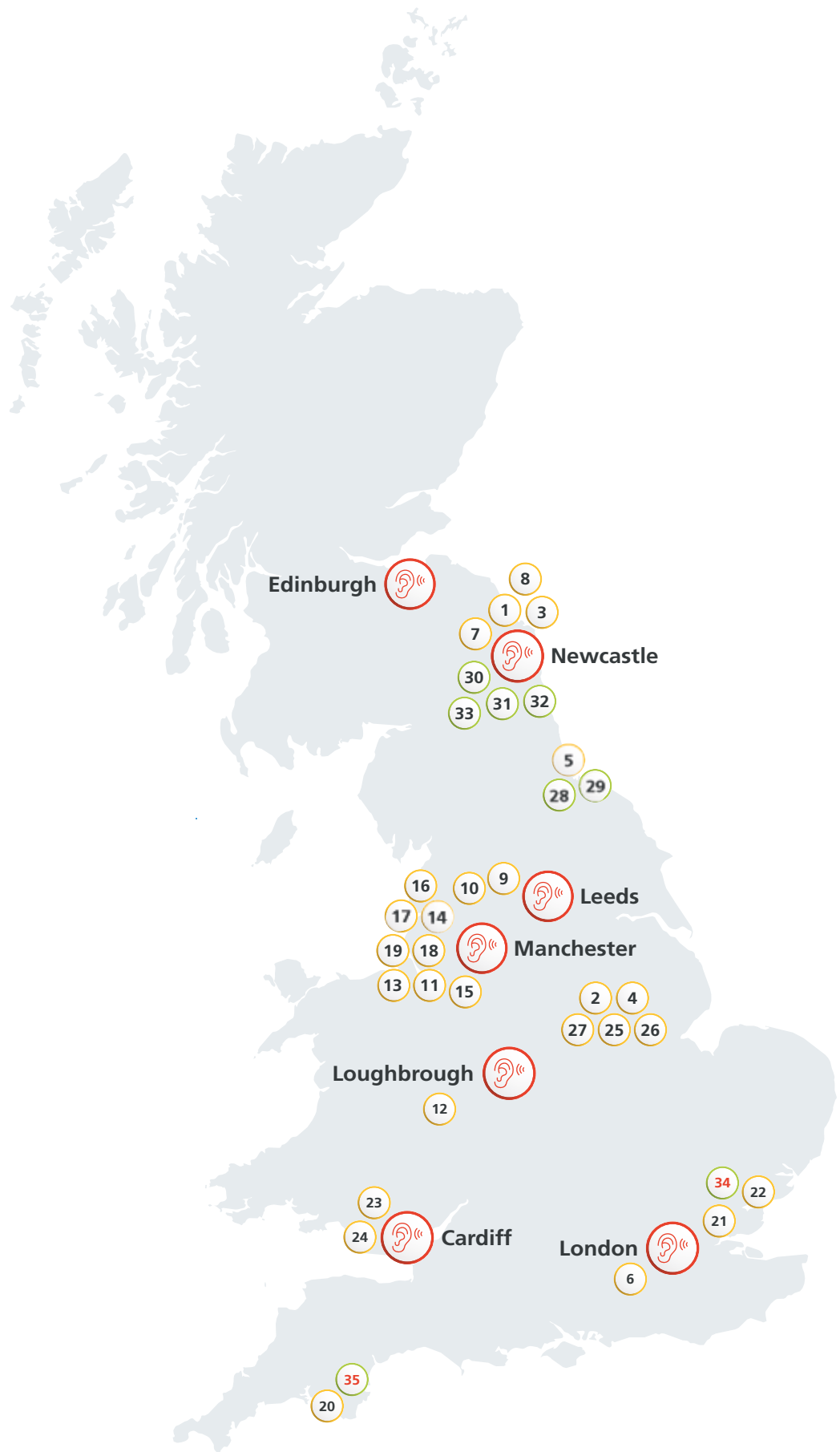
Born in Preston, Lancashire in 1970, Tim Farron was elected Member of Parliament for Westmorland and Lonsdale in 2005. He rose to become President of the Liberal Democrats during the Party's time in coalition government. Succeeding Nick Clegg as Party Leader in 2015, he led the Party through the 2016 EU referendum and the 2017 snap general election.

Methodology

The Commission made 27 visits to small charities, social enterprises and organisations. We heard from an additional 31 charities, social enterprises, Local Authorities, a police force and policy experts through virtual meetings or roundtables. We also hosted six Big Listens events, hosting small charities and social enterprises from across the country, asking them the biggest challenges they saw on the frontline of fighting poverty, and the best solutions they had identified. Big Listens were hosted in Loughborough, London, Leeds, Manchester, Cardiff and Newcastle, and attended by 302 charities, social enterprises and local organisations (and a further Big Listen was hosted in Edinburgh that did not feed into the Commission). The Commission hosted eight lived experience focus groups, including with those with lived experience of prison, addictions to illegal substances, long term unemployment and mental ill-health. The Commission also heard from other individuals who shared in depth their life stories with us, written up as ten case studies. The Commission also received 31 responses to our Call for Evidence and travelled over 6200 miles across three nations of the UK. The Commission also conducted a national representative poll of 6043 adults, in partnership with J.L. Partners between 25 August and 2 October 2023. This poll had a boost of 3021 of the most deprived people (see definition below)¹ across the nation and used innovative polling techniques to ensure this boost sample included the views of those truly at the margins.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Home Group (Newcastle) | 23. Llanhilleth Miners Institute (Llanhilleth) |
| 2. Oasis Community Centre (Worksop) | 24. Valleys Kids (Tonypandy) |
| 3. Oasis Community Housing (Gateshead) | 25. The Link Community Hub (Sheffield) |
| 4. Hetty's Charity (Mansfield Woodhouse) | 26. Rush House (Rotherham) |
| 5. Community Campus 87 (Stockton) | 27. Really Neet Project (Rotherham) |
| 6. Back on the Map (Hendon) | 28. The Moses Project (Stockton-on-Tees) |
| 7. Livin' (Spennymoor) | 29. Clean Slate Solutions (Middlesbrough) |
| 8. NuCastle Foundation (Newcastle) | 30. North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission (Newcastle) |
| 9. Tempus Novo / HMP Leeds (Leeds) | 31. Young Women's Outreach Project (Gateshead) |
| 10. Shared Health Foundation (Oldham) | 32. Family Gateway (Wallsend) |
| 11. Family Toolbox (Wirral) | 33. Key Community (South Shields) |
| 12. Caritas (Shrewsbury) | 34. Tendring, Essex |
| 13. Ferries Family Groups (Rock Ferry) | 35. Plymouth |
| 14. Foundation Years Trust (Wallasey) | 36. Newcastle |
| 15. Involve Northwest (Birkenhead) | 37. London |
| 16. Koala NW (Birkenhead) | 38. Loughborough |
| 17. Shaftesbury Youth Club (Birkenhead) | 39. Manchester |
| 18. WEB Merseyside (Birkenhead) | 40. Cardiff |
| 19. Wirral Borough Council (Wirral) | 41. Edinburgh |
| 20. Trevi Women (Plymouth) | |
| 21. Chess Homeless (Chelmsford) | |
| 22. Lads Need Dads (Colchester) | |

¹ Respondents qualified for the most deprived sample if they met either Condition 1: Have a household income of £14,000 a year or less or work no more than 16 hours per week and are not a housewife/househusband or retired with a private pension or in education or Condition 2: Three of the following conditions: Have a household income of £21,000 a year or less or work no more than 16 hours per week and are not a housewife/househusband or retired with a private pension or are currently in receipt of at least one of the following benefits: Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Pension Credit, Universal Credit. Quotas were added to ensure representative data for each sample: Gender, age, region, socioeconomic grade, ethnicity and 2019 general election vote (for the general public) and gender, age and region (for the most deprived).



Foreword

Politics has the power to transform lives. At its best, it is a uniting force that serves every citizen of the country. But all too often, too many people in the UK feel abandoned by it. We have just had a general election where political parties had to make the case that they were listening, that they understood people's concerns, and that they had credible solutions. Politicians of all stripes will now need to deliver the change the nation wanted. This report lays out practical solutions to deliver that change.

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) established this Social Justice Commission last year, nearly 20 years after its seminal report, *Breakdown Britain*, first shone a light into the darkest corners of our nation. Our first task was to conduct an unflinching enquiry into what life is like for those most struggling in the UK today.

Two Nations was the result of that process. As Commissioners of that investigation, we sought to ensure that no voice was left unheard. We spoke to over 300 frontline charities, social enterprises, and local organisations. We hosted lived experience roundtables to understand the biggest challenges people saw. And we polled over 6,000 people, more than half of whom were from the poorest communities in the UK, to ensure their voices were heard and their lives understood. What we found was a deeply divided society – “two nations”.

Our second task was to consider a way forward to address the root causes of people's struggles and propose solutions. This is that second report, *A United Nation*. We repeatedly heard five key challenges that needed addressing and so have sought to meet those head-on in both the structure and content of this report: make work pay, create safe streets, build stable communities, support fragile families, and champion the lost generation.

Some of the ideas in this report are not new, but their time has come. Others mirror best practice at home and abroad. But many also come directly from those we spoke to on the frontlines – the cry is often not to reinvent the wheel but to

replicate what may already be working in some of the toughest environments in the UK.

But one area that came with renewed energy was the cry to champion the lost generation. The Covid-19 lockdowns asked a lot of our children and they have still not fully recovered. The future of our nation depends on us paying back the debt we owe to them with the opportunities they deserve to reach their own and this country's potential.

Some of these ideas will have financial costs, demanding some tough trade-offs. Others will require us to change the way we do things. But the bottom line is that these are problems we can no longer afford to ignore. As Abraham Lincoln famously told his own Union, a house divided against itself cannot stand.



Martin Ivens
Chair of the Social Justice Commission



Josh Babarinde OBE MP



Rt Hon. Andy Burnham



Miriam Cates



Liz Earle MBE



Tim Farron MP



Laurance Hancock



The Rt Hon. The Lord King of Lothbury KG GBE DL FBA



Mercy Muroki



Rt Hon. Sir Stephen Timms MP

Executive Summary:

Five National Challenges

Two Nations: The State of Poverty in the UK was the result of travelling the length and breadth of the UK to find out what is really happening on our backstreets and amongst the most deprived communities. The Social Justice Commission met with over 300 small charities and experts, interviewed 6,000 people, and were told five clear areas to focus on: good work, stable families, strong communities, public safety, and giving children the best start in life.

Two Nations uncovered deep structural issues that have been decades in the making. Whole regions are bereft of thriving industries leaving neighbourhoods with few meaningful job opportunities that provide stability and pride. An increased fracturing of communities has left people disconnected from their neighbours. More and more children grow up without both parents at home and people of all ages increasingly turn to the state to provide support. The report warned that the UK was in danger of sliding back into the divides of the Victorian era marked by a widening gulf between mainstream society and those left behind. While violent attacks on the police, the public and property can never be justified, *Two Nations* prefigured much of the rioting that has scarred the country this summer.

Two Nations also demonstrated how the petrol of lockdown ignited this tinder box, which caused a blaze that is still raging. Children left school and thousands never returned. The slowly rising tide of mental ill-health started coming in at pace. Substance abuse and subsequent deaths were weaponised. Plunging the country into lockdown may have showed the strength of our resolve as the nation stayed at home and pulled together, but it exposed the weakness of the nation's social infrastructure.

