

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

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The Network's Website is at www.seapn.org.uk and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

Contents List

Did you see ...?

- *Museum Practice* – page 2

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Other Agencies

- *The Coalition's social policy record: policy, spending and outcomes 2010-2015* – page 2
- *Trends and friends ...* – page 6
- *Nations apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain* – page 9
- *Good times, bad times ...* – page 13

Health & Wellbeing issues – Other Agencies

- *Reading between the lines ...* – page 15
- *Exploring the longitudinal relationship between arts engagement and health* – page 16
- *Promising approaches to reducing loneliness and isolation in later life* – page 17

Abbreviations and acronyms – page 18

Did you see ...?

Museum Practice

Museum Practice has just published “Ask the Expert: working with people with dementia”, in which Carol Rogers from National Museums Liverpool (“House of Memories”) outlines good practice, with practical examples.¹

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Other Agencies

The Coalition’s social policy record: policy, spending and outcomes 2010-2015

This major new report²:

“... brings together the findings of a series of papers looking at different aspects of the Coalition’s social policy: early years, schools, further and higher education and skills, employment, housing, regeneration and neighbourhood renewal, adult social care, health and cash transfers, poverty and inequality.” [p2]

It begins by briefly outlining the Coalition’s inheritance, not only the financial challenges, but also some positive developments, drawn from previous research³:

“... on the whole economic and social outcomes had improved and differences between social groups narrowed, for example in terms of achievements in schools, low birth weights and levels of child poverty.” [p11]

It also looks briefly at the Coalition’s social policy agenda which, in a nutshell:

“... proposed a combination of Conservative thinking on markets, choice and competition, with Liberal Democrat belief in advancing democracy at a much more local level.” [p13]

They cite Peter Taylor-Gooby⁴ as describing the Government as:

¹ This article in *Museum Practice* is at: http://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/ask-the-expert/16032015-ask-the-expert-dementia?utm_source=ma&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=mp23022015 – you will need to log-in to the site to gain access.

² Ruth Lupton *et al.* *The Coalition’s social policy record: policy, spending and outcomes 2010-2015*. LSE Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (Social Policy in [a] Cold Climate, research report 4), 2015. Available to download as a pdf (1150 kb) from: <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/spcc/RR04.pdf>. There is a summary report at: <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/spcc/SRR04.pdf>.

³ Ruth Lupton *et al.* *Labour’s social policy record: policy, spending and outcomes 1997-2010*. LSE Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (Social Policy in a Cold Climate Research Report RR01), 2013.

“...this was not just an austerity government but a government set on a systemic restructuring that would shift significant responsibility from state to private providers, citizens and the community, thus leading to permanently lower spending, lower debt and market-led growth. This was not a coalition of weak compromises. Despite the difficult economic climate, it sought unusually large changes in a range of social policy institutions. Some were embedded in the Coalition agreement. Others were not and emerged later.” [p13]

It then looks at Coalition policies grouped around three themes: spending; restructuring of the state; and the design and content of public services – all of which led to “The Key Decision: More than Three Quarters of Budget Savings to Come from Public Spending” [p19].

It then goes on to analyse briefly the effects in terms, for example, of protection for the NHS, schools and pensions, but with cuts to Social Security and local services; and the effects of this combined with the restructuring of the State, the extension of provision by non-State bodies (and localism), and a fundamental redefinition of the terms for State support:

“Whether by design, or by default as a result of spending cuts, or a combination of both, a number of measures have had the effect of redefining the boundaries of responsibility between the individual and the state, reducing entitlement and increasing the extent to which individuals must meet their needs by private arrangement and/or private finance. This has been particularly apparent in social security, but also in relation to housing, social care, higher education, lifelong learning and children’s services.” [p35]

Finally, the research looks at outputs and outcomes, bearing in mind that some of the policies are only now being implemented:

“... recognising that we yet cannot provide as full an evaluation as we did of the Labour period in our previous report, we split our analysis into three parts. First we look at what has happened to the quantity and quality of service provision since the Coalition came into office (what we call ‘outputs’). The key question here is whether and how services were negatively affected by the spending reductions, but the effects of reforms are also of interest. We then examine trends in poverty and inequality, before looking at a wider range of social and economic indicators (what we call outcomes). The overall question here is whether these outcomes were better or worse in 2014/15 than in 2009/10, and the direction of travel. In each case we also look at effects on different groups of people (grouped by their position in the life course), to give a more detailed picture of who the winners and losers from the Coalition’s changes have been.” [p40]

⁴ Peter Taylor-Gooby. “Root and branch restructuring to achieve major cuts: the social policy programme of the 2010 UK Coalition Government”. *Social Policy & Administration*, 2012, 46 (1), pp61-82. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9515.2011.00797.x.

