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# 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](http://www.seapn.org.uk) and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

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## **Did you see ...?**

### ***Health Libraries Group Newsletter***

The latest issue<sup>1</sup> includes some very useful articles, eg:

- Rebecca Furness “Next steps after Umbrella”, which looks at the developing provision of cancer information in South Gloucestershire Libraries [pp7-8]
- “Public Health England – Knowledge and Library Services” [p9]

### ***Museums Journal***

The latest issue<sup>2</sup> has a number of interesting pieces, including:

- Gareth Harris “Social justice body launches” [p11] – and please see below
- Geraldine Kendall “Attendance rises mask deeper issues”, which looks at the work there is still to do to attract people from all backgrounds and age groups [pp14-15]. In an additional commentary on this, Sara Selwood highlights the fall in numbers of 16-24-year-olds and 25-44-year-olds and of BME groups [p15]
- David Anderson “Wales gets cultural education” (“Comment” column), which looks at the difference in approach to cultural education between Welsh and English Governments [p16]
- “Voxpop: Can museums prove that they are good for your health?”, which has four commentators (Carol Rogers, Mark O’Neill, Helen Chatterjee and Paul Camic) argue that the answer is “yes” but that more work needs to be done to prove the impact [p17]
- “Full steam ahead”, in which, in an interview with Simon Stephens, Peter Bazalgette argues that the Arts Council “can help culture flourish even in these difficult times” [pp38-41].

### ***CILIP Update***

The November issue<sup>3</sup> has a number of important news items and articles, including:

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<sup>1</sup> *Health Libraries Group Newsletter*, 30 (4), December 2013. Available to download as a pdf (650.22 kb) from:  
<http://www.cilip.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/HLG%20Newsletter%20December%20issue.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> *Museums Journal*, November 2013. Further information at:  
<http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal>.

- “Online readers help build audio library”, a brief news item about Lambeth Libraries’ initiative to involve people in recording 100 audio books which are going to be made available via the LibriVox website<sup>4</sup> [p10]
- “Library takes a lead in dementia awareness”, an outline of the work of Stockton Library and Heritage Service’s Karen Morris to develop a programme to raise awareness of dementia – it’s Stockton’s response to the Government’s “Dementia Challenge”<sup>5</sup> [p12]
- “Born to read”, a brief announcement of the launch of Save the Children’s report<sup>6</sup> (which says that children from poorer backgrounds in the UK are at higher risk of falling behind in key skills, including reading) and the subsequent campaign, “Born to Read”<sup>7</sup> [p17]
- “A critical role – health information on the hospital ward”, an interview by Rob Green with Victoria Treadway and Dr Girendra Sadera about the role of a clinical librarian at the bedside<sup>8</sup> [pp32-34]

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## Tackling social and digital exclusion – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

### Social Justice Alliance for Museums

The Alliance<sup>9</sup> was launched formally at the Museums Association Conference in November 2013.

“The aim of SJAM is to recruit museums and related bodies, and individuals, to sign up to the charter for social justice, and to campaign for and promote best practice.

While museums have made great strides in recent years in modernizing and opening up our institutions to a diverse public, there remain many people working in museums, and in the outside world, who do not believe that museums should be democratic bodies, open to and valued by the whole of society. Often the voices of these conservative thinkers can be

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<sup>3</sup> CILIP *Update*, Nov 2013. Further information at:

<http://www.cilip.org.uk/cilip/membership/membership-benefits/monthly-magazine-journals-and-ebulletins/cilip-update-magazine>.

<sup>4</sup> See: <https://librivox.org/>. LibriVox provides access to free public-domain audio-books.

<sup>5</sup> See: <http://dementiachallenge.dh.gov.uk/about-the-challenge/>.

<sup>6</sup> *Too young to fail: giving all children a fair start in life*. Save the Children, 2013.

Available to download as a pdf (1450 kb) from:

[http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/Too\\_Young\\_to\\_Fail\\_0.pdf](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/Too_Young_to_Fail_0.pdf).

(This report was assessed in *The Network Newsletter*, 150, Oct 2013, pp4-5,

[http://www.seapn.org.uk/site\\_content\\_files/files/newsletter\\_ns\\_150.pdf](http://www.seapn.org.uk/site_content_files/files/newsletter_ns_150.pdf).)