A United Nation seeks to directly address the five priority areas raised in *Two Nations*. The Social Justice Commission proposes a suite of recommendations to government and beyond in each of these key areas. From the five priorities highlighted to us by our extensive consultation with those tackling the very acute impacts of poverty on a daily basis, we have five key national challenges that must be addressed: make work pay, create safe streets, build stable communities, support fragile families, and champion the lost generation.

The steer from those we interviewed was not only on what to do, it was how to do it. Too often our research encountered people who felt Government doesn't listen to them. People feel processes were cruel and unempathetic. That the organisations there to support, seemed only to cause more stress and anxiety. The trivial quip that 'the computer says no' is now a reality many people face at their lowest ebb. Community and human interaction have somehow been lost. Government's natural inclination, to run and fund everything from Whitehall, was fundamentally challenged.

We know that it is almost impossible to transform the lives of the most disadvantaged without first having deep trusted relationships. A clear theme through all of the findings of *Two Nations* was this: systems don't change people ... people change people. This means as well as changing what support is provided, we also need to change how the support reaches those who need it most.

This is why we need a radical new deal for delivery, rooted in local communities with deep trusted relationships. Yes, we need to consider targeting certain pots with more money – for instance, we call for more police officers and more youth workers (this will inevitably cost the Government up front). But we also envisage a radically devolved, decentralised and diffuse system of service delivery.

This has major implications for government. Simply imposing more centralized programmes from national organisations and distant offices and officers of the state will never solve the problems of our poorest citizens. Any solution must start with deep, trusted, community-based relationships, with local people, charities, businesses and agencies, working with people they know. That means empowering local authorities as well as the third sector to deliver services that have traditionally sat with Whitehall. There is no reason public money cannot fund Family Hubs set-up by charities. There is no reason why Local Authorities should not have complete control over employment support services budget. There is no reason why public money cannot partner with private philanthropy to support youth infrastructure. No-one comes away from the public sphere thinking we need to further centralise power. There is huge support for this radical humanisation and delegation of public service delivery away from the distant corridors of Whitehall.

With this in mind, *A United Nation* sets out how the Government can meet these five national challenges by putting this decentralised relationships-based approach at the heart of the policy response.

The Five National Challenges

Make Work Pay

While unemployment figures are historically low, they are masking a huge cohort of people who are both out of work and not looking for work – known as the economically inactive. Too many people we spoke to wanted to work but couldn't for health reasons or felt that work simply wasn't worth it anymore. For many the small gains in income, the insecurity and lack of progression made it risky to leave the secure welfare system. Shifting this will require changes for welfare and employers. Our recommendations include:

- Devolve £6 billion of **employment support services and adult education** to local authorities who are better placed to match those furthest from the labour market with jobs. The administration of welfare such as payment and conditionality can remain with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) but other support services should be devolved to people who are better able to tailor the offer to the locality and individual. ([Page 20](#). For full details of the mechanism to devolve this support see CSJ, *Going Dutch*, 2024).
- HM Treasury should introduce a **learning and skills tax rebate** for employers who invest in low-skilled workers. Low skilled workers find navigating the labour market harder. Lower-level qualifications are associated strongly with unemployment and depress earning potential, but there is an opportunity to help businesses invest in their staff. ([Page 21](#))
- The Universal Credit Claimant commitment should have an 'asset based' element by **incorporating volunteering into 'expected hours.'** Currently, such claimants are allowed to volunteer through securing a 'relevant deduction' of expected hours, but many are cautious to raise this possibility for fear it may be construed as neglecting job seeking duties. Volunteering can have a huge preparatory value as it can provide claimants with regular social interaction, the opportunity to learn new skills, and in some cases, it can lead to employment. Work coaches should be empowered to instruct claimants to reserve 10 of the 35 expected hours per week for this purpose. ([Page 21](#))

Create Safe Streets

It is hard to reach your potential when you can not safely reach the end of your road. The prevalence of crime in their neighbourhoods and its far-reaching impacts are one of the most pressing issues holding people back. Addressing this needs a whole systems approach that goes beyond just policing - sentencing, rehabilitation, community services, and families must all play a part. Our recommendations include:

- The public's priority of law and order is **visible neighbourhood policing**. The Home Office should increase the number of officers in Neighbourhood Policing back to 2017 levels, adding approximately 5,260 more officers across the country. Even before these numbers are reached Police and Crime Commissioners should work with Chief Constables (or the Mayor of London to work with the Commissioner in London) to set a cap for the amount of time an officer in a Neighbourhood Policing Team can be abstracted to other duties. (Page 26)
- The Ministry of Justice should create a proposed alternative sentence for the adult criminal courts of England and Wales: the '**Intensive Control and Rehabilitation Order**' (ICRO). Those sentenced to an ICRO would serve both mandatory conditions (no further offences, GPS Electronic Monitoring enforcing curfew and periodic reviews before the court) and secondary conditions that are tailored to the needs of the individual (including minimum hours of work or education, drug or alcohol rehabilitation requirement and testing, and excluded activities or associations) and would enable those candidates deemed eligible to maintain stabilising relationships and engage in rehabilitative activities and requirements in the community. (Page 28)
- *Two Nations* found that the general public view families as our first line of defence against youth crime. The government should invest in **family support services** through the growing network of Family Hubs. The extension of Family Hubs and the Start for Life programme could also be accelerated by pro-actively seeking local philanthropists to co-fund a Family Hub in their area. (Page 45)

Build Stable Communities

Housing was identified as the most important negative issue for the most disadvantaged and it is clear there must be a national effort to increase the quantity of homes across all types of tenures. Beyond building homes, we also must build communities. It is time for a new deal for the voluntary sector who are the key element to so many stories of transformed lives, and a renewed vision for the power of philanthropy. Our recommendations include:

- The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should execute an ambitious, workable **plan to significantly boost the supply of all types of homes**. (Page 36)
- This should be accompanied by a mission to **provide secure, appropriate, high-quality rented accommodation** including in social homes that allows tenants to put down roots in the community. (Page 36)
- The Government should announce **an action plan for charities** which begins a new model of long-term partnership between Government and the Third Sector, allowing those closest to the communities they serve to deliver their transforming work with confidence of the future. (Page 37)
- HMRC should **introduce an automated Gift Aid system** to reduce unclaimed gift aid and increase the number of charities that currently do not benefit. (Page 39)

Support Fragile Families

The Commission heard that family is the single most important thing in everyone's life, and we found deep frustration amongst the most disadvantaged communities that Westminster doesn't understand its primacy. The UK is an outlier among its international counterparts for family fragility. Our recommendations include:

- The Department for Education should roll out an **evidence-based relationship programme** through Family Hubs, faith groups, community centres and GP surgeries. The cost would be in line with the Department for Work and Pensions' roll out of Reducing Parental Conflict programme which will be £11 million in 2024/5. (Page 42)
- The Government spends billions subsidising childcare. Yet despite this price tag, the current system fails to do what the majority of families want it to. The expansion of 'free' childcare to children as young as 9 months old will burden taxpayers with additional cost without grappling with whether more of the same is what parents want, or if it is in the best interests of children. 78 per cent of parents with young children would like to spend more time with their child than they currently do. HM Treasury should introduce a **Family Credit**, giving households more choice and flexibility when it comes to childcare options. (Page 43)
- Family policy too often focuses on mothers and children, but children have fathers too and engaging them is crucial to that child's outcomes. A raft of measures to **embrace fatherhood** could have huge potential for child outcomes, including strengthening paternity leave; requiring birth registration to include fathers' signatures; and parental preparation courses. (Page 44)

Champion the Lost Generation

COVID-19 lockdowns stripped years from the childhoods of our most disadvantaged young people, and we continue to reap the whirlwind with over 140,000 children missing more school than they attend, soaring mental health problems, and a generation feeling ill-equipped for life. We must correct this. Our recommendations include:

- The Department for Education should extend the school day by an hour to give five hours extra each week for enrichment activities, provided by community groups, which includes outdoor activities. Within this every state-educated secondary school child should have a **Right to Sport**, which includes an additional minimum of 2 hours per week of sport and outdoor education, closing the 'activity gap' and spreading the many benefits of physical activity to a wider cohort of pupils. (Page 53)
- Youth services provide an important space for young people, but their numbers have fluctuated wildly in recent years. A **National Youth Legacy Endowment** should be established to fund quality youth services in a sustainable way into the future, driven by the Department for Media, Culture and Sport and match-funded by philanthropists. (Page 50)
- The Government should make tackling the attendance crisis a national priority, roll out attendance mentors nationally, and develop a **national parental participation strategy** focused on tackling the drivers of school absence. (Page 52)



Chapter 1:

Make Work Pay

"It's a big commitment to risk going off the benefits system for a new job that may not work out."

Resident, Middlesbrough

Britain is on track for two decades of lost growth and the effects of economic stagnation can be seen wherever one looks. Most obviously, it is in pay. Between 1970 and 2007, wages typically grew by 33 per cent each decade. Since the financial crash: sluggish nothingness.² Nowhere are the effects of this failure felt most acutely than in the households of Britain's poorest. In *Two Nations*, we were told by communities across the country that work does not pay, and the state has to step in to plug the gap. Others told us that there were few work opportunities in their area and that the potential for advancement was limited.

We seek to put this right by proposing a package of reforms to help the most disadvantaged at every stage of their journey into employment. We propose helping those furthest from the labour market by removing barriers into work. We support devolving employment support services so job seekers can work with those who truly know their local area and we propose directing government spending into the most deprived areas by applying a "levelling up test" to public procurement.

But we must also support people once they are in work. Britain provides a range of employment protections, but those protections are only as good as their ability to be enforced. We propose merging a plethora of existing enforcement bodies into a new, united enforcement body to ensure that people entering the workforce can feel confident and secure.

2 Office for National Statistics, Earnings and Working Hours

Tackle Health Related Economic Inactivity

Recommendation

Devolve £6 billion of employment support services and adult education to future regional/ mayoral, combined and local authorities to help broker, upskill and match those furthest from the labour market with jobs.

The UK's historic focus on employment figures has meant less attention has been paid to our increasing levels of economic inactivity. The current model of employment support has traditionally focussed on low hanging fruit, with less effort directed to supporting those furthest from the labour market into work.

Increasing labour market participation is an important anti-inflationary supply side measure to achieve economic growth. International examples such as the Netherlands and Scandinavia, show that retaining welfare administration centrally but devolving employment support can help connect those out of the labour market with jobs and educational opportunities in their locality. This model prioritises individual relationships and holistic support. Further details on how this model will work can be found in CSJ, *Going Dutch*, 2024.

Recommendation

The Universal Credit Claimant commitment should have an 'asset based' element by incorporating volunteering into 'expected hours.'

Universal Credit (for claimants who are not prevented from working) is designed to replicate a working week, and therefore preparing for work must be a fulltime focus. Volunteering can have a huge preparatory value as it can provide claimants with regular social interaction, the opportunity to learn new skills, and in some cases, it can lead to employment. Volunteering is an asset-based activity as the claimant is treated as a contributor rather than a recipient. Currently, such claimants are allowed to volunteer through securing a 'relevant deduction' of expected hours, but many are cautious to raise this possibility for fear it may be construed as neglecting job seeking duties.³

The Department for Work and Pensions should introduce an 'asset-based' element to the claimant commitment by incorporating volunteering, or other community-based purposeful activity. At their discretion, work coaches should be empowered to instruct claimants to reserve 10 of the 35 expected hours per week for this purpose. This will improve claimants' wellbeing while job-seeking, making it a more productive period. This may be particularly appropriate for younger claimants with little work experience. Job Centres should work with local Councils of Voluntary Services (CVS) and social prescribers to find the right opportunity for their claimants.⁴

³ CSJ, Community Capital: How Purposeful Participation Empowers Humans to Flourish, 2019

⁴ Ibid.