The report concludes that, amongst other things:

“The Coalition pledged to pay down the country’s debts, something it has not managed to do in this parliament, and to reduce the current budget deficit, which it has done. In actual fact, because it decided to make over three quarters of its fiscal adjustments through budget savings (rather than increased taxes), but at the same time protecting the NHS and schools spending, and increasing spending on pensions, it gave itself very little manoeuvre to cut spending. Very substantial cuts of a third or more have been made in unprotected areas, largely in services that are delivered at local level, such as housing, adult social care and children’s services, but the overall reduction in public expenditure has been less than three per cent.

One effect of these choices is that pensioners have been protected from austerity more than working age people or young children, as far as taxes and benefits are concerned. Older people have, however, been negatively impacted by reductions in local social care spending, especially if at lower levels of care need.

At the same time, the government made plain that it did not just intend to be an austerity government, but a progressive one, and a reforming one. On the former count, intentions that the rich would contribute proportionately more to debt reduction have not been realised. Our analysis shows that it is poorer population groups who have been most affected by direct tax and benefit changes and in fact that savings made from changes to benefits have been offset by expenditure on direct tax reductions further up the income distribution, meaning that in combination, these changes have made no contribution to reducing the deficit or paying down the debt. The effects on poverty are not yet fully evident in official data which precede most of the key changes, and show poverty rates falling initially then stabilising against a relative threshold, while rising against a fixed threshold. However, modelled estimates suggest that poverty is higher in 2014/15 and will rise further, and there are signs of increasing material deprivation and hardship arising from a combination of rising costs of living, reductions in the value of benefits and eligibility and short-term benefit sanctions. Real wages have also fallen, as have earnings among the self-employed who, supported by the Coalition government, now constitute a much larger share of employment.

It remains to be seen whether social mobility – an explicit goal – will have been enhanced by the Coalition’s measures. The indicators are mixed ... Meanwhile, low income families with young children have been among the worst affected by benefit changes, and it now appears impossible that the statutory target of eradicating child poverty by 2020 can be met. While health visitor numbers increased and early education places for disadvantaged two year olds were rolled out, real spending per child on early education, childcare and Sure Start services fell by a quarter as local authority budgets were cut, leaving services for young children vulnerable. The structure of the labour market, with fewer ‘middle jobs’ and opportunities for progression, continues to present challenges to

social mobility, while adult learner numbers have been affected by funding cuts.” [pp57-58]

The final view is a gloomy one:

“Increasing need for health and social care, unaffordable housing, a regionally unbalanced economy, large spatial disparities in people’s outcomes and continuing labour market inequalities all remain to be tackled, as do child poverty, insufficient high quality affordable childcare, a weak system of apprenticeships for young people and relatively ineffective mechanisms for helping workless people back into work. The next government, like the Coalition, will need to address these challenges in the context of very high public sector net debt and a current budget deficit. The cold climate for social policy and those most affected by it will remain into the foreseeable future.” [p58]

The papers that this research has drawn from are:

- John Hills. *The Coalition’s record on cash transfers, poverty and inequality 2010-2015*⁵
- Kitty Stewart and Polina Obolenskaya. *The Coalition’s record on the under fives: policy, spending and outcomes 2010-2015*⁶
- Ruth Lupton and Stephanie Thomson. *The Coalition’s record on schools: policy, spending and outcomes 2010-2015*⁷
- Ruth Lupton, Lorna Unwin and Stephanie Thomson. *The Coalition’s record on further and higher education and skills: policy, spending and outcomes 2010-2015*⁸
- Abigail McKnight. *The Coalition’s record on employment: policy, spending and outcomes 2010*⁹
- Polly Vizard and Polina Obolenskaya. *The Coalition’s record on health: policy, spending and outcomes 2010-2015*¹⁰

⁵ LSE Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (Social Policy in a Cold Climate, Working Paper 11), 2015. Available to download as a pdf (1180 kb) from: <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/spcc/WP11.pdf>.

⁶ LSE Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (Social Policy in a Cold Climate, Working Paper 12), 2015. Available to download as a pdf (1650 kb) from: <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/spcc/WP12.pdf>.

⁷ LSE Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (Social Policy in a Cold Climate, Working Paper 13), to be published 10 Feb 2015.

