

Achieving Social Inclusion: What do we need to do?

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Background

Social Exclusion is more than just income poverty. It is shorthand for what can happen when people or areas have a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime and family breakdown.¹ Combating social exclusion and poverty is a key challenge facing the European Union (EU) and its Member States. In the year 2000, the member states of the European Union (EU) set out a strategy aimed at making the Union the most dynamic, knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010. To this end, the member states committed themselves to economic modernisation, to creating more and better jobs, to greater social cohesion and to making a decisive impact on poverty.²

National Action Plans (NAPs):

One of the key elements of the Social Inclusion process at the EU level is the preparation of a two-year National Action Plan (NAP) on Social Inclusion that sets out how each of the member states will combat poverty and social exclusion. The UK's current NAP (Working Together, UK Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2006-08) outlines the present position in the UK and the action that the UK will take until 2008 to tackle poverty and increase social inclusion.³ Key priorities are:

- 1) Tackling child poverty
- 2) Increasing Labour Market Participation
- 3) Improving Access to Public Service
- 4) Tackling Discrimination

The NAP for 2008-2010 will be launched in September 2008. You will have the opportunity find out more about the latest NAP and how the third sector can play a role in informing regional social inclusion strategy.

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The Social Exclusion Task Force:

The Social Exclusion Task Force was set up to coordinate the UK government's drive against Social Exclusion.³ It ensures cross-departmental dialogue in order to coordinate the government's efforts to mitigate poverty and encourage social inclusion. Its key principles are participation and involvement. It works with the government to identify priorities, test solutions, and facilitate collaboration across government. The aim is to extend opportunity to the least advantaged so that they can enjoy more of the choices, chances and power.⁴ This work is undertaken at local level through Local Area Agreements.

Social Inclusion and the UK

The story so far:

- to tackle income poverty, the focus has been on helping people into work, through the New Deals, welfare to work and tax credits programmes. As a result, employment has increased by 2.5 million, and tax and benefit changes mean that the poorest families are £3450 better off per year than they were ten years ago;⁷
- to tackle poor services, funding has increased and performance management improved. As a result, schools in the poorest areas have been improving at a faster rate than the rest, and better early years services have enabled many women to return to work, reducing child poverty and delivering a firm foundation for future learning and development for nearly all three and four year olds;⁸
- to tackle powerlessness, community engagement has been placed at the heart of regeneration, through programmes like the New Deal for Communities and Neighbourhood Renewal; and greater choice has been introduced for vulnerable people, such as in individual budgets for social care.⁹

What remains to be done?

Partly because of improvements over the last ten years, the key challenges of social exclusion are now different:

- Parenting and the early years have a new importance, thanks to research showing their life-long impact on education, emotional well-being, and resilience. Parenting throughout childhood is important, especially during pregnancy and the first three years of life, including the critical role of fathers.¹⁰
- The links between problems have a new importance. After improving the quality of particular services, it is now important to improve the joins between them to develop a much better understanding of the relationship of poverty to a set of complex problems: mental health, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, inadequate housing, worklessness. Solutions are now being considered that start with the problems as experienced by the individual and family and their articulated needs, and provide a coordinated response across a range of services that is greater rather than less than the sum of the parts.¹¹
- Prevention has a new importance. Better data is making it increasingly possible to identify earlier who needs support. Doing so can not only turn lives around, but also improves life for everyone and can release money that would otherwise go on recovery. The poor behaviour of a very few children in a class can make learning difficult for the rest; families living in the poorest areas are most likely to be victims of crime; a child in care with additional support needs can cost up to £300,000 per year.¹²

Social Inclusion in the East Midlands and VCS involvement

The East Midlands has become a beacon of good practice for Social Inclusion work through the inclusion, empowerment and capacity building of small, local community controlled projects (grass-roots projects).⁵ However, at the East Midlands lacks a regional social inclusion strategy and the VCS could play a key role in shaping its content. The VCS works with groups that work

with hard to reach communities. As the mitigation of poverty and related issues affecting those communities is at the heart of Social Inclusion work, strong representation from those communities is sought. The VCS could play a pivotal role in contributing to the regional Social Inclusion Strategy.

Voice EM

Voice EM is a registered charity that works with and supports BME organisations throughout the East Midlands.

It aims to advocate, help, resource, develop and enable the Black and minority ethnic third sector to play a meaningful role in the economic, social and cultural development of the East Midlands.

Author(s)

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References:

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http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force/context.aspx

⁴ http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion/

⁵ The key to Inclusion: A report on the state and potential of Empowerment approach to inclusion work in the English Regions; (L->Power, CEFET, The Big Lottery Fund and ESF)
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