Create Good Work by Supporting Workforce Investment

Recommendation

Introduce a “learning and skills tax rebate” for employers who invest in low-skilled workers.

Poor qualifications make navigating the labour market harder. Lower qualifications are associated more strongly with unemployment and lower qualifications depress earning potential.⁵

As it stands, few people who enter low pay permanently move out of it. Just 17 per cent of low-paid workers moved permanently out of low pay between 2006 and 2016, meaning poor educational performance can lead to a lifetime of limited achievement.⁶ Of all those who were low-paid in 2006, by 2016 just one in six managed to progress onto higher salary bands. Polling for the Commission has found that whilst 30 per cent of the general public expect to progress at work and receive a pay rise in the next year, among the most deprived this fell to 15 per cent.⁷

Recommendation

Merge the HMRC National Minimum Wage Enforcement body, the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority, and the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate to create a new, united employment enforcement body to crack down on employers who are not meeting requirements.

Despite significant progress in reducing instances of low pay, evidence produced by the Low Pay Commission and others show instances where firms do not pay their workers as they’re required to.⁸ There is also evidence of other abuses, including paid holiday, and other workers’ rights. In 2019, the Conservative Party Manifesto promised to bring a new enforcement body into being, merging the HMRC National Minimum Wage Enforcement body, the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority, and the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate into a single body.⁹ The creation of this body has since stalled – it should be reintroduced.

Recommendation

The Government should reduce the proportion of Universal Credit Standard Allowance that can be clawed back in debt repayments to 10 per cent; introduce affordability assessments into the benefits deductions process; and reverse the transfer of legacy tax credit debt from HMRC to the DWP.¹⁰

5 CSJ, *Playing the Ace: A Plan to Unleash the Potential of Adult Community Education and Bolster Economic Growth*, November 2022

6 Ibid.

7 CSJ, *Two Nations: The State of Poverty in the UK*, December 2023

8 Low Pay Commission, *Non-Compliance and Enforcement of the National Minimum Wage*; Low Pay Commission, *LPC kicks off 2022 visits programme in Leicester – but has anything changed?*

9 Conservative Party Manifesto, 2019

10 CSJ, *Collecting Dust: A Path Forward for Government Debt Collection*, April 2020

The Government should reduce the proportion of Universal Credit Standard Allowance that can be clawed back in debt repayments to 10 per cent;

As Universal Credit has become less generous, many claimants have struggled to keep up. Debt repayments – much of it for historic tax credit errors from HMRC – can further exacerbate this hardship. Currently, up to 25 per cent of a claimant's standard allowance can be deducted. The CSJ has previously recommended that the total amount of a standard allowance that can be clawed back is 10 per cent. This will ease claimant debt repayments while repaying legitimate creditors, and remove some of the barriers for people moving into work, as they will be able to keep more of the money they earn. Retaining some level of debt repayment protects creditors, including landlords, and also mirrors the circumstances those not on welfare would face. This intervention is minimum cost or broadly cost neutral as the debt is still repaid, but just over a longer time period.

...Introduce Affordability Assessments into The Benefits Deductions Process;

The Government should introduce leading measures of affordability, such as the Standard Financial Statement, into debt collection. This would allow the DWP to ascertain what level of payments are affordable to a claimant. Those who fall into arrears to other creditors more than a set number of times should immediately be referred to debt advice support services.

...And reverse the transfer of legacy tax credit debt from HMRC to the DWP.

Problems in the legacy benefit system mean that a significant proportion of claimants – up to 80 per cent – owe debt in the form of tax credit overpayments when they move onto Universal Credit. Between 2016 and 2023 HMRC has transferred £3.6 billion of extra debt and expects to pass a further £1 billion in 2024-2025. The cost of this repayment falls upon those failed by the legacy system.

DWP should be passed back to HMRC and not deducted through Universal Credit. The remaining portion of the tax credit debt should be retained by HMRC, and its recovery should be modelled on the student debt system where individuals only begin to pay it back in instalments when their earnings reach a specific threshold. The Government should review how high it wishes to set this threshold, given the trade-off between reduced work-incentives and the recovery of old debt. Writing off old tax credit debt could, after all, have a profoundly positive impact on the final rollout of Universal Credit, removing a key barrier for people reluctant to migrate to UC. After all, HMRC's inability to reclaim the historic debt because of the failings of Tax Credit shouldn't be passed on to UC. This creates a huge disincentive for those facing a 25 per cent claw back of their standard allowance due to debts resulting from issues with the legacy benefits system. Post the return of this debt, HMRC should review the total owed legacy benefit debts and consider writing off the remaining amounts. For ongoing benefit overpayments, claimants must be informed of any outstanding overpayment within a year and given an explanation as to why they received it. Overpayments revealed more than 13 months afterwards should be waived.

Make Government Spending Serve the Most Disadvantaged

Recommendation

Wider social costs and costs to the Exchequer, including the cost of unemployment and under-employment to the DWP, should be taken into account when seeking “value for money” in public contracts.¹¹

Recommendation

Wherever there is a geographical choice about where to award a public contract, procurement decisions should have to pass a “Levelling up Test”. Public bodies should be required to offer contracts in a way which will most effectively redress regional economic disparities and boost investment in left behind communities, with the Index of Multiple Deprivation used as a measure.¹²

The UK spends around 1/3 of its annual expenditure on contracts with private companies. This normally falls in the region of £290 billion per year. For context, this figure is more than twice the total annual NHS budget, more than five times the size of the defence budget, and greater than Britain’s total expenditure on social security, including the state pension. There is an opportunity to ensure this spend serves a dual purpose both delivering the service needed and funnelling investment and employment opportunities to the areas of the country that need it most. Public Sector Procurement rules based on EU Procurement Law should be changed to make it easier for small charities to bid for public contracts. The rules are currently complex and favour the large charities. A wider understanding of value for money should be embedded in the new procurement rules.

¹¹ CSJ, Spending It Better: Taking Back Control of Public Contracts to Level Up Britain, September 2021

¹² Ibid



Chapter 2:

Create Safe Streets

"Teesside it's just lawless. There is no police in here. There are no laws or rules here, you just do what you want." [sic]

Resident, Teesside

As the Social Justice Commission travelled the country speaking to those who lived in some of the most left behind communities, the prevalence of crime in their neighbourhoods and its far-reaching impacts were frequently mentioned as one of the most pressing issues holding them back. When asked what the worst thing about living in their area is, both the general public and the most deprived most frequently used the word 'crime' to answer this question, as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: What is the Worst Thing About Living in Your Area?



Source: Original polling conducted by JL Partners for The Centre for Social Justice of 6,000 adults Nat Rep between 25th August 2023 and 2nd October 2023

People feel unsafe in their communities despite the fact that overall crime has followed a general downward trend from a peak in 1995,¹³ (although some measurements of violent crime have risen).¹⁴ The Social Justice Commission found a widespread belief that the inhibitors of crime: strong families, respected community institutions, and crucially – a present and active police service – have been gutted out. The Commission's polling found that both the general public and the most deprived groups identify lack of parental supervision and boundaries as the primary cause of juvenile criminality, ahead of no meaningful activities, police presence, recognition amongst peers and mental health.¹⁵ The perception that justice will be done remains low: a survey by the Victims Commissioner found that only eight per cent of victims are confident they would receive justice as a result of reporting a crime.¹⁶

13 Office for National Statistics (ONS), Crime in England and Wales: Year Ending September 2022, January 2023

14 Home Office, CSJ analysis of Police Recorded Crime and Outcomes Open Data Tables

15 Original analysis conducted by JL Partners for The Centre for Social Justice of 6,000 adults Nat Rep between 25th August 2023 and 2nd October 2023

16 Victims Commissioner, Victims' Experience: Annual Survey 2022, 8 November 2023

Reduce the Perception of Lawlessness

Recommendation

The Home Office should increase the number of officers in Neighbourhood Policing back to 2017 levels, adding approximately 5,260 more officers across the country. Even before these numbers are reached Police and Crime Commissioners should work with Chief Constables (or the Mayor of London to work with the Commissioner in London) to set a cap for the amount of time an officer in a Neighbourhood Policing Team can be abstracted to other duties.

The consent principle that underpins policing in the UK means the public perception of the police's ability to detect and solve crime and the justice system's ability to punish perpetrators are important factors which can exist quite disconnected from the reality of police or judicial conduct. Part of the perception amongst the public that crime is getting worse, or remaining a key issue, is driven by the perception that police activity is not focused on the crimes that matter most to the public – namely burglary and theft, drug dealing, and anti-social behaviour. So-called 'low-level' crime and disorder are often 'Signal Crimes' which act as indicators to the public that their local area is not safe.

For neighbourhood policing initiatives that tackle crime that matters most to the public to succeed, officers need to have a consistent presence and build relationships with local residents. However, abstractions of police personnel for mutual aid, public order requirements or to back-fill other under-resourced police teams takes officers away from Neighbourhood Policing Teams and interrupts the officers' ability to build those crucial local relationships.

In order to improve trust between the police service and the general public, there needs to be a recalibration between what matters to the public and where police budgets and resources are deployed. Neighbourhood Policing Teams should be protected and take action to prevent crime that matters most to communities and not be routinely taken off neighbourhood duties in order to back-fill vacant places on other teams. Neighbourhood officers should not be classed as a 'taskable' resource to be deployed to incidents which are primarily the responsibility of Emergency Response Patrol Teams.

Recommendation

The Home Office should work with all Neighbourhood Policing Teams to ensure they are delivering 'hot spots policing', and deploying their resources and activities to neighbourhoods, streets and locations where crime is most concentrated, in conjunction with a problem-orientated policing approach.

Crime is highly geographically concentrated, particularly in areas of high deprivation. The most disadvantaged are disproportionately impacted by crime: 21 per cent of those living in the lowest decile for deprivation said they had stopped leaving home alone in the day as a result of feeling unsafe compared to only eight per cent of those in the highest decile¹⁷ and violence, robbery, and sexual offence were 2.1 times more common in the poorest decile of areas, compared to the richest.¹⁸

¹⁷ ONS, Perceptions of Personal Safety and Experiences of Harassment, Great Britain, May 2022

¹⁸ Trust for London, Crimes Recorded by Neighbourhood Income Deprivation Decile in London, 2022

Hot spots policing targets resources and activities to the places where crime is most concentrated. It has been proven around the world to reduce crime, most evidently in drug offences, disorder offences, property crime and violent crime. Hot spot policing has been most effective when combined with a problem-oriented policing (POP) approach. Hot spots policing is not defined by the use of specific interventions or tactics, but by whether activity is targeted to specific high crime locations. Activities could include directed police patrols, aggressive disorder enforcement (crackdowns), Prevention Hubs or POP.

Recommendation

The Ministry of Justice and the Police and Crime Commissioners should ensure that the roll out of the Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) across the country follow the model of the Group Violence Intervention (GVI), the success of which success depends on strong and consistent police enforcement.

Attempts to implement the GVI approach in England and Wales (such as Shield Pilot in London), were not faithful to the original model that has been proven to work in more than 77 cities around the world.¹⁹ This partial adaptation diluted its impact. Scotland has adopted the GVI approach and implemented it in both a thorough and consistent fashion. Over the same ten-year period, Scotland has seen a drastic reduction in sharp instrument fatalities, weapon possession, and gang fighting.²⁰

Violence Reduction Units should adopt the core mechanisms of Boston's "Operation Ceasefire," which was responsible for a 63 per cent reduction in youth homicide victimization²¹ and has been adapted around the world through a model called the Group Violence Intervention (GVI). The typical impact of a GVI is a 35 to 60 per cent reduction in community-wide levels of homicides.²²

The key elements of a Group Violence Intervention must include:

- A thorough understanding of the local problem and what is driving it;
- Committed and visible leadership at the highest levels;
- Full multi-agency collaboration, data-sharing and communication;
- A combination of enforcement, intervention and prevention;
- An honest and targeted approach; and
- Meaningful community engagement.