⁸ LSE Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (Social Policy in a Cold Climate, Working Paper 14), 2015. Available to download as a pdf (723.42 kb) from: <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/spcc/WP14.pdf>.

⁹ LSE Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (Social Policy in a Cold Climate, Working Paper 15), 2015. Available to download as a pdf (1008.13 kb) from: <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/spcc/WP15.pdf>.

- Tania Burchardt, Polly Vizard and Polina Obolenskaya. *The Coalition's record on adult social care: policy, spending and outcomes 2010-2015*¹¹
- Rebecca Tunstall. *The Coalition's record on housing: policy, spending and outcomes 2010-2015*¹²
- Ruth Lupton and Amanda Fitzgerald. *The Coalition's record on area regeneration and neighbourhood renewal 2010-2015*¹³

Finally, there is further information about the research programme on the CASE website¹⁴.

Trends and friends ...

This important new report¹⁵ looks at:

“... whether the impact of technology seen elsewhere in society and in social relationships are replicated among homeless and excluded people; whether these groups have access to the hardware and software necessary for digital inclusion; whether they want to make use of digital technologies and what aspirations for use of digital technology they might have ...

The findings in this report are from two surveys: a qualitative questionnaire devised by Lemos&Crane and staff in homelessness agencies and both quantitative and qualitative interviews conducted by Groundswell peer researchers – people with first-hand experience of homelessness themselves.” [p2]

Key findings include:

¹⁰ LSE Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (Social Policy in a Cold Climate, Working Paper 16), 2015. Available to download as a pdf (2390 kb) from: <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/spcc/WP16.pdf>.

¹¹ LSE Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (Social Policy in a Cold Climate, Working Paper 17), 2015. Available to download as a pdf (1780 kb) from: <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/spcc/WP17.pdf>.

¹² LSE Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (Social Policy in a Cold Climate, Working Paper 18), 2015. Available to download as a pdf (739.87 kb) from: <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/spcc/WP18.pdf>.

¹³ LSE Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (Social Policy in a Cold Climate, Working Paper 19), 2015. Available to download as a pdf (660.72 kb) from: <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/spcc/WP19.pdf>.

¹⁴ See:

http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/case/new/research/Social_Policy_in_a_Cold_Climate.asp.

¹⁵ Gerard Lemos and Sarah Frankenburg. *Trends and friends: access, use and benefits of digital technology for homeless and ex-homeless people*. Lemos&Crane, 2015. Available to download as a pdf (555.47 kb) from:

<http://www.lemosandcrane.co.uk/home/register?id=235023> (NB you will need to register on the website to access the report).

Access and usage:

“Far from the stereotype of people unable or unwilling to engage in technology, the majority of respondents used digital technology in the form of mobile or smart phones and internet access. Ninety-five per cent of Lemos&Crane respondents either used digital technology or expressed an interest in doing so.” [p3]

“Regular and frequent internet access was common among respondents, but access was also problematic. Forty-six per cent of the Lemos&Crane respondents said they went online nearly every day or every day and 81% went online at least once a week. This is lower than the comparable figure for the general population. Twenty-six per cent of the Groundswell respondents, a lower proportion, said they went online nearly or every day, 27% said they never went online and 10% did so only rarely. Forty-two per cent of respondents spent between 1 and 3 hours online in a single session. Although respondents go online slightly less often than the general population, they do not spend significantly less time online per session.” [p3]

Skills, confidence and training:

“Those respondents who made at least occasional use of digital technology generally considered themselves to have passable skills. The majority rated their abilities as at least ‘average’, ranging up to ‘expert’ although 14% said they had no skills at all. Respondents typically felt confident using Facebook and other social media sites but found office and word processing programmes difficult. The majority learned by teaching themselves. Eight-per cent learned through training provided at services, typically older respondents. Feedback from staff, however, suggested that respondents may be over-stating their level of skill.” [p4]

Barriers to access and the role of services:

“Reliance on (mostly hardware) facilities in homelessness services to access the internet was common but many people experienced difficulties ...

Common problems included services having too few computers, time restrictions, unreliable internet connections and lack of privacy when using computers. Services blocking particular sites or web searches for security purposes were also problematic ...

