

Press release: An analysis of 2 decades of efforts to improve social mobility

Two decades of government efforts to improve social mobility have failed to deliver enough progress in reducing the gap between Britain's 'haves and have nots', the Social Mobility Commission warns today (28 June 2017) in a hard-hitting new report.

The commission, an independent body that monitors progress on social mobility, calls on current and future governments to learn 5 key lessons from the mistakes and successes of the past 20 years.

It warns that without deep-seated reform, social and economic divisions in British society are set to widen with consequences for community cohesion and economic prosperity.

The '[Time for change](#)' report examines various public policies pursued over the last 20 years and assesses the impact they have had – for good or ill – on social mobility in Britain.

The in-depth analysis, carried out for the first time, covers 4 life stages from the early years and school through to training and further/higher education and then into the world of work. It gives 'red', 'amber' and 'green' ratings depending on how successful governments have been in translating policy into positive social outcomes.

Damningly, the report is not able to give a single 'green' rating to any of the life stages. Both early years and schools are given an 'amber' rating, while young people and working lives receives a 'red'. Overall, only 7 policies score a green while 14 score 'amber' and 16 'red'.

While the report says that some policies – such as increasing employment and getting more working-class young people into university – have had a positive impact, overall the report concludes that 'too little' has been done to break the link between socio-economic background and social progress.

It says that over 20 years new divides have opened up in Britain, across geographies, income groups and generations – and that many policies of the past are no longer 'fit for purpose'. It comes up with 5 key lessons from the past and makes recommendations for government which includes:

- successive governments have failed to make social mobility the cornerstone of domestic policy – so in future they should develop a strategic cross-departmental social mobility plan
- long-term progress has too often been sacrificed to short-term change – so 10 year targets should be implemented to ensure public money is spent effectively

- how policies have been designed has often been misaligned from the objective of securing higher levels of social mobility – so public policy should be subjected to a new social mobility test
- public resources have not been properly lined up behind social mobility policies – so future budgets should identify how public spending addresses geographical, wealth and generational inequalities
- governments have overly limited their scope of action – so in future they should be more active in building a national coalition with councils, communities and employers to improve social mobility

The Rt Hon Alan Milburn, Chair of the Social Mobility Commission, said:

As the general election seems to demonstrate, the public mood is sour and whole tracts of Britain feel left behind. There is a mood for change in Britain.

When more and more people feel like they are losing out, social mobility matters more than ever before. Higher social mobility can be a rallying point to prove that modern capitalist economies like our own are capable of creating better, fairer and more inclusive societies. It is the best antidote to the growth of political populism, both right and left, that we have witnessed around the world.

For 2 decades, successive governments have made the pursuit of higher levels of social mobility one of the holy grails of public policy. While there has been some progress, it has not gone far enough towards translating welcome political sentiments into positive social outcomes.

In fact, what is so striking about this new analysis is how divided we have become as a nation. A new geographical divide has opened up, a new income divide has opened up and a new generational divide has opened up.

If we go on like this, these divisions are set to widen, not narrow. There is a growing sense in the nation that these divisions are not sustainable, socially, economically or politically. There is hunger for change. The policies of the past have brought some progress, but many are no longer fit for purpose in our changing world. New approaches are needed if Britain is to become a fairer and more equal country.

Main findings from the report

Early years

- child poverty has risen in the aftermath of the recession and there is currently no prospect of it ending
- early years services have become a welcome part of the education system

in Britain, but despite billions of investment the attainment gap has only begun to shrink recently

- at current rates of progress, it will take 15 years before all children are school ready and 40 years before the attainment gap between poor 5 year olds and their better-off counterparts is closed