<sup>7</sup> See: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/about-us/where-we-work/united-kingdom/born-to-read>.

<sup>8</sup> Some of you may have been at their inspiring session at Umbrella 2013.

<sup>9</sup> There is also a news item on the Museums Association website by Simon Stephens, “Museums unite around social justice” – see:

<http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/11112013-museums-unite-around-social-justice>.

loud and influential. Moreover, in times of real pressure on public funding, there is a threat that the progress many museums have made towards a more generous and democratic future will be stopped in its tracks as funding cuts bite and as traditional museum values of exclusivity and elitism are promoted as the only way forwards.”<sup>10</sup>

The Alliance has a five-point charter which it is inviting people to sign up to; the points are:

1. “We celebrate the incalculable value to society of museums and their collections.
2. We recognise that the duty of museums is to enable everyone to learn about the human and natural worlds.
3. We support the concept of social justice – we believe that the whole of the public is entitled to benefit from access to the resources museums contain and the ideas they provoke.
4. We acknowledge that many museums have for many years failed to operate for the wider public benefit, and instead have catered primarily for educated minorities. We reject this approach.
5. We pledge to lead the fight for access to museums for all – this is the essence of social justice.”<sup>11</sup>

The website also has a growing number of case studies<sup>12</sup>.

The Network has just signed up to become part of the Alliance.

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## Tackling social and digital exclusion – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

### “Written Statement – Public Libraries in Wales”

Included here for its recognition of the role of public library services. This Statement<sup>13, 14</sup> by John Griffiths (Minister for Culture and Sport) begins:

“In our Programme for Government, we rightly focus on tackling poverty and stimulating jobs and growth. Libraries are at the heart of this agenda. They provide a vital community service for people of all ages and are an essential component of a civilised society. I am determined to work with other bodies to develop a resilient strategic framework for the forward delivery of Welsh library services. We need libraries more than ever to provide opportunities for learning, free access to digital services and places where the whole community can meet in safe public spaces.

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<sup>10</sup> Taken from: <http://sjam.org/about-us/>.

<sup>11</sup> Taken from: <http://sjam.org/sjam-charter/>.

<sup>12</sup> See: <http://sjam.org/case-studies/>.

<sup>13</sup> John Griffiths “Public Libraries in Wales” (Written Statement). Welsh Government, 2013, see:

<http://wales.gov.uk/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2013/8265614/?lang=en>.

<sup>14</sup> Source: email to lis-pub-libs from Frances Hendrix.

Knowledge is power and libraries are a tremendous resource for people empowering them and making a real difference to their lives.”

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## ***Coping with the cuts? Local government and poorer communities***

This is a new research report<sup>15</sup> from JRF, which looks at how local authorities are coping with cuts to spending and budgets, and what the impact is on deprived communities. It draws particularly on three case study authorities, Newcastle, Coventry and Milton Keynes Councils.

The report begins by setting out the scale of cuts to budgets and the broad effects of this on local government. However:

“It is clear that the local authorities are taking significant steps to protect poor and vulnerable social groups from the most severe effects of austerity. At the national level and in our case studies, authorities have on average made less severe cuts in services which tend to be used more by poorer groups and greater cuts in those used more by better-off groups. At the same time, however, low income groups may still be affected much more adversely by these savings. Public services play a much more important role in the lives of people on low incomes.” [p4]

The major concern highlighted by the report is about the “residualisation”<sup>16</sup> of services:

“Residualisation of local government service provision is a real danger, in that services are increasingly targeted on the most vulnerable groups and councils risk losing the support and buy-in of better-off social groups. Protecting pro-poor services in the context of diminishing resources could undermine the capacity of councils to provide a broad range of services to groups across the social spectrum.” [p4]

One of the most interesting sections for us is probably “Reflections and key messages”. Some key messages (and warnings) include:

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<sup>15</sup> Annette Hastings *et al.* *Coping with the cuts? Local government and poorer communities*. JRF (Programme Paper – Austerity), 2013. Available to download as a pdf (763.4 kb) from: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/local-government-communities-full.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> “Residualisation” tends to be applied to housing issues, eg “The term ‘residualisation’ means a process in which a residue is created. When people move in some number from a neighbourhood or community because they believe it is no longer a desirable place to live, then what they leave behind is a social residue of less enabled people. The social balance of the area is disturbed by the departures and the people who remain are faced with concentrated poverty together with strengthening social stigmatisation. Homes vacated by the leavers hold no attraction other than to people who cannot access accommodation elsewhere. Empty houses, overgrown gardens, and rampant vandalism contribute to the further decline of the area. Peacemeal [sic] demolition of empty property merely signals a general lack of confidence and an absence of regenerative strategy by the authorities.” Taken from: Brian Williams “Social residualisation: a brief description”, 1999. <http://urbanrim.org.uk/residual.htm>.