Respondents in both groups felt the training they were offered was not appropriate for their needs and usage aspirations. Typically training wasn’t basic enough or they thought the skills and programmes being taught (for example, Microsoft Office) were not relevant to their experiences and aspirations.” [p5]

On the role of libraries:

“Although libraries are often important places in the lives of homeless and ex-homeless people, they also brought challenges for internet access, despite being relied upon by a significant proportion of respondents (19% of the Lemos&Crane group and 18% of the Groundswell group). Common difficulties in libraries included time limits on computer use and too few computers available. People also faced particular difficulties arising from being homeless. Many libraries required members to have a permanent fixed address to join the library, excluding some from accessing library resources. Perhaps more troublingly, respondents reported being excluded from libraries for having too much luggage.” [p5]

Friends, family and relationships:

“The most frequent use of digital technology was keeping in touch with family and friends and social interaction. Facebook and other means of online social networking have made contacting family members easier, with all the joys and tribulations that always characterise family relations ...

Entertainment and leisure was the second most popular use of digital technology and was highly valued by respondents, including watching or streaming music, TV shows, or films online, playing games, finding information relating to a hobby or interest, or reading magazines and blogs online ...

Although relatively few respondents reported problems with safety, security or privacy using digital technology, a higher proportion had concerns. Respondents were primarily concerned about the security of their personal information and the threat of identity theft or fraud. Concerns about bullying, harassment, blackmail or other online threats, though mentioned by a few people, were far less common.

The second common concern was losing face-to-face contact as a result of increased use of technology, and in particular anxieties about essential services systematically moving to ‘digital by default’. Respondents were worried that the loss of face-to-face contact would reduce levels of trust and connection between people. They were also concerned that complex online systems might make accessing important services more difficult.” [p6]

The report then goes on to make a series of recommendations, including:

- Improving internet access at homelessness services
- Library access for homeless people:

“Public libraries should review access requirements to reduce exclusion of homeless and vulnerable people. Not requiring a fixed permanent address to access the computers and the internet would be a significant benefit. In addition, current policies or practices of turning people away because of their luggage or other

characteristics associated with homelessness should be abandoned. Providing somewhere for people to leave their belongings would also enable people to make valuable use of library services.” [p7]

- Support and information to find cheaper access solutions

“Service users need assistance to get away from expensive and restrictive contracts for phones and the internet and accessing cheaper or better value for money options.” [p8]

- Digital inclusion as part of support workers’ support planning approach
- Services to provide cheap or free equipment for clients
- Use of digital technology by services themselves

“Using digital technology to provide service users with information relevant to them – reminders and practical help and guidance such as information on money, health and available services or opportunities – would be a welcome development with obvious benefits in support and resettlement.” [p8]

For those looking to improve and develop their provision for homeless people, this is a very important starting point.^{16, 17}

Nations apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain

This major report¹⁸ (which appeared at the end of 2014), commissioned by Crisis, looks at the experiences of single homeless people across the UK. (For this study, the term ‘single homeless people’ was defined as “homelessness amongst people of adult age without dependent children”¹⁹.)

¹⁶ Source: email from Kevin Harris.

¹⁷ John Pateman has just sent me a link to a YouTube video, “A Librarian’s Guide to Homelessness”, in which “Ryan Dowd of Hesus House, the 2nd largest shelter in Illinois, discusses what a person who is experiencing homelessness may have to contend with on a day-to-day basis and how a library might respond” – see: <https://clacommunityled.wordpress.com/2015/02/18/a-librarians-guide-to-homelessness/>. This has useful tips for working with homeless people in a library setting.

¹⁸ Peter Mackie and Ian Thomas. *Nations apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain*. Crisis, 2014. Available to download as a pdf (1330 kb) from: <http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/NationsApart.pdf>.

¹⁹ This is the definition used in: Anwen Jones and Nicholas Pleace. *A review of single homelessness in the UK, 2000-2010*. Crisis, 2010. Available to download as a pdf (866.71 kb) from: http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/ReviewOfSingleHomelessness_Final.pdf

“A complex range of statutory and non-statutory interventions are now being delivered to address single homelessness across Great Britain, with variations in services likely to reflect national boundaries. There has been no systematic appraisal of the impacts of this divergence on the profile and experiences of single homeless people. Therefore, this research sought to answer two questions:

- What is the profile of single homeless people across Great Britain?
- Are there differences in the assistance provided to single homeless people and if so what does this mean for the lives of single homeless people across Great Britain?” [p viii]

The research findings:

“... are presented in two sections: a) the overall picture of experiences across Great Britain, and b) geographical differences in people’s experiences of accessing homelessness services.” [p viii]

The overall picture of experiences across Great Britain

The profile of single homeless people shows that:

“The majority are young single men with multiple support needs. There is a very clear trend that people face difficulties during childhood and then support needs worsen with age, particularly where homelessness is not addressed and repeat homelessness occurs. It is clear that failing to deal with homelessness early is significantly impacting upon support needs.” [p viii]