Schools

- spending on education is 50% higher than what it was in 1997 and increased for the first decade, but has fallen in the second
- despite reforms to schools and success in improving results and raising standards, two-thirds of children on free school meals do not get good GCSEs
- there has been significant progress in reducing the attainment gap between poorer pupils and their better-off classmates at primary school, but the gap increases substantially at secondary school
- there is currently no prospect of the gap between poorer and wealthier children being eliminated at either GCSE or A level
- geographical inequality amongst the poorest children in England has increased as attainment in London schools has improved far faster than the rest of the country

Young people

- progress such as the school age rising to 18, access to higher education widened and the recreation of apprenticeships should be welcomed but progress is too slow
- labour market outcomes for young people are poor – while youth unemployment has fallen, the number of young people who are NEET has barely changed
- young people's wages have fallen 16% – taking pay to below 1997 levels
- the number of young people receiving careers advice or work experience has fallen and more new apprenticeships have gone to older workers than younger ones
- despite university access widening, retention and graduate outcomes for disadvantaged students have barely improved
- at current rates of progress, it will take 120 years before disadvantaged young people are as likely as their better-off peers to achieve A level or equivalent qualifications – in higher education, it will take 80 years before the participation gap closes

Working lives

- employment rates are the highest on record and extreme low pay has been eliminated, but 1 in 5 people in the UK are stuck on low pay – a higher proportion than other comparable nations
- wages have stagnated in real terms with living standards falling – particularly for young people
- regional inequalities have risen with London and the south moving ahead while other parts of the country fall behind – output per person in London is £43,629 compared to less than £19,000 in the North East
- the highest-paid and best-paid jobs remain deeply elitist, while some

progress is being made – it is painfully slow

Recommendations in the report

Early years

The government should:

- establish a new national ambition to ensure that within a decade every child, regardless of background, is school ready by the age of 5 and that the attainment gap between poorer 5 year olds and their peers has been halved
- focus childcare policy on improving teaching for the poorest children by doubling the early years pupil premium to enable childcare providers to offer extra support for disadvantaged children
- support early years' teachers by shifting regulatory emphasis and funding from teacher qualifications to continuing professional development
- restore funding for parenting programmes and experiment with online classes to achieve scale without undermining quality – using funding from both health and education budgets and shared objectives across both departments.

Schools

The government should:

- introduce a new ambition that, within a decade, the attainment gap between poorer children and their better off classmates should be closed at GCSE level
- align inspection regimes and redistribute resources behind the new drive to close the attainment gap
- abandon plans to extend grammar schools and instead focus on developing new collaborative approaches to turning around failing schools
- introduce effective incentives to attract and retain good-quality teachers in the schools that need them most, including a new emphasis on continuing professional development
- develop a more balanced curriculum incorporating social and emotional learning, alongside careers advice, within the formal school timetable

Young people

The government should:

- set a new aim to have the attainment gap in level 3 qualifications within the next decade through new policies including [T levels](#), apprenticeships, and extra support and accountability reforms for further education colleges
- refocus apprenticeships policy on young people and on higher quality apprenticeships
- ensure careers advice and support is available in all schools via greater emphasis on destinations measures plus increased training and

time in the curriculum

- ensure that higher education is available via further education colleges in social mobility cold spots
- encourage universities to focus on helping students succeed in the labour market by measuring graduate outcomes and offering better careers advice and work experience opportunities

Working lives

The government should:

- introduce a new ambition to make the UK the country with the lowest level of low pay in the OECD by 2030
- increase the number of high-skilled jobs in the regions and particularly in social mobility cold spots, by encouraging and incentivising public sector bodies and private companies to base themselves in those areas
- devolve accountability and resources to enable the development of local skills strategies that bring employers to those areas
- forge a new concordant with employers behind a national drive to improve career progression underpinned by increased investment in skills policies – including high-quality apprenticeships
- make socio-economic diversity in professional employment a priority by encouraging all large employers to make access and progression fairer, with the Civil Service leading the way as an exemplar employer