“Grant reductions of the kind implemented by the Coalition Government mean that the worst effects of austerity are focused on local authority areas which are home to larger concentrations of the poorest people. Historically, councils with higher levels of deprivation have received additional grant income to compensate for levels of need. This ‘strategy of equality’ is being undone by the current government: north and south of the border, deprived councils have been subject to the biggest reductions on a per capita and proportionate basis. Such authorities face significant difficulty in continuing to meet the range of needs and demands in their areas.” [p50]

“It needs to be constantly borne in mind that public services play a much more important role in the lives of people on low incomes compared to those living in more affluent circumstances. Poor people cannot replace a visit to the library or free museum with a visit to the bookshop or theatre. Neither can they augment the care funded by local government with care purchased from the market.” [p51]

“There are mixed views on whether the various approaches underway for transferring a range of responsibilities from councils to service users should be welcomed. There is undoubted support in some parts of local government for measures which attempt to reduce the reliance of residents on council services such as those for clearing up litter. If these attempts are successful, some of the central tenets of the Big Society and localism agendas are likely to be borne out: namely, that when the local state contracts, individuals and communities come forward to fill the gaps – by providing higher levels of care for family or neighbours or by running libraries and leisure centres for example. In this vein, transferring responsibility may also halt some of the behaviours which lead to the need for services to be provided in the first place – again littering would be an example.

However, there is also concern that, if the attempts are unsuccessful, then a rather different set of outcomes will be apparent – some care needs will not be met, some valued libraries and leisure centres will go by the wayside, some streets will be littered and degraded. There is also concern that it will be difficult to provide the funds needed to support people living in poorer neighbourhoods to, for example, take on the running of the local leisure centre and ensure its long-term financial viability. Finally, unless carefully implemented, the development of strategies designed to reduce levels of face-to-face contact between councils and citizens across local government have the potential to exclude and isolate.” [pp51-52]

“There is also evidence of services being increasingly targeted on those with the highest needs – such as careers services for young people being focused entirely on those with NEET status, or Sure Start centres closed in all but the most deprived neighbourhoods. There is a danger that this might lead to a situation in which local government serves only the neediest fraction of the population. This leads to the obvious risk of ‘threshold effects’ – where those with slightly lower levels of individual

need or who live just outside designated areas miss out. More fundamentally however, services which are residualised can become stigmatised: only for those unable to access services provided by the market. As a result, the willingness of those who do not rely on council services for the majority of their needs to pay for council services relied on almost exclusively by the poor could be undermined.” [pp52-53]

This is an important background research paper which has been amplified by JRF’s further analysis<sup>17</sup>:

- “Cuts in spending power and budgeted spend are systematically greater in more deprived local authorities than in more affluent ones, with a difference of around £100 per head in both England and Scotland.
- Deprived authorities have seen greater reductions in spending power (down by 21.4%) than affluent ones (down by 15.8%). A major reason for this discrepancy is that deprived authorities were more grant dependent than other authorities. The scrapping or consolidation of many specific grants (some of which were particularly geared to tackling deprivation) almost inevitably means that local authorities with the highest levels of deprivation will be disproportionately affected by austerity.
- Cuts are also generally greater in the North and Midlands than in the south of England, and in the west rather than the east of Scotland. The North-South difference is £69 per head.”