¹⁹ CSJ, It Can Be Stopped, August 2018

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ US Department of Justice, Reducing Gun Violence: The Boston Gun Project's Operation Ceasefire, September 2001

²² US Department of Justice, National Gang Centre, Group Violence Intervention, Accessed: <https://nationalgangcenter.ojp.gov/spt/Programs/42>

For success, these interventions must be underpinned by robust police enforcement, as demonstrated below.



Cut Re-offending

Recommendation

The Ministry of Justice should create a proposed alternative sentence for the adult criminal courts of England and Wales: the 'Intensive Control and Rehabilitation Order' (ICRO).

The prison estate is overcrowded, and reoffending rates are high. Adults released from custodial sentences of less than 12 months had a proven reoffending rate of 56.1 per cent.²³ Some offenders go into prison and learn the art of criminality, whilst also losing their benefits, housing or any employment they had before being sentenced to prison. For primary carers of children who go to prison, they can often lose custody of their children.

There is a need for a new sentence that sits between a Suspended Sentence Order and an immediate custodial sentence. This new sentence, called the Intensive Control and Rehabilitation Order (ICRO) is wider in scope than any pre-existing community-based order, applicable to a cohort of individuals who would otherwise serve a sentence of immediate custody in the prison estate. The sentence would enable those candidates deemed eligible to maintain stabilising relationships and engage in rehabilitative activities and requirements in the community. To allow for this to happen, electronic monitoring, together with curfew requirements, would be used to achieve the restraint of liberty necessary to satisfy the punitive element of the sentence, while offering sufficient protection for the public. Those sentenced to an ICRO would serve both mandatory conditions (no further offences, GPS Electronic Monitoring enforcing curfew and periodic reviews before the court) and secondary conditions that are tailored to the needs of the individual (including minimum hours of work or education, drug or alcohol rehabilitation requirement and testing, and excluded activities or associations).

Previous pilots that have looked at more stringent community sentences such as Intensive Supervision Courts, have focused on criminals who have committed low level crimes. However, chance for rehabilitation is not in correlation to the level of the crime, and in fact those who have committed so-called low-level crime can be the hardest to rehabilitate, due to the often-prolific nature of low-level crime.

²³ Ministry of Justice, Proven Reoffending Statistics: July to September 2022,

An ICRO pilot must ensure that there is no gap between sentencing and the beginning of the order. Probation, rehabilitation and other services that are needed to enforce the ICRO also need to be sufficiently resourced to provide the stringency that is required. An ICRO pilot must also consider the particular needs of women within the criminal justice system, for whom many securing safe, secure and appropriate accommodation (required for the ICRO to be disposed) is a key challenge.

Recommendation

The Ministry of Justice should review sentencing tariffs across all offence types to ensure parity of tariff for comparable offences.

Longer prison sentences are being seen across almost all types of offences, and continuing on this trajectory is not tenable. A key driver in the increased prison population is that prisoners are spending longer in prison. As two examples, in 2008 the average sentence for manslaughter was 59.2 months and 106.1 months in 2019 (a 79 per cent increase). In 2008 the average sentence for knife possession was 4.7 months but 7.1 months in 2019, (a 51 per cent increase). The Ministry of Justice's own Impact Assessment of the presumption against custodial sentences of 12 months or less, flagged that the change may lead to some sentences being increased above 12 months in order to circumnavigate the presumption, known as up-tariffing.²⁴

There is need for a recalibration of sentencing across all sentence types to prevent continual up-tariffing. The review should take into account the appropriate balance between the punitive and rehabilitative purpose of sentences, noting the reducing rehabilitative returns past a certain sentence length. Types of sentences that would mean an offender is a danger to the public should be exempted from a sentence length change, but there is an opportunity to provide a more consistent sentencing framework that does not impact on public safety.

Recommendation

The Ministry of Justice should bring forward its 'New Deal' for Governors and set out how Prison Governors can be given increased autonomy on: staff recruitment and remuneration, use of Release on Temporary License (ROTL), staffing structure, the Incentives and Earned Privilege Scheme (IEPS), and education, employment and wellbeing budgets.

Despite having a large amount of accountability, Prison Governors have limited responsibility over their own budgets, staff and activities within the prison. Prison Governors reported not having the ability to recruit their own staff, many meeting their new prison officers only on their first day of work. There is also scope to use IEPS and meaningful activities to incentivise co-operation and improve employment outcomes.

²⁴ Ministry of Justice, Impact Assessment: Sentencing Bill – Changes on the Presumption of the suspension of short sentences, IA No: MoJ070/2023, 14th November 2023

*The Prisons Strategy White Paper – Response to Consultation Questions (2022)*²⁵, promised a New Deal for Governors, the detail of which is still to be laid out. This New Deal should allow Prison Governors to innovate within their own prisons, taking greater ownership of the delivery of meaningful activity and being able to recruit staff that fit the needs of their prison. As another example of encouraging innovation within the prison estate, the New Deal could set out guidance on how Governors can grant permission for business premises to be applied for within the footprint of suitable prison estates. Efforts to improve rehabilitation, and particularly employment outcomes for those leaving prison, should be explicitly assessed by HM Inspectorate of Prisons. This should include consideration of the in-prison work opportunities a prison provides alongside the steps taken by prisons to develop the foundations needed for successful desistance from crime, such as employment, appropriate housing and strengthening of positive family relationships.

Recommendation

Steps to accelerate processing the court backlog should be made including by permanently lifting the ‘sitting days’ cap on Crown Court judicial sitting days and running a nationwide campaign to recruit high quality magistrates.

A key contributor to the perception of lawlessness that persisted amongst the most disadvantaged communities was the long waiting times for cases to go through the court system and reach a verdict. The uncertainty of when and if justice would be served contributed to the perception that criminals could act with impunity. Outstanding cases continue to increase in both the Magistrates Court and the Crown Court reached a record high of 64,709 backlogged cases in June 2023.²⁶ The median duration from offence to completion was 187 days in the magistrates court and 398 days in the Crown Court.²⁷

The cap on judicial ‘sitting days’ should be permanently lifted, allowing the Crown Court to hear the highest possible number of criminal cases per year. The shortages in the magistrates court should be addressed through a nationwide recruitment campaign, encouraging highly skilled individuals to serve as magistrates.

Recommendation

The Ministry of Justice should create a programme of multi-agency interventions coordinated by a keyworker to support a pathway away from crime for those leaving the prison estate between the ages of 18 and 25, based on learnings from the Stronger Families Programme (formerly Troubled Families).

Reoffending remains high. Adults released from custodial sentences of less than 12 months had a proven reoffending rate of 56.1 per cent while the proven reoffending rate across all offence and sentence types is 25.8 per cent.²⁸ Only 26.4 per cent of individuals are in employment six months after being released from a custodial sentence.²⁹ Reoffending costs approximately 18.1 billion per year.³⁰

²⁵ Ministry of Justice, *Prisons Strategy White Paper – Response to Consultation Questions*, June 2022

²⁶ Ministry of Justice, *Criminal Court Statistics Quarterly: April to June 2023*, September 2023

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ministry of Justice, *Proven Reoffending Statistics: April to June 2022*, 25 April 2024

²⁹ Ministry of Justice, *Community Performance Annual*, update to March 2023, July 2023

³⁰ UK Parliament, *The Use of Short Prison Sentences in England and Wales*, July 2023

The Ministry of Justice should trial a new wrap around service to tackle prolific offending for those at the beginning of their criminal justice journey. The programme should be geared toward preventing young offenders becoming stuck in a cycle of reoffending after their first custodial sentence. It should also focus on reducing demand and dependency of these offenders on costly reactive public services and delivering better value for the taxpayer. A dedicated key worker would consider the problems of an offender (and their families if appropriate) in a holistic manner, organise services to grip the individuals' problem, and work with them in persistent and assertive way towards an agreed improvement plan. The key worker would begin supporting the individual prior to release and then continue co-ordinating through the gate services. The key worker should be commissioned by the Ministry of Justice but sit separately to Probation Officers. Modelled on the Stronger Families Programme model, the programme should begin with a payment by results model with the potential to move to Earned Autonomy over time.

A Path to Recovery from Addiction

Recommendation

The Government should announce Drug Awareness Courses, similar to Speed Awareness Courses, for minor first-time offenders caught in possession of an illicit substance.

Addiction was raised as a key issue in *Two Nations* and people complained it was becoming more common and visible. Earlier interventions for people caught in possession or using illegal substances, will reduce the number of people who go on to become addicted. Education on the impact of taking drugs is lacking and for minor first-time offenders, an awareness course would help them to understand the risk and consequences of continuing, whilst signposting to addiction support.

Advice and support could be prescribed at these days with a focus on dealing with the root cause of the illicit substance abuse. Courses must include referral pathways to mental health and addiction services.

Recommendation

The Government should establish a Drug Treatment Court for non-violent offenders of drug-related crime who have addiction disorders.

The Government recognised the need for a Problem Solving Court in 2022 to support minor offenders who would be best suited to rehabilitation and punishment outside of the prison estate.

This is modelled on a Drug Treatment Court in the United States which is aimed at supporting individuals into work and stable housing and has had good results.

The CSJ has previously recommended Problem-Solving Courts (PSC), a policy which the former Justice Secretary, Dominic Raab, announced plans to roll out in July 2022. The UK Government recently launched two Substance Misuse Intensive Supervision Court pilots. Although there is a substantial international evidence base, there is limited evidence about the effectiveness of PSC in the UK due to inconsistent implementation and evaluation. In order to best implement this court system, a robust, independent review of the pilots should be implemented. This includes collecting data to effectively assess re-offending and abstinence rates.

Recommendation

The Government should expand the use of Child Criminal Exploitation charges to encompass those found to have purchased illegal drugs from a minor.

In 2022, 52 per cent of victims of drug trafficking were children.³¹ This is a form of Child Criminal Exploitation (CSE) whereby children are recruited into criminal gangs and exploited through county lines networks and the selling of illegal drugs. The CSJ believes that those found to have bought or exchanged drugs from a minor are also guilty of engaging in Child Criminal Exploitation and that for those to whom this applies should be charged not only for possession of illegal drugs but for engaging in Child Criminal Exploitation to add weight to the conviction. Child Criminal Exploitation is not currently a separate offence.

31 UK Data Service, National Referral Mechanism Statistics



Chapter 3:

Build Stable Communities

“Housing prices are hugely expensive, and [people] are having to disperse and disrupt the strong sense of community and belonging because housing is too expensive to live there”.

Community Member, Big Listen

Britain has a chronic shortage of homes. This problem is decades in the making and the result of an outdated planning system which has failed to deliver the affordable, quality and secure homes individuals and families need. For too long Government has put off change due to the political difficulties of reform. Yet reform is what is desperately needed. Currently, Britons are subject to a housing market that is characterised by unaffordable costs, bad quality properties and insecure tenure, especially for the most disadvantaged. Two Nations found that over three quarters of the most disadvantaged worry about their housing.³²

We propose a suite of reforms that the Government can implement to unlock housing supply across all tenure types. These changes would help to boost the affordability, quality and security of tenure in the housing market, especially for the most disadvantaged. We propose an ambitious but workable plan to reform the planning system, delivering the homes the country needs in partnership with local communities. This will require significant political will by a government determined to act in the long-term interests of the nation. We also outline how the Government can strengthen the hand of renters, particularly those renting from private landlords, with a raft of recommendations which require the full implementation of the original content of the Renters (Reform) Bill which was set to abolish No-Fault Evictions and introduce a new Standard Tenancy.