Notes for editors

1. The Social Mobility Commission is an advisory, non-departmental public body established under the Life Chances Act 2010 as modified by the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. It has a duty to assess progress in improving social mobility in the United Kingdom and to promote social mobility in England. It currently consists of 4 commissioners and is supported by a small secretariat.
 2. The commission board currently comprises:
 - Alan Milburn (Chair)
 - Baroness Gillian Shephard (Deputy Chair)
 - Paul Gregg, Professor of Economic and Social Policy, University of Bath
 - David Johnston, Chief Executive of the Social Mobility Foundation
 3. The functions of the commission include:
 - monitoring progress on improving social mobility
 - providing published advice to ministers on matters relating to social mobility
 - undertaking social mobility advocacy
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Press release: PM call with Taoiseach Leo Varadkar: 27 June 2017

Prime Minister Theresa May spoke on the phone to Taoiseach Leo Varadkar today. The Prime Minister discussed the Confidence and Supply agreement the Conservative Party have reached with the DUP which will provide the UK with certainty at this critical time.

The Prime Minister explained that the DUP will support the Conservative Government on votes on the Queen's Speech, the Budget, and legislation relating to Brexit and national security. The Prime Minister went on to say that the agreement makes clear that the United Kingdom remains steadfast to our commitments as set out in the Belfast Agreement and its successors, and in governing in the interests of all parts of the community in Northern Ireland.

They confirmed their joint commitment to restore a Northern Ireland Executive as soon as possible and agreed to engage closely, and work with the parties in Northern Ireland, to bring back political stability and a strong voice at Stormont.

The two leaders also spoke about their willingness to continue close cooperation as the UK embarks on leaving the European Union.

News story: Statement by Secretary of State for Northern Ireland James Brokenshire ahead of the 29 June deadline to restore devolved government in NI

The coming hours will be critical to form a functioning executive in Northern Ireland.

Discussions between the parties took place last night. Further intensive discussions are taking place today and I expect they will continue into this evening.

Northern Ireland needs strong devolved government to provide leadership, direction and a voice for Northern Ireland. This is vital during the critical period ahead as the UK prepares to leave the EU.

This is also a moment of outstanding opportunity for Northern Ireland. The package of UK Government financial support announced yesterday will make a tangible difference to the lives of everyone living here.

Discussions today are focused on Irish language and equality issues because they are the most critical areas to resolve to enable an Executive to be formed on Thursday.

I have urged the parties to find a way to overcome their outstanding differences in the hours ahead.

With political will – and some courage – effective government in Northern Ireland can be restored by the end of the week. If the parties focus on this common sense of purpose, for the benefit of all communities, this can be achieved.

I know that is what the vast majority of people here voted for and what they are hoping their political representatives can deliver.

[News story: David Davis' speech from The Times CEO Summit](#)

Introduction

Politicians love to take credit for a national success, particularly national economic success.

The truth is over the last seven years, Britain's business leadership have knuckled down to turn the economy around.

Thanks to that hard work, I can stand here and talk about an economy that was the second fastest growing major advanced economy last year.

That has created over 3 million private sector jobs since 2010.

And that has a deficit that is now two-thirds less than it was seven years ago.

So it's an economy that is fighting fit.

Which is not to say that our society does not face the same challenges as every major Western economy.

Globalisation and competition from the Far East.

Technology and automation.

Demography and an aging population.

Pressure on public services and public spending.

And, uniquely for us, Brexit.

For all that, I know that our country stands on the verge of a very prosperous future.

As a fully sovereign United Kingdom, we will be stepping out into the world and seizing new opportunities.

As part of that we want to forge the closest possible relationship with our neighbours and friends in the European Union.

A deep and special partnership, to use the Prime Minister's phrase, that reflects our shared values and joint histories.

An open dialogue with business

But I am also clear that Britain will only be able to deliver that if Government and business work hand in hand.

Your expertise will be crucial over the next two years, if we are to get the right deal for the United Kingdom as we exit the European Union.

We will be introducing a significant amount of important legislation that will help us build a country that is ready for the future.