In more detail:

- “Most single homeless people are male (83%), aged 21-50 (76%) with a median average age of 35, White British (81%), and of British nationality (85%), albeit a significant minority (10%) are from accession state countries ... [20]
- At some point during their lives homeless people have faced: unemployment (64% of respondents), mental ill health (49%), drug dependency (48%), alcohol dependency (46%), and serving a prison sentence (41%).
- Differences in support needs reflected the extent of repeat homelessness, as well as the age group, gender, ethnicity and nationality of the person ...” [These include:]
 - Women are more likely to have faced mental ill health (64% of women, 46% of men), violence/abuse from a partner (61% of women, 13% of men), their children being looked after by someone else (38% of women, 9% of men), and self-harming (49% of women, 23% of men).

²⁰ Accession states include A8 (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia) and A2 (Bulgaria, Romania).

- British people are more likely to have faced all types of support needs than people of other nationalities.” [p ix]

Their housing histories are particularly revealing:

“Homelessness generally began at a young age, often resulting from a relationship breakdown at home. Many people then faced a vicious cycle of repeated homelessness, with most having experienced rough sleeping. Significantly, the earlier a person becomes homeless, the greater the likelihood that they will face repeat homelessness.

- Nearly 50% of respondents first became homeless aged 20 or younger. The median average age was 22.
- 44% of people first became homeless from the parental/family home, with a further 21% exiting the social rented sector and 11% leaving the private rented sector.
- The main reasons why people left their accommodation during their first episode of homelessness are: a non-violent dispute (41%), a violent dispute (19%), being given notice by a landlord (15%), and discharge from an institution (12%). The percentage of people leaving accommodation as a result of a dispute within the household (violent or non-violent) then decreases after the first experience of homelessness, whereas the percentage who become homeless after leaving an institution increases.
- 10% of respondents had never lived in permanent accommodation during their adult lives and nearly 80% had slept rough. Young homeless people appear to be particularly vulnerable: 1 in 4 young people (aged under 21) have never lived in permanent housing.” [p ix]

The report then looks at some of the desperate measures that single homeless people will take to try to find accommodation (eg “A quarter of respondents had committed a crime in order to get accommodation.” [p x]); and the effectiveness – or not – of their seeking assistance.

The geography of single homeless people’s experiences across Great Britain

The second part of the report looks at experiences across Great Britain.

- “In very broad terms, the picture in Scotland is positive relative to the rest of Great Britain ... Exploring people’s experiences of accessing help in Scotland showed that people were more likely to have been offered temporary accommodation and less likely to be offered no advice.” [p xi]
- “In Wales single homeless people’s experiences appear to fall just below the average for Great Britain. This may be influenced by the fact that a greater proportion of single homeless people appear to be vulnerable in Wales. For example, more people become homeless at a young age, a high proportion have multiple support needs and very many have experienced three or more homeless experiences. Statutory service provision for these individuals is mixed. Whilst single people make up a

high proportion of priority need households, the likelihood of being offered settled accommodation is low when compared to England (including London) and Scotland.” [pp xi-xii]

- “The picture in London is the most concerning across Great Britain, despite an apparently less vulnerable homeless population. In London, single homeless people appear to be less entrenched: the proportion of British people is lower, fewer people have multiple support needs, only a minority of people became homeless before age 21, and fewer people face repeat homelessness. Statutory homelessness services for these individuals is very limited, with an extremely low proportion of priority need households being single, albeit those who do secure priority need status are almost as likely to be offered settled accommodation as in Scotland or the rest of England. Experiences of accessing services in London raise concern. Compared to the rest of Great Britain, people are more likely to be offered no advice, far fewer people report that assistance is helpful and fewer people feel they are treated well.” [p xii]
- “Across the rest of England (all parts of England excluding London), single homeless people’s experiences appear to be slightly above the average for Great Britain. These experiences do not result from statutory provision as, like London, single homeless people are rarely found to be in priority need. Despite limited statutory accommodation provision, the proportion of single homeless people offered temporary accommodation is in line with the British average and the likelihood of being offered no advice is relatively low. Most significantly, above any other part of Great Britain, single homeless people were more likely to report assistance as helpful, that assistance ended homelessness, and that treatment by staff was good.” [p xii]

Finally, the report makes a number of recommendations around the following themes:

- The role of law in addressing homelessness
- Principles of effective homelessness services (including: “Local authorities must treat all homeless people with respect and empathy” [p xv])
- The local connection dilemma (“The research identified a clear trend of local authorities restricting services only to those with a local connection, with no consideration given to the impacts on those who are excluded.” [p xv])
- The importance of affordable housing supply
- Data collection and publication.