Taken together these reforms provide the Government with an ample framework to begin delivering the homes the country needs in the best interests of the British people.

32 CSJ, Two Nations: The State of Poverty in the UK, December 2023, p. 142

Build More Homes

Recommendation

An ambitious, workable plan to significantly boost the supply of all types of homes. Options include:

- i. Implement a new zonal planning code in partnership with devolved Government and local authorities, which would reform the planning system from being majority-discretionary based to a rule-based zonal system.
- ii. Reform the Land Compensation Act 1961 to remove the right of landowners to receive 'hope value' under compulsory purchase orders. The value paid to landowners should be determined by an independent expert panel and be binding on all parties. The Government should also implement a cross-party agreed mechanism of land value capture with the aim of splitting planning gain 50/50 with the landowner/developer and local authority/state.
- iii. Expand access to finance for Community Land Trusts.
- iv. Recategorise the greenbelt. Land of genuine environmental value should be protected and placed in a special protected zone. All other land, especially land within a certain radius of transport infrastructure should be made open to development.
- v. Release public land for housing.
- vi. Simplify the laws pertaining to permitted developments for 'granny annexes' to help families take care of elderly relatives in older age.

Provide Secure, Appropriate, High-Quality Rented Accommodation

Recommendation

Ensure those in rented accommodation, either in the private rented sector or in social homes, have secure high-quality accommodation, which is appropriate to their needs and allows them to put down roots in a community. Options include:

- i. Review Social Housing Allocation process to ensure that social housing is allocated to those most in need and entitled.
- ii. Permit planning applications for income-linked 'move-on' Stepping Stone accommodation to be built to enable those in supported housing to progress in work and lead an independent life.
- iii. Abolish Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988 and simultaneously overhaul Section 8 to strengthen the rights of landlords where appropriate.

- iv. Reform Assured Shorthold and Shorthold tenancies and bring about a Standard Tenancy which is periodic, leaving fixed-term tenancies only for the general student Private Rented Sector (PRS) market.
- v. Introduce a clear, coherent Decent Homes Standard for the PRS.

Harness the Power of the Third Sector

"We are not an emergency charity. We become a family to our service users, someone to listen to."

CEO, Small charity in Manchester

The Commission heard of some of the most pressing challenges facing the small and medium sized charities and social enterprises in the third sector. These are: a decline in volunteers, challenges in core funding, securing long-term programmes, collaboration, competition with large charities, engaging with statutory services, risk taking and the rise in demand post-COVID-19 pandemic.

There needs to be a new settlement for the third sector which gives them the adequate resourcing and long-term support to run commissioned Government services as well as care and support their communities in a time of social breakdown and unravelling.

Recommendation

The Government should announce an Action Plan for Charities which begins a new model of long-term partnership between the Government and the Third Sector.

- i. Local Authorities should be required to employ a council-level role for a Local Charities Representative whose job it is to build relationships between statutory services and local charities.

Charities often don't have time to network with other services or introduce themselves to social prescribers and other key workers who would be a help to them in their work. There is sometimes little communication with local authorities.

A Local Charities Representative should be in every local authority, whose job it is to build relationships between statutory services and local charities and to maximise service and support opportunities. Ideally this person would have worked for a small or medium sized charity in the past. In Scotland, Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs) provide a single point of access for support and advice for the third sector within local authority areas. Since 2018 there has been a TSI in each local authority area in Scotland.

- ii. The Government should require a local forum to be made open regularly for local community groups, and charities to use for free or a discounted rate.

Often spaces in the community are cut off from local charities and people, but there are vast assets available to be used. One such example is Retained Fire stations. CSJ Alliance Charity Revival North Yorkshire negotiated a deal with a Retained Fire Station which is heated all week but only used once by the fire brigade. They are now using this previously empty community asset for an office and space for local residents to pop in and share concerns or needs.

Local authorities should work with statutory services and emergency services to map community spaces which could be used by groups and charities in the area. The question asked should be what is preventing the group using the space, rather than what case can the group make to use the space.

- iii. The Government should require local authorities to co-locate statutory services within community grassroots charities and organisations.

Statutory services are often far removed from the most disadvantaged. Many of the poorest will have no interactions with council and statutory services and struggle to access in-person appointments. Many CSJ Alliance charities host statutory services in their premises. The Simon Community Access Hub in Glasgow co-locates in one building all the homeless charities, along with the NHS, the Council Housing department and Social Work. As such they are able to offer a homeless person coming into the premises a wrap round person centred approach, where service users feel comfortable and have built up trust. There should be a requirement on statutory services to branch out and staff should place themselves in different community centres at certain points of the week.

- iv. Local Authorities and other statutory services should be required to involve representatives from small and medium size charities on statutory and decision-making boards.

Too often charities are cut off from the decisions made inside councils which effect their service users and the communities they serve. Often charities are plugging the gaps between statutory service users and reducing demand on Government. There needs to be a better way for statutory services to engage with charities in the best interest of local people.

Local authorities and statutory services would be required to invite charity representatives to regularly attend meetings that relate to the work of those charities. This could initially be rolled out to charities running commissioned services if not done already.

- v. Local Authorities should be required to maintain an up-to-date database of local charities and their main service provision. This should be viewable to the public and accessible by charities and other statutory services providers.
- vi. Local Authorities should have greater scope to share information with approved charities in the interest of the service users requiring support. Exceptions for GDPR should be considered where this permits collaboration between Charities and between Local Authorities and Statutory Services.

Recommendation

HMRC should introduce an automated Gift Aid system.

This would reduce what goes unclaimed, stop money being claimed in error and help over 126,000 charities that currently do not benefit from gift aid, as per the recommendation of the Charity Tax Group.³³

Charities should also be allowed to recover all input VAT. The current regulations are complex and difficult for the charities to work with, particularly for building works which will often involve expensive professional VAT advice.

33 Charity Tax Group, The Future of Gift Aid Project, 2021



Chapter 4:

Support Families

“One of the things we get frustrated with when we’re working with Government and MPs is that they seem to forget how important family is to all of us. They never really take it into account when they’re making policy.”

Charity CEO, Stockton-on-Tees

The family is in crisis. Being raised by both parents is now a privilege enjoyed by only one in two children.³⁴ The result is a generation for whom the template of future relationships is unhelpful: short-lived, fragile and unpredictable. The impact on children’s outcomes cannot be in any doubt. While in some circumstances it is safe and right for parents to separate, and while there will always be exceptions on an individual level, on a population level children benefit from a stable committed relationship between their parents.

We are seeing a decline in birthrates, too, resulting from poor or short-term relationships. This has been accompanied by a surge in single households and lone parents that has turned loneliness into a public health issue. Our mental health has also been affected by a lack of supportive, stable connection. Social media offers virtual but also fake, abusive, and unstable relationships. Traditional institutions that once offered opportunities for family bonding, and the shoring up of existing relationships, such as churches, local volunteer groups and schools, are struggling to command the allegiance they once took for granted.

To support the most significant relational nexus, the family, is now a matter of urgency. It is also a matter of popular will: repeated polling, including most recently by the Children’s Commissioner³⁵, as well as our own work with Alliance charities, continues to show that families continue to be the most important element in all our lives. Saving this public good makes economic, not just political, sense: relying on family members for care, whether for the older or the younger members of our community, prevents costly reliance on services and spares the expensive trajectory of the maladjusted.

Our strategy offers some practical steps with far-reaching consequences.

³⁴ The Children’s Commissioner’s Office, The Big Ask. Accessed: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/about-us/the-big-ask/>

³⁵ Ibid.

Relationship Support for Families

Recommendation

The Government should make signing a baby's birth registration a statutory duty for both parents and locate birth registration services within Family Hubs, in the 75 Local Authorities that currently provide them.

A father's active involvement in their child's early years is critical for everything from emotional and mental development to the ability to forge and maintain stable relationships and even to IQ.³⁶ Yet, as the IFS notes,³⁷ fathers are "largely absent in UK data sets". They are also increasingly absent, as we have seen, from their children's lives. This has negative consequences for those children's development.³⁸

The Government has a role to play, by requiring birth registrations to include fathers' signatures. Currently, the mother can choose to register the birth without the child's father if they're not married or in a civil partnership and the father's details are then not included on the birth certificate (which costs £11 for a copy). This reduces a father's role to "guest" or "bystander" rather than an engaged participant in a child's existence. We recommend that, by law, the father's signature and their details must be included in the register of their baby's birth. This places fatherhood on a statutory footing and ensures they feel responsible for their child, but also feel included in an early landmark in their child's existence.

Recommendation

The DfE should roll out an evidence-based relationship programme through Family Hubs, churches, community centres and GP surgeries. The cost would be in line with the Department for Work and Pensions' roll out of Reducing Parental Conflict programme (£11 million in 2024/5).

Our increasingly individualised culture risks preventing strong and stable relationships. The result, is young people becoming wary of marriage; and couples unable to respect long-term commitment. Without a society-wide encouragement of marriage and commitment few seem to know what the building blocks of a strong relational framework look like.

The Culture of Freedom Initiative (COFI) was rolled out in three counties in the state of Florida in 2016-8. It reduced divorce by 28 per cent through relationship education. COFI worked through 93 churches building up and publicising Relationship Education Services, including premarital education, marriage enrichment programs, and an intensive programme for couples thinking seriously about divorce called "Hope Weekend."

³⁶ CSJ, Testing Times, December 2018

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Helen Norman and Jeremy Davies: What a Difference a Dad Makes: Paternal Involvement and its Effects on Children's Education, University of Leeds, 2023

Over two years, COFI, with funding from a local philanthropist, helped to put 35,000 people through Relationship Education services in the Jacksonville area and publicity tried to target those at most risk for divorce. The divorce rates in the area compared with the rest of Florida were almost identical in 2015. The divorce rate in the Jacksonville area fell by almost 30 per cent in the first two years of the COFI project (2015-2017) to a record low. The divorce rate in the rest of Florida fell by just 8 per cent in that same time period.

Financial Support for Families

Recommendation

HM Treasury should introduce a Family Credit, giving households more choice and flexibility when it comes to childcare options.

The Government spends billions subsidising childcare. Yet despite this price tag, the current system fails to do what the majority of families want it to. The expansion of ‘free’ childcare to children as young as 9 months old will burden taxpayers with additional cost without grappling with whether more of the same is what parents want, or if it is in the best interests of children.

78 per cent of parents with young children would like to spend more time with their child than they currently do, citing finances as the main obstacle to doing so. 44 per cent of parents with pre-school children said they would like to stop working altogether if they could, and 47 per cent said they would like to reduce their hours if possible.³⁹ The Government should establish a new childcare offer with the principal purpose of remedying the fundamental mismatch between current childcare policy objectives and parents’ priorities. Parental aspirations to spend more time caring for their children in their early years must be better recognised in a reformed childcare support system.

The new offer’s functional purpose should be to expand the subsidies available for parents seeking a wider range of childcare options, producing a more ‘neutral’ subsidy environment which facilitates parental and informal care as well as formal childcare. The Government should therefore give parents the cash equivalent of the childcare subsidy earmarked for children between the ages of 9 months and 2 years. Between the ages of 2 and 4 years, children should be entitled to 15 hours of formal childcare. The cash equivalent of the remaining 15 hours covered by the current childcare offer should be handed to parents, to spend as they see fit. To further enhance support for parents of young children and extend the childcare options available to them, the Government should introduce a transferable tax allowance equal to 100 per cent of the basic allowance and frontload child benefit.