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## Youth Literacy and Employability Commission report

The All Party Parliamentary Literacy Group’s report<sup>18</sup> has just been published.<sup>19</sup>

It begins by setting the scene:

“Youth unemployment in the UK is a national priority: A fifth of 18 to 24-year-olds are not in full-time education or employment. The most recent study of international literacy highlights that this is closely related to low youth literacy levels. The correlation between literacy and low youth employment is reinforced by well-documented frustration from the

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<sup>17</sup> JRF Press Release, [http://www.jrf.org.uk/media-centre/poorer-greater-budget-cuts?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Weekly+publications+and+blogs+wb+25th+November++2nd+December&utm\\_content=Weekly+publications+and+blogs+wb+25th+November++2nd+December+CID\\_e1b6c3d9c80721a1df23269004e7c58b&utm\\_source=Email%20marketing%20software&utm\\_term=Press%20Release%20Poorer%20are+as%20face%20100%20per%20head%20greater%20budget%20cuts%20compared%20to%20rich%20ones%20%20JRF%20report](http://www.jrf.org.uk/media-centre/poorer-greater-budget-cuts?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Weekly+publications+and+blogs+wb+25th+November++2nd+December&utm_content=Weekly+publications+and+blogs+wb+25th+November++2nd+December+CID_e1b6c3d9c80721a1df23269004e7c58b&utm_source=Email%20marketing%20software&utm_term=Press%20Release%20Poorer%20are+as%20face%20100%20per%20head%20greater%20budget%20cuts%20compared%20to%20rich%20ones%20%20JRF%20report).

<sup>18</sup> Youth Literacy and Employability Commission. *The report of the All-Party Parliamentary Literacy Group*. National Literacy Trust, 2013. Available to download as a pdf (784.48 kb) from: [http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0001/9628/Youth\\_Literacy\\_and\\_Employability\\_Commission\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0001/9628/Youth_Literacy_and_Employability_Commission_final_report.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Source: NLT *Literacy news and resources*, 12 Dec 2013.

business community. One survey has noted that 15% of employers provide remedial literacy training to school leavers.” [p5]

In order to investigate this further, the Commission was set up:

“The Youth Literacy and Employability Commission is a joint venture between the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Literacy and the National Literacy Trust. It set out to gather evidence for the first time from all three stakeholders – employers, the education sector and young people.” [p6]

The Commission has come to some important conclusions (and has also made a series of recommendations). Conclusions include:

- Business and education mean different things by ‘literacy’
- Young people are deeply concerned about their future employment options and want the skills that will help them succeed
- A renewed partnership between business and education is the key for unlocking the literacy skills of young people in schools
- Literacy teaching in secondary schools is frequently not as systematic or as strongly led as in primary schools. [Taken from p20]

The overall recommendation is as follows – there is also a set of specific steps that Government is recommended to follow.

“We believe that there is a strong causal link between low literacy and youth unemployment. We believe that this is not inevitable and we believe that Government should lead a national campaign working with education, business and the third sector to address it. We believe that systematically strengthening the links between business and education at national, local and structural levels is the necessary foundation for increasing literacy levels to meet employers’ expectations. The focus for this needs to be on stimulating realistic employment aspirations for the 11 to 14 age group.” [p21]

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## **Tackling social and digital exclusion – Other Agencies**

### **“Poverty and Social Exclusion”**

The launch of the “Poverty and Social Exclusion in the United Kingdom” research project was noted in Newsletter 143<sup>20</sup>.

Their latest email newsletter<sup>21</sup> - which highlights new pieces on their website – includes:

#### **“Legacies of the Troubles”**

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<sup>20</sup> *The Network Newsletter*, 143, Mar 2013, pp5-6 – see:

[http://www.seapn.org.uk/site\\_content\\_files/files/newsletter\\_ns\\_143.pdf](http://www.seapn.org.uk/site_content_files/files/newsletter_ns_143.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Subscription details are at: <http://poverty.us6.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=3cc08239ed6bbd505a396fd1c&id=f32e398adb>.

This summary<sup>22</sup> reports that “the 'Troubles' had a deep impact on people's lives in Northern Ireland:

- 10% of adults lost a close relative
- 11% of adults lost a close friend
- 33% witnessed a bomb explosion
- 3% of adults had witnessed a murder

The study finds that these experiences are associated with a higher risk of poor mental and physical health and higher levels of unemployment and deprivation.”

### “Low income and digital exclusion”

In this very brief piece, Lyndsey Burton argues that the approaches to digital inclusion are often too simplistic:

“There’s a story that we tell ourselves about poverty and digital exclusion: the poorest people are digitally excluded; digital exclusion perpetuates poverty: therefore, getting people online will help lift them out of poverty ... Government campaigns to reduce digital exclusion, insofar as they have commented on low income at all, have followed this basic model, pointing to the increased job and education prospects of those with basic digital skills. However, research suggests that the relationship between low income and low digital engagement is more complicated.”