This report gives real insights into the lives and needs of single homeless people, and is key to our developing work in this area. Recommended.²¹

²¹ Source: NCB *Policy & Parliamentary Information Digest*, 5 Jan 2015.

Good times, bad times ...

This new title²² from Policy Press has not received as much of a fanfare as *Austerity bites ...*²³ which was assessed in the previous Newsletter²⁴. However, it deserves to be read too, as it fills in many of the gaps.²⁵

Good times, bad times ... takes the notion which is being promoted by some parts of the media and some politicians that the issues around welfare spending are very straightforward, that:

“It’s skivers versus strivers; dishonest scroungers against honest taxpayers; families where three generations have never worked against hard-working families [etc]” [p1]

To illustrate just how wrong this is, the book uses as a motif the two families that were first introduced in a *World in Action* TV documentary²⁶ in 1989, which:

“... traced how (stereo-)typical working-class and middle-class families were affected by the welfare state of the time.” [p6]

The book introduces each chapter with a look at how these two families, their children and grandchildren might have fared since then, and, in so doing, illustrates some key issues – both about what might have occurred, but also the dangers in limiting our views to stereotypes.

Briefly:

- Chapter 2 looks at the redistributive effects of welfare spending – who gains and who loses?
- Chapter 3 takes a life-cycle approach (which is actually much closer to the reality of welfare spending – there isn’t a “them” and “us”, just an “us”)
- Chapter 4 looks at the frequent short-term changes in most people’s circumstances – and sounds a warning about Universal Credit: “... the system running it would have to cope with 1.6 million changes in circumstances *every month* among the 7.5 million households receiving it” [p253]
- Chapter 5 looks at changes to incomes from year to year: “... those counted as poor in one year are often not poor the next, and continuous poverty for several years in a row is comparatively rare ...” [p 253-254]

²² John Hills. *Good times, bad times: the welfare myth of them and us*. Policy Press, 2015. Published price: £12.99. Further info at: <http://www.policypress.co.uk/display.asp?K=9781447320036&sf1=contributor&st1=John%20Hills&m=1&dc=7>.

²³ Mary O’Hara. *Austerity bites: a journey to the sharp end of cuts in the UK*. Policy Press, 2014. Published price: £15.99. Further info at: <http://www.policypress.co.uk/display.asp?K=9781447315605>.

²⁴ *The Network Newsletter*, 165, Jan 2015, pp2-4.

²⁵ Thanks to Devon Libraries for obtaining copies of both titles for me.

²⁶ “*World in Action* was a British investigative current affairs programme made by Granada Television from 1963 until 1998. Its campaigning journalism frequently had a major impact on events of the day”, see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_in_Action.

- Chapter 6 looks at how different aspects of the tax system and welfare state have helped or hindered families to build up savings and wealth, and the impact in terms of wealth inequality across the UK
- Chapter 7 looks at financial and other links across generations – not only regarding wealth: “... these differences in life chances depending on background are stronger in the UK (and the US) than they are in some other, generally less unequal, countries.” [p257]
- Chapter 8 reflects on “the ways in which social policies both affect and are affected by changes in the wider economy and society over time ...” [p12]

The conclusion then brings this all together. As it states:

“Britain’s welfare state now accounts for two-thirds of all government spending ... How it operates, for whom, and how it evolves are probably the most important questions in British politics ...

It is therefore profoundly damaging that as a nation we understand so poorly what all this activity achieves, and who is affected by it.” [p249]

This is a thought-provoking read, and ties together, for example, research on the economy and into inequality (echoes of *The spirit level*²⁷), as well as taking apart the media myths of “them” and “us”.

My only disappointment was the limitations that the author has placed on his list of possible solutions [pp221-222]. These include options for redistributing wealth, but these are primarily around taxation and/or cutting services – personally, I would have liked to see some more far-reaching ideas included (such as cutting arms spending; tackling obscene bonuses; questioning the profit-making approach to core services such as power supply and transport; and so on).

However, this aside, this is an excellent book – and, for those of us dealing with information, gives some interesting thoughts about how we might help to dismantle the “welfare myth”.^{28, 29, 30}

²⁷ Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett. *The spirit level: why more equal societies almost always do better*. Penguin Allen Lane, 2009.