To protect the work incentives in the welfare system, eligibility for the cash equivalent of formal childcare subsidies would be limited to households not in receipt of means tested benefits.

39 CSJ, Parents Know Best: Giving Families A Choice in Childcare, October 2023

Recommendation

HM Treasury should boost Marriage Allowance to allow couples to share 100 per cent of personal tax allowance.

When we put the welfare and tax system together, we find that family formation is penalised. If a woman has a child and does not work while the father is in paid employment, then, whether they live together or are married, she loses the benefits while he continues to pay the same rate as if they were single. Currently a spouse can only transfer 10 per cent of their personal income tax allowance, or roughly £1,260, reducing the tax bill by up to £252. Only 43 per cent of eligible couples take advantage of Marriage Allowance.

The tax system should allow fully transferrable tax allowances between married couples, allowing them to retain more of their income.

Recommendation

HM Treasury should bring maternity allowance (for self-employed mothers) in line with the generosity of maternity pay. New fathers who are self-employed should be eligible for a paternity allowance, depending on how many Class 2 National Insurance contributions they have made in the 66 weeks before their baby is due. This would bring their rights in line with that of new mothers who are self-employed and eligible for a maternity allowance.

Recommendation

The Government should strengthen statutory paternity leave, helping fathers to bond with their babies and partners.

A baby's arrival can be the glue or the disruptor for a couple. Due to the financial strain associated with staying at home, some parents, especially from low-income families, return to work earlier than they would have preferred – and too early for a strong bond to develop between them and their infant. Yet, just as mothers who have skin-to-skin contact with their baby experience a rise in oxytocin levels, new research shows that fathers do too.⁴⁰ These oxytocin levels rise during the mother's pregnancy too, in other words men are biochemically primed to engage with their baby.

Statutory Paternity Leave is two weeks in duration and both weeks are paid at a flat rate. This can only be taken in one go and must end within 56 days of the child's birth. Businesses could adopt a more generous paternity leave package for their employees but in the UK, just 7 per cent of organisations provide additional time and flexibility. As a result, in 2022, just 170,000 men took paternity leave after the birth of a new child.

40 L.T. Gettler, et al., Fathers' Oxytocin Responses to First Holding Their Newborns: Interactions with Testosterone Reactivity to Predict Later Parenting Behaviour and Father-Infant Bonds, *Dev Psychobiol*, July 2021

Engaging fathers from the word go is key to ensuring that the mother feels supported in this vulnerable and exhausting period, while the baby is given the benefit of two parents' energy time and money.

The CSJ supported Gareth Davies MP in his drafting of a Paternity Leave Bill. The Bill would address the disparity between maternity and paternity leave rights - a move popular with the vast majority of Britons who believe parenting should be a balanced partnership. 95 per cent of men agree that fathers are vital to a child's wellbeing.⁴¹

Three key policy changes would bring paternity leave in line with maternity leave:

- i. Timing of leave: New fathers should be able to take Statutory Paternity Leave (SPL) in more than one go, and at any time during their baby's first year, allowing fathers to be on hand when mothers most need their support.
- ii. Employment status: Fathers should qualify for leave from the first day of employment.
- iii. Length of time in employment: New fathers who are self-employed should be eligible for a paternity allowance, depending on how many Class 2 National Insurance contributions they have made in the 66 weeks before their baby is due. This would bring their rights in line with that of new mothers who are self-employed and eligible for a maternity allowance.

Community Support for Families

Recommendation

The Department for Education and the Department for Health and Social Care should contract the Family Hubs Network to extend the reach of the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme by pro-actively seeking local philanthropists to co-fund a Family Hub in their area.

From raising children to dealing with their own mental and physical health issues, parents are struggling. The support hitherto supplied by extended family and close-knit neighbourhoods is, for many, inaccessible.

Family Hubs were introduced by the CSJ in 2007. The Government has funded 75 hubs across the country. Local and flexible, the hubs are based on co-production, drawing institutions and community together to work on local issues. This gives the third sector -- faith and voluntary organisations -- a chance to play an important role in a collaboration with Local Authorities, schools and even local businesses, all delivering joined up services. In this way the hub is stoking community cohesion. Moreover, while delivering wrap around support, the hub can remain a "soft access point" where parents and children can "loiter without intent".

One way to future proof this model is to invite local philanthropists and businesses to become stakeholders, as has occurred successfully with Youth Zones. The Family Hubs Network, run by Dr Samantha Callan OBE, already has a huge footprint in this area with strong ties to existing hubs and potential stakeholders, and they are best placed to roll out Hubs by drawing together private money and LAs. Based on the National Centre for Family Hubs Contract, we estimate this would cost £500,000.

41 CSJ, *Testing Times*, December 2018, p. 17

Recommendation

Social prescribing link workers should deliver 6 to 8 sessions of parental preparation courses for expecting parents in the local GP surgery or Family Hub.

The first 1001 days of life are critical to child development and interactions between babies and their primary caregivers shape the brain's architecture. The academic research is clear that good quality interactions produce positive outcomes for children. Neuroscience shows that the benefits of developing a secure attachment with the caregiver are immense, shaping the infant brain so that the child may grow and attain higher academic grades, exhibit greater emotional regulation and higher levels of social competence. Children with secure attachment are also more willing to take on challenges and experience lower levels of ADHD and delinquency.⁴² High quality parenting significantly improves the odds of a child from disadvantaged background doing well at school.⁴³ Poor attachment, however, also affects the brain's architecture, having a negative impact on learning and behaviour long-term.⁴⁴

Parenting should therefore be treated as a public health issue. A population approach to parenting promises to prevent behavioural and emotional problems in early childhood which would have longer term impact, including improved school readiness and reduced risks of mental health issues in adolescence.⁴⁵

The Government should roll out a programme of locally delivered parental preparation sessions. GPs, midwives, and Health Visitors should signpost parents to these sessions. Based on the highly successful National Childbirth Trust model (NCT)⁴⁶ and on The Mum Club,⁴⁷ a network of expectant parents would meet fortnightly in the local GP surgery or Family Hub to learn about the challenges and rewards of parenting. The sessions, led by a trained Social Prescriber, or a specialist charity link worker, will foster peer learning and socialisation, addressing post-partum depression, isolation and paternal engagement, among other issues, while also creating supportive, local networks for new parents.

Crucially, the sessions will emphasise the role of fathers in the infant's development. Research has shown that an engaged father means better school outcomes for a child, regardless of that child's gender, ethnicity, age in the school year and household income.⁴⁸

The average NCT class costs £262, for two people to attend 17 hours of courses in total; while the Mum Club charges for get togethers (£30 + per ticket). A universal model that sought to include even the most disadvantaged and hard to reach parents would have to be free or low charge. The template here would be the Youth Zone, which draws together a special partnership between private and public sector support as well as charitable trusts and grants and through the affordable membership of participants themselves (£5 per year) and then only 50p each visit.

42 A. Widmer, M. Havewala, J.C. Bowker, K.H. Rubin, Secure Attachment Relationships with Mothers, but Not Fathers, Moderate the Relation Between Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Symptoms and Delinquency in Adolescents, *J Atten Disord*, 2023

43 Edward Melhuish, Julian Gardiner, The Impact of Non-Economic and Economic Disadvantage in Pre-school Children in England, NESTA, March 2024

44 A. Widmer, M. Havewala, J.C. Bowker, K.H. Rubin, Secure Attachment Relationships with Mothers, but Not Fathers, Moderate the Relation Between Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Symptoms and Delinquency in Adolescents, *J Atten Disord*, 2023

45 Deborah Klein Walker, Parenting and Social Determinants of Health, *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, Volume 35, Issue 1, October 2020

46 National Childbirth Trust, Accessed: <https://www.nct.org.uk/>

47 The Mum Club, Accessed: <https://themumclub.com/>

48 Helen Norman and Jeremy Davies: What a Difference a Dad Makes: Paternal Involvement and its Effects on Children's Education, University of Leeds, 2023

Recommendation

The Department for Health and Social care should Invest £500 million in boosting Health Visitors numbers.

As per above, too many parents are unsure of how to relate to or identify issues with their children, especially babies. Health Visitors specialise in working with families with a child aged 0 to five, visiting families at two weeks and eight weeks and then when the infant is one and two. However, the number of Health Visitors has fallen by over a third since 2015,⁴⁹ and stands currently at just over 7,000 members. This is troubling as their early identification of issues is indispensable in any effort to prevent more intensive and costly interventions. The costs of perinatal mental health problems are at least £1.2bn per year – rising to over £8bn in long-term costs to society.⁵⁰

Health Visitors can support families in their relationships but also signpost to other specialist services including SEND, domestic abuse etc. They are cost-effective: for example, evidence suggests that supporting mothers to breastfeed exclusively to four months would save an estimated £11m a year to NHS, by reducing infections as well as having a major impact on reducing obesity.⁵¹

Of all the family support services available, health visitors are the most popular with parents.⁵² Public Health England's review of the universal health visiting service found that the services deliver a positive return on investment and contribute to addressing childhood obesity, tobacco use and maternal mental health.⁵³ During their home visits, the Health Visitors offer ante natal checks, when they undertake tasks such as weighing the baby, discussing immunisation and assisting mothers with breastfeeding, but also going beyond baby's and mother's health, to assess fathers' participation, the couple relationship, as well as parents' education, employment status, and substance abuse. They can also signpost to specialist support for these issues. Boosting the number of Health Visitors, by undertaking a £500 million recruitment drive by the HV Institute, would enable timely interventions, delivering considerable savings in the longer term to the public purse.⁵⁴

49 Institute of Health Visiting, Health Visitor Workforce Numbers in England Reach an All-time Low, 26 August 2022

50 Parent and Infant Foundation, The Case for Investment in Health Visiting Services, September 2021

51 Ibid.

52 Department for Education, Safeguarding Strategy Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children, November 2017

53 Public Health England, Review of Mandation for The Universal health Visiting Service, October 2016

54 Parent and Infant Foundation, The Case for Investment in Health Visiting Services, September 2021



Chapter 5:

Champion the Lost Generation

"I feel in policy circles there is a focus on moving on from pandemic, but in schools I work with, [they are] still fighting to get to starting point, let alone move on."

Charity Leader, Leeds

Childhood in the 21st century is hard. *Two Nations* found children and young people are still dealing with the deep scars of lockdown, being educated online, and at home, and missing out on key social and coming of age opportunities. Two decades ago, just one in ten children were assessed as having a clinically recognisable mental health problem, a figure that is now one in five, rising to one in four for those between 17 and 19.⁵⁵ 44 per cent of 16–17-year-olds report elevated psychological distress.⁵⁶ Our analysis found that by 2030, if trends continue, over one in four (27.8 per cent) of 5-15-year-olds will have a mental disorder.⁵⁷ There are likely to be 108 per cent more boys with mental health disorders by 2030 than if the lockdown had not occurred.⁵⁸ Amidst these alarming numbers there is concern that mental ill-health terminology may be too loosely applied and is being used as a catch-all term to describe complex social challenges.

Children in the most disadvantaged families are suffering disrupted attachment and developmental delays. Only just over half (57 per cent) of the most disadvantaged pupils leave primary school with the expected standards in reading, writing, and maths.⁵⁹ Over 142,000 children are missing more school than they attend and 1.4 million children miss an afternoon a week.⁶⁰ Young people do not feel equipped for work or with skills for life, schools have to deal with social and family issues before they can even turn to teaching. An increasingly online world is robbing young people of their childhoods and initial government guidance on phone-free schools was very welcome but hardly scratches the surface of the growing problem. What is more, a decade of progress in closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged students and their peers was wiped out by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We need a new narrative for our young people that gives them a hopeful vision for the future.