She suggests that we need to look at four areas of inclusion (access, skills, attitudes, and types of engagement) and reconsider what impact these may have.

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## ***Monitoring poverty and social exclusion 2013***

The New Policy Institute and JRF have just produced their latest annual review<sup>23, 24</sup>.

The key points from their findings are:

- “In 2011/12, 13 million people in the UK were living in poverty. For the first time more than half of these people lived in a working family.
- The proportion of pensioners in poverty is at its lowest for almost 30 years. The proportion of working-age adults without children in poverty is the highest on record.

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<sup>22</sup> See: <http://www.poverty.ac.uk/pse-research/legacies-troubles>.

<sup>23</sup> Tom MacInnes *et al.* *Monitoring poverty and social exclusion 2013*. JRF, 2013. Available to download as a pdf (3350 kb) from: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/MPSE2013.pdf>. There is a summary (228.5 kb) available from: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/poverty-disadvantage-exclusion-summary.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> Source: JRF *Weekly publications and blogs*, w/b 9 Dec 2013.

- Average incomes have fallen by 8 per cent since their peak in 2008. As a result, around 2 million people have a household income below the 2008 poverty line but are not considered to be in poverty today.
- In the last year, the labour market has shown signs of revival. Underemployment has fallen slightly from 6.4 million to 6.3 million and young adult unemployment appears to have peaked at 21 per cent.
- The number of people in low-paid jobs has risen. There are now around 5 million people paid below the living wage.
- The movement in and out of work is substantial – 4.8 million different people have claimed Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) – in the last two years.
- Following recent changes to the social security system, many people on means-tested benefits have reduced incomes. Around 500,000 families face a cut in housing benefit via the under-occupation penalty and a reduction in Council Tax Benefit. The number of sanctioned jobseekers with a reduced entitlement to JSA doubled in 2010 to around 800,000.
- The level of benefits for an out-of-work adult without children now covers only 40 per cent of what the public considers to be a minimum standard of living. For families with children this figure is no more than 60 per cent.
- National averages mask huge variations between areas in unemployment, educational achievement, and life expectancy.”<sup>25</sup>

Their current forecast is pessimistic, and they conclude with a stark warning:

“Although the labour market has now turned, pay is still falling relative to prices. The real value of benefits will fall further in 2014. The danger is that this downward shift is becoming a downward spiral.

Our reading of where this is heading is bleak. For those not working, the price of state financial support is discipline and demonisation. The real value of that support, already low (especially for those without dependent children), continues to fall. Restrictions on housing and council tax benefits also mean it has to go further than ever. For some, state support no longer even stops people from going hungry. This is the significance of food banks. It’s not so much the number of people having to turn to them (350,000 in 2012/13, even before the deepest of the cuts) as the reasons for the referrals, almost half arising directly from problems with the benefit system. If this system were doing its job, that proportion would be all but zero.

Those who are poor but in work (with their families, now a majority of all those in poverty across the UK) enjoy more political sympathy, but they still face the prospect of more stringent conditions attached to the receipt of in-work benefits under Universal Credit aimed at getting them to work

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<sup>25</sup> Taken from: [http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/monitoring-poverty-and-social-exclusion-2013?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Weekly+publications+and+blogs+wb+9th+December+2013&utm\\_content=Weekly+publications+and+blogs+wb+9th+December+2013+CID\\_ec4d4b3aa3963599f77a209fac6f7355&utm\\_source=Email%20marketing%20software&utm\\_term=Publication%20Monitoring%20poverty%20and%20social%20exclusion%202013](http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/monitoring-poverty-and-social-exclusion-2013?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Weekly+publications+and+blogs+wb+9th+December+2013&utm_content=Weekly+publications+and+blogs+wb+9th+December+2013+CID_ec4d4b3aa3963599f77a209fac6f7355&utm_source=Email%20marketing%20software&utm_term=Publication%20Monitoring%20poverty%20and%20social%20exclusion%202013).

longer. Yet the main financial beneficiary of any extra work is not the worker and their family but the state. For example, someone receiving tax credits but also paying national insurance and income tax keeps 27 pence of every extra pound earned; the other 73 pence goes to the Treasury. In this situation, a day's work at the minimum wage puts £11.90 in the pocket. With housing benefit adjusted (reduced if earnings rise), the net return for the day's work falls to just £4.20. Universal Credit will help if there is housing in the claim but will make it worse if there isn't (by £10.60 in both cases). Those in in-work poverty are ever more trapped.