²⁸ NEF have just published an interesting report which, in looking at the three different kinds of responses to austerity (Adapting: making austerity more liveable or workable; Challenging: speaking or acting against austerity; and Imagining: Becoming advocates of alternatives and wider structural change) also includes case studies, with some examples of challenging government and the current narrative. Sarah Lyall and Adrian Bua. *Responses to austerity: how groups across the UK are adapting, challenging and imagining alternatives*. NEF, 2015. Available to download as a pdf (556.57 kb) from: http://www.barrowcadbury.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/responses_to_austerity_NEF.pdf?utm_source=Barrow+Cadbury+Trust+eNews&utm_campaign=670a31f4fd-Newsletter_13_Fev2_12_2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_dc8147d8de-670a31f4fd-34225993.

²⁹ To place the UK in context, it is worth looking at a new report from Caritas: Ann Leahy, Seán Healy and Michelle Murphy. *Poverty and inequalities on the rise: just social models needed as the solution! A study of the impact of the crisis and austerity on people, with a special focus on Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Romania*

Health & Wellbeing issues – Other Agencies

Reading between the lines ...

This new research report³¹, published to coincide with six new “Quick Reads”³², shows the positive impact reading has on health and wellbeing and how it reduces isolation:

“[It] explored the emotional, social and psychological benefits to adults of regular reading for pleasure.” [p4]

Key findings include:

- Just over half of the UK adult population regularly reads for pleasure, with women reading more than men, and retired people reading most frequently. Bedtime ranks as the most popular reading occasion, with half of readers saying the activity helps them sleep better.
- Regular readers for pleasure reported fewer feelings of stress and depression than non-readers, and stronger feelings of relaxation from reading than from watching television, engaging with social media, or reading other leisure material (for example, celebrity, beauty or style magazines).
- Reading creates a parallel world in which personal anxieties can recede, while also helping people to realise that the problems they experience are not theirs alone.
- A fifth of respondents said reading helped them to feel less lonely.
- Those who read for pleasure also have higher levels of self-esteem and a greater ability to cope with difficult situations. [Taken from p4]

The conclusions include:

- “Readers feel happier about themselves and their lives.
- Reading for just 30 minutes a week
 - produces greater life satisfaction;
 - enhances social connectedness and sense of community spirit;
 - helps protect against and even prepare for life difficulties.” [p4]

and Spain. Caritas Europa (Crisis Monitoring Report 2015), 2015. Available to download as a pdf (2610 kb) from:

http://www.caritas.eu/sites/default/files/caritascrisisreport_2015_en_final.pdf.

³⁰ To take some of these themes further, JRF have just published a report which, primarily, “assesses the scale of the ‘low-pay, no-pay’ phenomenon, whereby people cycle between periods of low pay and worklessness. Being low paid increases the probability of periods of worklessness by around 10 per cent, after accounting for a host of individual, family and employment characteristics ...” See: Spencer Thompson. *The low-pay, no-pay cycle*. JRF (JRF Programme Paper ‘Poverty in the UK’), 2015. Available to download as a pdf (376.4 kb) from: http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/low-pay-no-pay-full_0.pdf.

³¹ Quick Reads and Josie Billington. *Reading between the lines: the benefits of reading for pleasure*. Quick Reads, 2015. Available to download as a pdf (2260 kb) from: <http://www.quickreads.org.uk/assets/downloads/docs/Galaxy-Quick-Reads-Report-FINAL%20.pdf>.

³² See: <http://www.quickreads.org.uk/about-the-books/new-books-for-2015>.

This is all backed-up by brief summaries of the key research findings.

This is a valuable confirmation of the power and effects of reading – and gives even greater support to our work in health and wellbeing.³³

Exploring the longitudinal relationship between arts engagement and health

This new report³⁴ “reveals that engaging with the arts and culture generally has a positive long-term effect on health and wellbeing.”³⁵

“The prevailing narrative in UK policy-making circles is that we lack evidence around how engagement in the arts – as an audience member and/or practitioner – affects our physical and psychological health over time. Between February and July 2014, research was conducted which sought to address this perceived deficit in several ways.” [p5]

To begin:

“... this research adopted an international perspective to locate and critically analyse those English-language studies to have explored the association between arts engagement and health. This gave rise to an evidence base, comprised of fifteen studies, which collectively suggest that arts engagement has a beneficial impact upon health over time.” [p5]

This was followed by research to investigate whether these sorts of findings could be replicated in the UK – and this in turn led to a series of recommendations for future work, with a realisation that many studies make assumptions about people with ill health (that they don't participate in cultural activities, for example), and the need to re-examine the data that already exists.