55 NHS Digital, Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2022, November 2022, p.2

56 Cosmo Study, Wave 1 Initial Findings, Briefing No. 4, Mental Health and Wellbeing. Accessed: cosmostudy.uk/publications/mental-health-and-wellbeing

57 CSJ, *Two Nations: The State of Poverty in the UK*, December 2024

58 Ibid.

59 Institute for Fiscal Studies, *Lack of Progress on Closing Educational Inequalities Disadvantaging Millions Throughout Life*, August 2022

60 Department for Education, *Pupil Absence in Schools in England*, March 2024

A New Offer for Young People

Recommendation

Establish a National Youth Legacy Endowment to fund quality youth services in a sustainable way.

In recent years, young people have fallen to the bottom of the political agenda. Chronic underinvestment in youth services, diminishing extracurricular opportunities and dwindling activity levels have coincided with rising levels of youth violence, a spiralling mental health crisis and growing discontent. National lockdown extracted a high price from children and young people to whom COVID-19 presented little risk, making a bad situation worse.

Analysis conducted by the YMCA in 2022 found that Local Authority funding for youth services fell by 74 per cent between 2010/11 and 2020/21, while annual spend per head on 5-to-17-year-olds in England has plummeted from £158 to just £37.⁶¹ With financial pressures on Local Authorities showing no sign of abating, youth services will always be vulnerable to Local Authority cuts, with funding uncertainty and short term contracts compromising the quality of provision.

Youth services are a force multiplier for reaching government targets in education, health and crime. This is widely recognised, leading to extensive goodwill in the private sector and among philanthropists to match-fund youth services. To harness this, the Government should establish a match-funded National Youth Legacy Endowment.

Creating world class youth infrastructure that will last requires a sustainable funding model. Independence from Local Authority and Departmental budgets is therefore critical. The Fund should sit outside Departmental structures, overseen by a Board of Trustees charged with ensuring that the funding is used to support the very best projects for the highest possible impact. Rather than simply handing out cash, the National Youth Legacy Endowment must work with philanthropic supporters to amplify the power of government funds. The Government should seek match funding for the initial endowment, but also require fund applicants to have secured match funding for individual projects. Funds should be distributed at a rate that protects the sustainability of the fund long term. Modest payments in the short terms will protect the fund's long-term viability.

The fund jointly established by Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Football Association (FA) and the Premier League to support sporting facility upgrades provides precedent for a fund co-funded by Government and private interests, and distributed by a non-Governmental body, in line with certain conditions.

The businessman and philanthropist John Roberts has secured commitments totalling £1 billion to support youth services. The Government should match this commitment, establishing a £2 billion endowment fund that demonstrates children and young people are no longer a political afterthought.

61 YMCA, Devalued, February 2022, p. 3

Recommendation

Introduce a new style 'Army Short Service Limited Commission' modelled on the Norwegian National Service. This would constitute an optional and selected form of national service where 15-20 per cent of the 18-year-old population would take part in 12 months of military service and obtain an apprenticeship rate pay.

Many young people from Britain's most disadvantaged communities are cut adrift from meaningful work, employment opportunities and/or may have failed in education. A new national service scheme modelled on the Norwegian competitive model would provide an opportunity to gain skills, travel the country and grow a sense of active citizenship and belonging. They would experience being paid and be supported to obtain employment after their year of service is complete. The Norwegian scheme is highly successful, and many young people want to take part.

Recommendation

The Department for Education should produce a framework for a new category of free school focused on children with a range of vulnerabilities (for example have a high chance of leaving school with no qualifications, absenteeism or at risk of becoming involved in crime) that provides a sport intensive curriculum, with an extended school day. The schools should be in areas of high deprivation.

Sport interventions have been found to reduce offending by 52 per cent, significantly cutting violent crime.⁶² The risk factors for becoming and remaining NEET overlap with the risk factors identified as driving violent crime and the protective factors which can mitigate violence have also been found to be relevant to reducing the impacts of being NEET. Department for Education and Ministry of Justice research analysed by the CSJ found persistently absent pupils to be more than three times as likely to commit an offence by aged 17 than pupils fully attending school.⁶³

Schools have the power to transform lives for good and to divert young people away from crime or exclusion. Based on the model of Urban Dove, Brooklyn, New York, there is an opportunity to create a new approach to schooling, which harnesses the transformative power of sport, in order to provide stability and purpose for children at risk of crime and exclusion. There is an opportunity to 'test and learn' from this model for rolling out an extended school day across all schools.

Recommendation

Give local authorities greater access to useable UC data, enabling the targeting of youth support at a local level.

⁶² Youth Endowment Fund, Sports Programmes: Toolkit Technical Report, 2021

⁶³ CSJ, Severe Absence from School Hits Record High Amid Calls for Urgent Action, October 2023

Currently, Local Authorities are only able to verify a family's welfare status on a case-by-case basis. They are not able to use data to identify a target cohort and allocate provision accordingly. While progress was made during COVID-19, with Local Authorities granted access to batch data in order to target funds awarded via the Household Support Grant, the utility of incredibly rich DWP data remains compromised by excessively risk-averse data sharing agreements.

The Government should clearly communicate that using whole-cohort UC data to identify those who need support constitutes appropriate use under the terms of data sharing agreements between DWP and Local Authorities.

A World Class Education

Recommendation

The Government should make tackling the attendance crisis a national priority, roll out attendance mentors nationally, and develop a national parental participation strategy focused on tackling the drivers of school absence.

Severe absence has more than doubled since the pandemic, reaching a peak of 158,000 in the summer term of 2023 and still at crisis levels.⁶⁴ Every day of school matters – children who attend school regularly get better exam results and are less likely to find themselves NEET upon leaving school. Disadvantaged children are more likely to be absent than their more affluent peers, meaning the absence crisis is compounding disadvantage. CSJ research has found that 28 per cent of parents believe the pandemic showed it is not essential for children to attend school every day.⁶⁵ This suggests a serious breakdown in the relationships between schools and a significant minority of parents.

While the Education Secretary has described absence as her top priority, Government efforts to address absence continue to fall short. Without urgent, national action, the impact of absence will be felt for decades to come.

The Government should commit to rolling out attendance mentors nationally in the immediate term, ensuring families across the country benefit from personalised support to tackle barriers to attendance. The cost of 2,000 attendance mentors employed across the country would cost £80 million per year. Longer term, government should create a National Parental Participation Strategy which includes best practice guidance to help schools and parents to engage more meaningfully with each other.

Recommendation

Redirect per pupil funding for looked after children and children on the edge of care to subsidised boarding school places.

⁶⁴ Department for Education, Pupil Absence in Schools in England: Autumn Term 2023/24, May 2024

⁶⁵ CSJ, The Missing Link, January 2024

Local Authorities spent £11.1bn on children's social care in 2021-22, a 41.6 per cent increase since 2009/10.⁶⁶ Yet eye-watering costs fail to guarantee good outcomes. Too often, children in care suffer disrupted care pathways, contributing to compromised life chances. They are more likely to have a mental health issue and experience lower levels of wellbeing and are less likely to do well academically at school. While progress was made between 2014 and 2019 in closing the attainment gap between looked-after children and their peers, this is now unravelling. In 2021, looked-after children were 2.3 grades behind in GCSE English and maths, up from 2.2 grades in 2019.⁶⁷

The Government should re-direct the per pupil spend (GAG allocation plus pupil premium funding) to support boarding school places for Looked After Children, where this is the best option for the young person. The Local Authority should top this up with funds which would otherwise be allocated to residential care, with outstanding costs met by the school.

Analysis from the Royal National Children's SpringBoard Foundation suggests that c.200-300 children likely to benefit could be identified annually. Children will benefit from the stability of boarding against the instability of a life in the care system and develop the confidence and independence that the country's top schools foster.

The Royal National Children's SpringBoard Foundation has been commissioned by the Department for Education to create a national network of schools, facilitating placements for Looked After and vulnerable children. Enabling a child's educational allowance to follow them to boarding school would expand the number of places on offer while remaining cost neutral to Government.

Guidance for local authority staff should be updated to embed the expectation of routine consideration of the potential suitability of children in, and on the 'edge of', care for a state boarding school place as part of plans made for those children at the natural school transition points. This could be extended to guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and as a criterion within Ofsted inspections of local authority children's social care departments.

The most comprehensive study of Looked After Children placed in boarding schools found that many of these young people went from the highest category of risk to the lowest, while 97 per cent of Looked After Children placed by the Royal National Children's SpringBoard Foundation into boarding schools achieved at least 2 A-Levels, compared to 16 per cent of disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Recommendation

The Government should extend the school day by an hour to give five hours extra each week for enrichment activities, provided by community groups, which includes outdoor activities. Within this every state-educated secondary school child should have a Right to Sport, which includes an additional minimum of 2 hours per week of sport and outdoor education, closing the 'activity gap' and spreading the many benefits of physical activity to a wider cohort of pupils.

⁶⁶ Institute for Government, Performance Tracker 2023: Children's Social Care, October 2023

⁶⁷ Education Policy Institute, Attainment Gaps for Children in Social Care, July 2023

A third of children are inactive, meaning they do less than 30 minutes of exercise per day.⁶⁸ One in five primary and secondary pupils do no extracurricular activities at all in an average week, rising to one in four pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the UK lags behind its OECD counterparts, with activity levels lower than Finland, Ireland, Austria, Hungary, Spain and the EU average.⁶⁹ Children and young people from the least affluent families are the least likely to be active, with only 44 per cent meeting Chief Medical Officer activity guidelines, compared to 55 per cent from the most affluent families.⁷⁰

Sport unlocks life-long friends, introduces mentors, provides purpose and builds confidence. It boosts academic prospects, supports strong attendance and prepares young people for the world of work. Importantly, given the sharp uptick in levels of mental ill-health, participation in sport also enhances psychological and social health outcomes, creating healthier, happier children and young people.

The Government should therefore commit to delivering two hours of additional extracurricular sport every week, for all secondary school pupils in England – provided on school premises by community organisations, in addition to traditional PE time. A programme to deliver two hours of additional support provision for secondary school pupils would cost just under £1.38bn.⁷¹ This should be underpinned by new funding to unlock five hours of extracurricular activity. The Right to Sport would see all pupils participate in a minimum of two hours of extracurricular sport per week, on top of PE time already scheduled on the curriculum, closing the ‘activity gap’ between state school pupils and their independently educated peers.

The Right to Sport should be delivered in partnership with charitable initiatives. Charities and third sector organisations can take pressure off the education staff in a school and also deliver specialist activities and coaches that are not available among existing staff. As one example, the Government recently gave more money to initiatives for cricket in schools, including £10 million to Chance to Shine which has now reached almost seven million children, with great impact.

Recommendation

The Government should create clear financial incentives for the best teachers to teach in the country's most challenging schools.

High-quality teaching is one of the most powerful levers for improving outcomes for children and young people, particularly for socio-economically disadvantaged pupils who stand to benefit the most. But attracting and retaining teachers, particularly in schools serving a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils, is a serious challenge. Pupils in the most deprived fifth of schools are around twice as likely to get an unqualified teacher, and a quarter more likely to get a teacher with less than five years of experience, when compared to pupils in the least deprived fifth of schools.⁷²

We also know that a lack of aspiration can prevent children and young people from low-income backgrounds from fulfilling their potential. They do not see good jobs in their local communities and do not believe that a good education is the route to a better life. Exposing children to adult role models from a range of professional backgrounds would help to expand their horizons, demonstrating the options a good education can open up.