The pressure now being applied to the poorest quarter of society has not been seen since before the birth of the welfare state in the 1940s. Some local charities and advice services have told us about families now counting pennies. Given the evidence in this report, this is not surprising.

The problems that this government and the last see themselves as addressing through their welfare reforms – a soaring benefit bill, worklessness, poverty – are serious indeed. But their roots do not lie in the people caught up in them. Instead they lie elsewhere, in the behaviour of both financial and non-financial corporations, in the laxity of regulators, in an unwillingness to contemplate a low-cost, good-quality alternative to private rented homes, in confused thinking that treats valid answers to questions about individuals (why this person is unemployed rather than that) as if they were valid answers for social ones too (why there is unemployment at all).

If poverty is really to be 'tackled' (as the euphemism goes), it is the shortcomings of powerful institutions and ideas that must be the object of relentless attention, not the poor themselves." [pp9-10]

As a follow-on, one of the research team has just written a blog-piece<sup>26</sup> for JRF, which argues for a stronger jobs-market and also, based on some US research<sup>27</sup>:

"... that when demand for labour is strong, the poorest benefit most – and conversely are the biggest losers when the labour market is slack. This is because the bargaining power of workers is enhanced. The bottom fifth of the income distribution sees proportionally larger increases in both wages and hours worked than those higher up the income distribution.

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<sup>26</sup> Adam Tinson. "A stronger jobs market is vital to tackle in-work poverty", JRF, 2013, [http://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/2013/12/stronger-jobs-vital-tackle-work-poverty?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=JRF+Newsletter+-+December+2013&utm\\_content=JRF+Newsletter+-+December+2013+Version+A+CID\\_df549cf39b1ceb9c904f57e9623a8705&utm\\_source=Email%20marketing%20software&utm\\_term=JRF%20blog](http://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/2013/12/stronger-jobs-vital-tackle-work-poverty?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=JRF+Newsletter+-+December+2013&utm_content=JRF+Newsletter+-+December+2013+Version+A+CID_df549cf39b1ceb9c904f57e9623a8705&utm_source=Email%20marketing%20software&utm_term=JRF%20blog).

<sup>27</sup> Dean Baker and Jared Bernstein. *Getting back to full employment: a better bargain for working people*. Center for Economic and Policy Research (Washington DC), 2013. Available to download as a pdf (1360 kb) from: [http://www.cepr.net/documents/Getting-Back-to-Full-Employment\\_20131118.pdf](http://www.cepr.net/documents/Getting-Back-to-Full-Employment_20131118.pdf).

The implication is that a strong labour market will attack the twin roots of in-work poverty: that is, both low pay and too few hours.”<sup>28</sup>

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## The Big Society

### *The Big Society audit 2013*

Civil Exchange<sup>29</sup> have just published this report<sup>30, 31</sup> (its second audit) which “looks beyond the rhetoric of this controversial policy to find out what’s been happening in practice.” Its overall conclusion is that:

“There are some positives but also a large gap between actions and words, particularly in relation to public services.”<sup>32</sup>

The report begins by reminding us that:

“The Big Society isn’t going away, though some have declared it dead.”  
[p1]

The report then goes on to focus on three strands identified by the Government as key to its delivery:

- Community empowerment
- Opening up public services
- Social action.

It assesses each of these against key indicators to test whether the reality meets the initial aspirations; these are summarised on pp7-8. For some indicators, Civic Exchange found that there had been no real change (eg how far individuals have influence over local decisions); for some, they found change to have been mostly positive (eg levels of volunteering); but, for many areas, they found that the impact had been negative or largely negative (eg more accountable and responsive public services).