The research is critical of previous work by ACE³⁶, arguing that this focused on the impact of the arts at an individual level and did not look at the evidence of

³³ Source: NIACE *Members' Update*, 31 Jan-13 Feb 2015.

³⁴ Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt. *Exploring the longitudinal relationship between arts engagement and health*. Manchester Metropolitan University: Arts for Health, 2015. Available to download as a pdf (1190 kb) from:

<http://www.artsforhealth.org/research/artsengagementandhealth/ArtsEngagementandHealth.pdf>.

³⁵ Taken from: <http://www.artsforhealth.org/research/artsengagementandhealth/>.

³⁶ *The value of arts and culture to people and society: an evidence review*. Arts Council England, 2014. Available to download as a pdf (657.4 kb) from:

<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/The-value-of-arts-and-culture-to-people-and-society-An-evidence-review-Mar-2014.pdf>.

John D Carnwath and Alan S Brown. *Understanding the value and impacts of cultural experience: a literature review*. Arts Council England, 2014. Available to download as a pdf (5180 kb) from:

http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/Understanding_the_value_and_impacts_of_cultural_experiences.pdf.

impact on a broader, societal level. In doing so, the existing research that this study looks at was not included in the ACE reviews.

In addition, the research suggests that:

“... the most exciting area of future development is that of molecular biology. Genetic data from the HUNT Study [37] could be analysed to determine whether cultural engagement has an association with stress markers such as oxidised DNA. Beyond this, an ambitious new study could be designed that would take account of epigenetic phenomena (such as the methylation of DNA or blood RNA), their relationship to health conditions (such as schizophrenia) and extent to which this is mitigated by cultural participation through the generations.” [p56]³⁸

Promising approaches to reducing loneliness and isolation in later life

This new report³⁹ highlights the lack of “high quality evidence to demonstrate the impact of different interventions on loneliness” [p8].

However, there is evidence, and this review draws together approaches “that were most commonly identified by our experts, and whose promise was supported by some form of evidence.” [p8]

The most common approaches were focused on the individual, and aimed “to address three key challenges:

1. Reaching lonely individuals
2. Understanding the nature of an individual’s loneliness and developing a personalised response
3. Supporting lonely individuals to access appropriate services” [p9]

The report termed these the ‘foundation services’; it then goes on to look at ‘structural enablers’:

“... approaches that support the development of new structures within communities – including not only specific groups and services, but also the foundation services. These ... include:

- Neighbourhood approaches – working within the small localities with which individuals identify.
- Asset based community development (ABCD) – working with existing resources and capacities in the area to build something with the community.

³⁷ A Norwegian longitudinal study; for further information, please see p29 of the report.

³⁸ Source: email from Jo Ward.

³⁹ Kate Jopling. *Promising approaches to reducing loneliness and isolation in later life*. Age UK/Campaign to End Loneliness, 2015. Available to download as a pdf (1510 kb) from: <http://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/Promising-approaches-to-reducing-loneliness-and-isolation-in-later-life.pdf>.

- Volunteering – with volunteers working at the heart of services, wherever possible creating a ‘virtuous circle of volunteering’ whereby service users become volunteers.
- Positive ageing – approaches that start from a positive understanding of ageing and later life as a time of opportunity – including Age Friendly Cities, Dementia Friendly Communities, etc.” [pp9-10]

There will also still be ‘direct interventions’ which can be summarised as:

- “Services to support and maintain existing relationships
- Services to foster and enable new connections
- Services to help people to change their thinking about their social connections.” [p10]

Finally, it looks at ‘gateway services’, such as transport, which can assist in tackling loneliness by supporting existing relationships and facilitating new ones.

The report is illustrated by a lot of useful, brief case studies – although none directly features cultural and heritage organisations, nevertheless there is much we can think about in terms of developing our own provision for isolated people.⁴⁰

Abbreviations and acronyms

ACE = Arts Council England
CASE = Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion
JRF = Joseph Rowntree Foundation
LSE = London School of Economics
NCB = National Children’s Bureau
NEF = New Economics Foundation
NIACE = National Institute of Adult Continuing Education

This Newsletter was compiled by John Vincent, and all items are written by him, unless otherwise stated. Please send any comments or items for the next issue to:

John Vincent
Wisteria Cottage
Nadderwater
Exeter EX4 2JQ

Tel/fax: 01392 256045
E-mail: john@nadder.org.uk

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⁴⁰ Source: *Later Life Newsletter*, 64, Feb 2015.