68 Sport England, Active Lives Children and Young People Survey Academic Year 2021-22, December 2022

69 OECD, Physical Activity Among Children and Adolescents, 2020

70 Sport England, Children's Activity Levels Hold Firm but Significant Challenges Remain, December 2023

71 For full cost breakdown see CSJ, Game Changer, p. 51

72 UCL, Could We Get the Best Teachers into the Most Deprived Schools?, September 2017

The Government should adopt a two-prong approach to teacher recruitment:

- Clarify and strengthen existing financial incentives for the best teachers to teach in challenging schools. Existing bonus schemes and student loan forgiveness programmes are a good first step and early evaluations are encouraging, but these should be simplified, strengthened and better publicised.
- Smooth the route into teaching for career switchers, building on the success of Now Teach. There is a strong appetite among Now Teach teachers to work with disadvantaged pupils while career changers are uniquely equipped to raise children's aspirations beyond the school gates. Increasing the number of flexible teaching roles, recognising the value of past experience in remuneration arrangements and continuing to bear down on workload will enable more established professionals to make the switch.

Recommendation

Employability should be included as a key judgement in Ofsted inspection reports.

It is a recurrent complaint of employers that pupils emerge from formal education poorly equipped for the world of work. Foundational 'soft skills' such as communication, teamwork and timekeeping are often lacking, making it difficult for young people to function in professional environments. The primary purpose of education is to enable students to become independent citizens via paid employment, yet Ofsted inspection reports do not routinely refer to employability. This is despite the fact that Ofsted's Education Inspection framework makes repeated reference to employment and explains that inspectors will assess the extent to which providers prepare learners for 'future success in their next steps.'⁷³

While many, high-attaining students will develop employability skills organically, those who do not pay a high price. Efforts to support employment readiness at secondary school should be explicitly assessed by Ofsted and included as a headline judgement in inspection reports. This should include consideration of the careers guidance and work experience opportunities a school provides, with reference to the Gatsby Benchmarks, alongside the steps taken by schools to develop the foundational skills young people need to flourish in the world of work.

Recommendation

The Government should create a companion to Ofsted focused on helping schools improve.

⁷³ Ofsted, Education Inspection Framework, Updated July 2023

Ofsted's remit is tightly drawn. The inspectorate diagnoses problems but does not help schools to devise a remedy once judgements are handed down. Its budget is a quarter of what it was 20 years ago, relative to the budget for schools, and staff time is highly stretched. Getting through 5,000 schools a year means allowing just two days per inspection. There is no time for support or follow-up should they be found wanting. Inspectors have no remit to offer advice or support.

As the former Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman, wrote in the foreword to her final annual report, budgetary pressures mean that 'school inspections are necessarily shorter and more intense; reports are necessarily briefer; and many strands of our work that help build school sector goodwill and reinforce our value to the sector, government and others are having to be progressively curtailed.'⁷⁴

Ofsted is a force for good. The National Audit Office found that 84 per cent of headteachers believe the inspection process is fair, while teachers agree by almost two-to-one that their latest inspection raised standards.⁷⁵ It is important that failure is identified and that schools are given the information they need to improve. Allowing failure to go unrecognised would be a disservice to pupils that harms the disadvantaged most.

But to deliver maximum impact, a companion to Ofsted should be created to help schools respond to Ofsted judgements. This would support a more collaborative relationships between schools and the inspectorate while also ensuring judgements are taken forward in a constructive way. Additional resources should be provided by Government to enable this new body to work with schools in the wake of 'inadequate' and 'requires improvement' judgements.

Recommendation

The Government should develop a new metric of school-age disadvantage, better capturing the challenges faced by pupils and schools than entitlement to Free School Meals (FSM).

The popularity of FSM as an indicator of disadvantage is based mainly upon its availability. There is no other measure reflecting individual economic disadvantage that is universally or even widely available. However, it is an imperfect and unsophisticated proxy that excludes a significant minority of children facing disadvantage. Simply dividing pupils into FSM and non-FSM in order to calculate the attainment gap ignores important variation in levels and types of disadvantage and will give a misleading picture of the true attainment gap in any school or local area. This compromises Government's ability to develop effective policy for promoting educational opportunity, including via the Pupil Premium, which follows FSM eligibility.

Government should develop a more nuanced measure for tracking the impact of disadvantage on school-age children and weighting educational resources in their favour. This should consider the importance of local factors shaping children's outcomes given huge regional variations in attainment among low-income children. Familial factors should also be considered, such as family structure and whether either parent is or has been in prison, for example. This would better capture the challenges children are likely to face reaching a good level of attainment, enabling a sharper policy focus on those most in need of support.

74 Ofsted, The Annual Report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2022/23, November 2023

75 National Audit Office, Ofsted's Inspection of Schools, May 2018

Recommendation

Focus apprenticeships on those with the most to gain.

Apprenticeships are popular with the public but the number both of apprenticeship starts and completions remains low. Apprenticeship opportunities for the most deprived have fallen fastest and the opportunities they can access are not reliably high quality. Ofsted's latest annual report, for example, criticised widespread use of apprenticeships to fill staffing gaps.⁷⁶

At the other end of the spectrum, rebadging professional development for established workers as apprenticeships reduces opportunities for younger, less-skilled workers to access well paid, highly skilled careers.

While businesses contribute nothing towards university education, they are required to cover the full cost of employing apprentices, given levy funding only covers the cost of training. Conversely, taxpayers subsidise university education through unrepaid student loans, whereas apprenticeship training is paid for via a levy on business. This imbalance deters employers from hiring apprentices, particularly where individuals are seen as higher risk owing to their age or employment history.

The Government should better incentivise employers to take on apprenticeships, redressing the imbalance between Government support for university-based and employer-led training. This would also enable Government to make it more attractive for businesses to take on younger, lower skilled apprentices in particular, ensuring apprentices fulfil their potential as drivers of social mobility.

Prior to the introduction of the apprenticeship levy, when government paid a higher contribution towards the training of younger apprentices than that of older ones, a significantly higher number of younger apprentices were trained. More recently, in the wake of COVID-19, Government offered a £3,000 incentive payment to employers to take on an apprentice and apprenticeships starts increased significantly. This suggests that employers are receptive to financial incentives.

There is currently a £1000 incentive for employers hiring apprentices who are between 16 and 18 years old, or under 25 with an education, health and care plan. But awareness among employers is low. The incentive payment should be increased and proactively communicated. Government should consider increasing incentive payments for apprenticeships in sectors facing labour shortages.

The quid pro quo should be a review of apprenticeships to ensure they are fulfilling their original purpose as a route into skilled work. The Richard Review of Apprenticeships, published in 2012, made clear that apprenticeships are of most value when they provide 'sustained and substantial training, fully and closely integrated within the experience of learning and practising a real job.'⁷⁷ Apprenticeships that do not offer 'sustained and substantial training' should therefore be discontinued. This does not mean pulling up the drawbridge and denying access to those without pre-existing qualifications or substantial skills at the point of application. It means, rather, ensuring that the apprenticeship offer is always stretching and provides a meaningful entry point to skilled work.

⁷⁶ Ofsted, The Annual Report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2022/23, November 2023

⁷⁷ Doug Richard, The Richard Review of Apprenticeships, November 2012, p. 5

To avoid disadvantaging those who would benefit from training that no longer falls under the apprenticeship banner, Government should expand and enhance traineeships. These lower-level qualifications were introduced in 2014/15 to provide training opportunities where the demands of an apprenticeship are considered inappropriate, either for the learner or the role. As training rather than employment, participants are unpaid. To increase the attractiveness of traineeships, Government should introduce a training allowance that sits outside of participants' UC claim.

To help smaller businesses navigate the apprenticeship system Government should establish SME 'hubs'. These would handle the bureaucracy around apprenticeship recruitment and provide ongoing support to apprentices, recognising that smaller businesses are less likely to have the resource to provide this directly.

Recommendation

Create a stronger technical and vocational pathway at 14, building on the pioneering MBacc.

35.8 per cent of 18 year olds entered university in 2023, meaning that 64.2 per cent did not.⁷⁸ 38.7 per cent of pupils in state-funded, English schools were entered for the English Baccalaureate in 2021-22, meaning 61.3 per cent were not.⁷⁹ Yet the school standards agenda is geared towards academic study, with university admission the implied goal. For many young people this is undesirable or inappropriate.

The technical and vocational pathway is far less clear, making it harder for pupils to identify high quality options that will open the door to skilled, well-paid work. As products of the university system themselves, teachers are not always well equipped to help.

Greater Manchester's MBacc will guide students towards subjects which will maximise their chances of getting a good job in the local economy. Young people on the MBacc route would take subjects such as Engineering, Business Studies and Art and Design alongside core subjects including Maths, English and Computer Science. Each of the gateways is intended to lead to a group of quality T Levels, accompanying work placements and other technical qualifications. Strong buy-in from local will maximise the value of the MBacc.

Introducing technical equivalents to the EBacc across the UK would be both a welcome signal of the value of technical and vocational education, and a helpful guide to students trying to navigate their options. Local economies, meanwhile, would benefit from the supply of young people with in-demand skills. As a first step, Government should require mayoral authorities to develop technical equivalents of the EBacc. This would build on the objectives of Local Skills Improvement Plans in a practical, high-impact way that clearly communicates the value of quality, technical qualifications to students and teaching professionals alike.

Recommendation

Ensure the Office for Students (OfS) regulatory framework supports disruptive models of HE that challenge the poor value for money endemic across traditional institutions.

⁷⁸ House of Commons Library, Higher Education Student Numbers, January 2024

⁷⁹ Department for Education, English Baccalaureate Entry and Achievement, August 2023

Rates of university participation have increased but the proliferation of low-quality courses means it has not paid the dividends hoped for. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to attend less selective courses associated with poorer graduate outcomes. Figures from the Office for Students show that nearly three in ten graduates do not progress into highly skilled jobs or further study 15 months after graduating. The Institute for Fiscal Studies also estimates that one in five graduates would be better off financially if they hadn't gone to university.⁸⁰

Recent reforms to Higher Education have deployed market mechanisms to promote student choice and provider competition in an attempt to drive up quality and value for money. Despite this, the basic model of university education remains unchanged, with traditional, research intensive, three-year courses dominating the undergraduate landscape. Nearly all courses cost between £9,000 and £9,250 per year.

The Government should ensure the regulatory framework for Higher Education (HE) supports innovative, disruptive models of delivery, enabling a 'start up' mindset across the HE sector. Just as the Free Schools movement empowered communities to meet local need, challenger models to low quality HE provision will raise standards and support meaningful student choice. While this should be community-led, Government must create the conditions that allow innovative institutions to thrive.

The New Model Institute of Technology and Engineering (NMITE) in Hereford is a useful example of an alternative approach to HE. Small cohorts allow for personalised relationships between academics and students, while close relationships with local employers ensure students develop in demand skills and capabilities. Courses are blocked into bespoke engineering projects with a specific task in mind, all completed in small teams and in conjunction with real business partners. Students are taught 9-5, five days a week, 46 weeks of the year, enabling undergraduate degrees to be completed in a little over two years.

There is a strong 'levelling up' angle to NMITE's model, which brings the widely documented economic advantages of HE provision to the local area, through both the economic activity of staff and students and the supply of highly skilled graduates.

80 IFS, Most Students Get a Big Pay-Off from Going to University – But Some Would Be Better Off Financially If They Hadn't Done a Degree, February 2020



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