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<sup>28</sup> Taken from: [http://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/2013/12/stronger-jobs-vital-tackle-work-poverty?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=JRF+Newsletter+-+December+2013&utm\\_content=JRF+Newsletter+-+December+2013+Version+A+CID\\_df549cf39b1ceb9c904f57e9623a8705&utm\\_source=Email%20marketing%20software&utm\\_term=JRF%20blog](http://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/2013/12/stronger-jobs-vital-tackle-work-poverty?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=JRF+Newsletter+-+December+2013&utm_content=JRF+Newsletter+-+December+2013+Version+A+CID_df549cf39b1ceb9c904f57e9623a8705&utm_source=Email%20marketing%20software&utm_term=JRF%20blog).

<sup>29</sup> “Civil Exchange is a think tank which aims to be:

- A catalyst to help civil society and government work together in new ways.
- A resource for research, policy development, capacity building, awareness-raising and exchange, which brings together existing expertise and knowledge.

It acts as a ‘link tank,’ working with other organisations and individuals to generate new ideas and solutions.” Taken from: <http://www.civilexchange.org.uk/about>.

<sup>30</sup> *The Big Society audit 2013*. Civil Exchange, 2013. Available to download as a pdf (1910 kb) from: <http://www.civilexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/THE-BIG-SOCIETY-AUDIT-2013webversion.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Source: *Public Libraries News*, 9 Dec 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Quotes taken from: <http://www.civilexchange.org.uk/the-big-society-audit-2013>.

They also found what they have described as “The Big Society Gap”:

- “Against each Big Society goal, there is a significant class divide.
- The Big Society is healthiest in affluent and rural communities and there is no sign of the gap closing.
- Disabled people have been badly affected by changes to public services.
- Ethnic minority people have lower levels of volunteering and reported levels of trust than the white population but are more positive about political engagement. Ethnic minority and religious groups are more likely to report discrimination by public services.
- Political engagement, volunteering and giving increases among older aged people, with the young becoming worryingly disengaged politically.” [p9]

The report calls for a “radical review of the Big Society” [p9], to include:

- Development of a new model for delivering public services, which should draw much more on the voluntary and community sectors and wider civil society, along with “public service professionals and businesses, rather than seeing them as interchangeable.” In addition: “A long-standing bias toward the private sector and financial efficiencies of scale at the expense of social efficiencies should be corrected.”
- “More investment in early action, harnessing voluntary and community sector expertise in how to tackle complex social issues at their root.”
- Increased investment in building the social infrastructure of disadvantaged and urban communities
- Steps to increase the public understanding of the potential of the voluntary and community sector
- “Bringing the Big Society to business, to ensure that all enterprises whether or not for profit, behave ethically in everything they do, especially when they contract with the public sector.” [taken from p9]

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## **Broader issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations**

### ***Great art and culture for everyone 2010-2020: 10-year strategic framework***

ACE has recently published its ten-year strategy<sup>33</sup> – it has received considerable attention elsewhere, so this assessment focuses primarily on the social justice elements.

In terms of background, the existing ACE framework<sup>34</sup> covered only some of their responsibilities; this document brings together all their responsibilities – and also highlights the differences in role that ACE plays in each area.

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<sup>33</sup> *Great art and culture for everyone 2010-2020: 10-year strategic framework*. Arts Council England, 2013. Available to download as a pdf (488.03 kb) from: [http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/Great\\_art\\_and\\_culture\\_for\\_everyone.pdf](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/Great_art_and_culture_for_everyone.pdf).

In the “Who we are and what we do” chapter, the strategy includes three key areas of work:

- Advocacy and partnership
- Development (and this particularly shows the different part that ACE plays, from being “the main body charged with developing the arts in England” to “As local authorities provide funding for libraries, our role is a development one, using our advocacy role and resources – including a small amount of funding – to support the work of libraries as centres of excellence that are accessible to all and connected to the rest of the local arts and cultural infrastructure.” [quotes from p18])
- Investment.