From customs to immigration we will need your input to ensure that we not only get the right deal with the European Union – but also lay the groundwork for a country that can compete around the world.

To do that we need a regular and open dialogue with businesses, up and down the country.

As the negotiations intensify, there is a clear need to equally intensify the dialogue with business.

That's why the Prime Minister, the Chancellor, the Business Secretary and I will shortly outline new proposals to ensure we have the right mechanisms in place across Government to do just that.

We will provide a clear forum for Government to engage across the board with all relevant sectors.

Certainty for business

Which brings me to my next point.

One of the key issues that businesses raise with me and my cabinet colleagues is the need to give them as much certainty and clarity as possible.

The more certainty we can give you, the more confident you will be to go out

and invest.

That in turn will drive job creation and help boost living standards.

We have already done this work to provide you with that clarity.

Plan for Brexit

Firstly, you asked for more information over our approach to the negotiations ahead.

Six months ago the Prime Minister outlined a clear plan with business at its heart.

And that plan remains in place.

We are seeking a new deep and special partnership with the European Union, underpinned by an ambitious and comprehensive agreement on free trade and customs.

These will cover goods and services, and we want them to ensure the greatest possible tariff and barrier-free access to each other's markets. Tariff and barrier free, both those things.

To make sure such an agreement is properly enforced, we will seek a new dispute resolution mechanism. It won't be the European Court of Justice, it will be international.

We will also need to manage the evolution of our regulatory frameworks – to maintain a fair and open trading environment and minimise non-tariff barriers.

We also recognise the need for an implementation phase to allow businesses on all sides to adjust and provide a smooth and orderly glide path to our new arrangements.

As the letter invoking Article 50 said, it will “help both sides to minimise unnecessary disruption if we agree this principle early in the process.”

And, let us not forget, that such an approach is mutually beneficial for the UK and the EU. The EU itself has recognised the need for transition periods, signalling its desire to avoid any cliff-edge or unnecessary disruption.

That is exactly the point that the Chancellor is making at a conference in Berlin today.

We are entirely aligned on this point. It is an approach the Chancellor and I have designed over some months at the meetings we have every week to develop our strategy in this area.

I firmly believe our approach puts jobs and prosperity first. So much so I didn't have to say it at first.

We are undertaking this process in the national interest.

And the national interest obviously includes the economic interest and the business interest.

We have undertaken a widespread assessment of every sector of our economy; 60, all told.

This will inform the type of deal we are aiming for.

Putting jobs and prosperity first means not only securing the markets which we currently have.

It also means opening up to new, growing markets across the globe.

There is no doubt that the world's economic mass has been moving eastwards for some time. This is only likely to continue.

In 1980 the EU accounted for 30% of World GDP. According to the IMF this is forecast to have halved to 15% by 2022.

The European Commission itself admits that 90% of future global growth will happen outside Europe's borders.

As I said, there are challenges, opportunities and threats from both globalisation and technology.

Disruptive change is becoming the norm in many markets.

The premium for agility in policy making has never been higher. Over the coming years and decades we, as a country, need to be flexible and nimble to take advantages of the changing landscape of the global economy.

The European Union has many virtues, but agility is not one of them.

We, however, start from an incredibly strong position.

We are already a world leader in engineering, life sciences, medicine, media, commerce, law.

From our skilled workforce to our world-class universities or the simple fact that English is the language of business across the world, we are well placed to take advantage of the new opportunities that are around.

Our approach to exiting the European Union is the first step to ensuring that remains the case.

Our actions will mean new trade deals around the world, and significantly enhance our ability to make the most of global growth outside the European Union.

Citizens' rights

You also asked for clarity over your workforces.

I know that the firms represented in this room together employ tens of

thousands of EU citizens.

These workers are vital to your firms and are an integral part of our economy and our society.

Yesterday, we unveiled our proposal to secure their rights together with the rights of UK citizens living in the European Union.

We want them to continue to live their lives as they do now.