Chapter 5 is “Where are we now?”, which looks at the context within which ACE has established its goals. The context includes:

- Achieving excellence (“The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games provided a watershed moment when the public was able to see how vital arts and culture are to the fabric of our nation.” [p26])
- Connecting with people (“We believe that increasing the number of people who experience and contribute to the arts, to museums and to libraries is good for society. Sharing cultural experiences brings communities together and we will work to better understand the social impact of the arts and culture.” [p28])
- Resilience and sustainability
- “The people behind success”, the workforce. “It will be a priority over the next decade to support these people to maintain and develop the skills they will need to achieve our shared mission.” [p33]
- The next creative generation – “We believe it is every child’s birth-right to have the opportunity to experience the arts, to access the knowledge in our libraries, and to see the wonderful objects within our museums and learn about the stories behind them.” [p35]

Following this, the strategy then sets out ACE’s five goals:

1. “Excellence is thriving and celebrated in the arts, museums and libraries

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<sup>34</sup> *Achieving great art for everyone: a strategic framework for the arts*. Arts Council England, 2010. Available to download as a pdf (165.97 kb) from: [http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/achieving\\_great\\_art\\_for\\_everyone.pdf](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/achieving_great_art_for_everyone.pdf). Culture, knowledge and understanding: great museums and libraries for everyone – a companion document to ‘Achieving great art for everyone’. Arts Council England, 2011. Available to download as a pdf (146.48 kb) from: [http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/culture\\_knowledge\\_and\\_understanding.pdf](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/culture_knowledge_and_understanding.pdf).

2. Everyone has the opportunity to experience and to be inspired by the arts, museums and libraries
3. The arts, museums and libraries are resilient and environmentally sustainable
4. The leadership and workforce in the arts, museums and libraries are diverse and appropriately skilled
5. Every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts, museums and libraries” [p39]

It goes on to set out for each goal:

- What success will look like
- What ACE will do
- How to assess if we are making progress.

So what about social justice issues?

The strategy makes a strong commitment to the principles of equality and diversity:

“England is one of the most diverse societies in the world. Our diversity is our strength and the Arts Council’s commitment to excellence and equality demands that the public in this country has an opportunity to enjoy as diverse a range of arts and cultural experiences as possible.

Our commitment to diversity and equality is a long-standing one. We believe arts organisations, museums, and libraries, should ensure that their work draws on and reflects the full range of backgrounds and perspectives to be found in our society. While we can point to examples of best practice, where this approach to diversity is part of an organisation’s DNA, we know that not all the work we currently support does this to the extent it should. We will use our funding, development and advocacy roles to ensure that these examples of best practice are replicated and built upon.” [pp26-27]

In the section on Goal 4 (The leadership and workforce in the arts, museums and libraries are diverse and appropriately skilled), it will look successful if:

“The leadership and workforce of the arts and cultural sector – and especially the organisations that we invest in – reflect the diversity of the country, indicating that there are fair routes to entry and progression.” [p55]

ACE will:

“Promote a diverse workforce, through our funded organisations and strategic programmes, with the aim of creating fairer entry and

progression routes in the arts and culture sector, as well as more diverse leadership and governance.” [p55]

These are all laudable goals – but we’ve been there before. What’s missing is what the mechanisms are for getting ‘from here to there’, especially at a time when areas of employment are shrinking, and organisations are less likely to put resources into traineeships, for example.

It also seems to me that ACE has, again, missed stressing the vital role that the arts (in its widest sense) can play in promoting social justice – all the work that goes on every day to support disadvantaged communities, promote health and wellbeing, provide greater understanding of how society works ... if they really built up this area of work (drawing, for example, on *Museums change lives*<sup>35</sup>) maybe we would not get so many of the “but what does the cultural sector contribute?” questions.

As SCL rightly said in their response<sup>36</sup>:

“SCL welcomes seeing Libraries embedded within Arts Council England but we still hold concerns that our important work supporting IT literacy, community health outcomes and generating economic prosperity – through our work with job seekers, small businesses and lone workers – is not reflected within this.”<sup>37</sup>

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

ACE = Arts Council England

ASCEL = Association of Senior Children’s and Education Librarians

JRF = Joseph Rowntree Foundation

NEET = Not in Education, Employment or Training

NLT = National Literacy Trust

SCL = Society of Chief Librarians

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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](mailto:john@nadder.org.uk)

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<sup>35</sup> *Museums change lives: the MA’s vision for the impact of museums*. Museums Association, 2013. Available to download as a pdf (2170 kb) from: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1001738>.

<sup>36</sup> “SCL Response to ACE 10 Year Framework”, <http://www.goscl.com/scl-response-to-ace-10-year-framework/>.

<sup>37</sup> Source: ASCEL *Current Awareness Update*, Nov 2013.