So we are going to create a status that is almost equivalent to that of British citizens, in everything except for the right to vote. If they want the right to vote, they can become British citizens.

In every other aspect it will give them the same employment rights, the same health rights, the same welfare rights, and the same pension rights.

It also means ensuring they can work here or run their own businesses here unimpeded. So we will continue to recognise the qualifications they've gained across the EU, and request that EU member states will do the same for our citizens in their countries.

But most importantly for you I want to be crystal clear that under our proposal there will be practically no burden on business at all.

You will be able to keep on employing the EU citizens who are already here.

We also want this clarity to extend to immigration more broadly.

My job is to bring back control of migration to Westminster.

It is not to slam the door on immigration.

We will bring immigration down, but in a way and at a pace that does not cause labour shortages, or worse, undermine the nation's need for new talent.

Repeal Bill

Finally we said that we'd provide you with as much clarity over regulations and laws as we could.

So, we will convert all current EU law into UK law on the day we exit.

Across the board, the regulations you face today will be essentially the same you face on the day we leave.

Conclusion

So I have outlined some of the work the government is doing to provide you with the certainty you need.

Why I think the future for this country looks very bright.

John Williams was quoting that point from Winston Churchill, saying 'I'm an

optimist', well I'm a determined optimist in this matter.

As we deliver on this national instruction from the referendum last year, business will always be the front of our mind.

We take seriously our duty to protect existing markets.

But I also firmly believe that there are significant upsides and significant opportunities for business in this country as we open up to the rest of the world.

I'm going to go off piste slightly and leave my speech for a moment, because I'm old enough to remember the great changes in British society that were brought about during the early years of the Thatcher government, in 1979 and the early eighties.

And I remember the controversy and the risk and the fear, and the uncertainty around those changes.

But one of the things that happened which I didn't expect, which nobody in that great change expected, was a revolution of expectation that took place in Britain.

We went from being something like 20th in the world and going down, to climbing back up to being fourth in the world in economic terms.

That occurred because of a series of things that people didn't predict, as I said, a revolution in expectations where people suddenly said: "We can do this. We can make something of this. We can be the best of what we're doing again."

And we weren't just about managing at the time.

Well I think there's a very very good chance that as we open up the rest of the world, as opportunities form, our businesses and our citizens here will see the same sort of revolution in expectations that we saw back in the eighties.

And if we do, the job of being a determined optimist will be worthwhile.

Thank you.

[News story: New opportunity for employers to play major role in](#)

setting new apprenticeships standards

Employers and experts from across different industries are being given the opportunity to take an active role in shaping apprenticeships across England.

The Institute for Apprenticeships, the new governmental body covering apprenticeship standards, has for the first time issued an open call for leaders from across industry to apply to become route panel members. Successful applicants will play an important role in shaping the requirements of apprenticeships in their sector.

Route panels are employer-led groups formed of experts from within a particular industry sector. The Institute for Apprenticeships oversees 15 route panels in total, each covering different sectors such as agriculture, social care or legal and finance. Their aim is to review the quality of standards for apprenticeships and make sure they provide the right basis for future employment.

Peter Lauener, Chief Executive of the Institute for Apprenticeships, said:

We are taking important steps to ensure the quality of apprenticeships. They are crucial routes in helping young people reach their potential, and they provide excellent career development, as well as retraining opportunities later in life.

Apprenticeships are playing an increasingly important role in British industry, and it is important that the right structures are in place to ensure they equip people with the right skills. This is a fantastic opportunity for employers and experts to bring their knowledge to the table and make their voices heard.

For [more information and to apply](#), the advert is open until 12pm on Friday, 4 August 2017 via Public Appointments on GOV.UK.

Notes to Editor

The Institute for Apprenticeships launched on 1 April 2017 as an employer-led body ensuring high-quality apprenticeship standards and assessment plans in England. It is expected that from April 2018, this remit will expand to include responsibility for technical education.