

Press release: 'Left Behind Britain': narrowing the social mobility divide

Education Secretary Justine Greening will today (Thursday 30 March) open a major conference in Westminster aimed at improving social mobility and building a shared agenda for action.

The 'Left Behind Britain' conference, which is hosted by the Social Mobility Commission and University of Bath, brings together 200 political leaders, policy makers, academics, charities, think tanks, civil servants and business leaders to increase understanding, share knowledge and explore new solutions to one of the greatest challenges facing our country today.

The Social Mobility Commission's recent ['State of the Nation' report](#) to Parliament found that there is a new geography of disadvantage in Britain today which goes beyond a crude north-south divide.

It found that low levels of social mobility are not just impeding the poorest in society, but are holding back whole tranches of middle, as well as low-income families, the so-called 'treadmill families', who are running harder and harder but standing still.

From the early years through to education and the labour market, the 1-day conference examines the causes and consequences of declining social mobility in many parts of Britain today.

It will focus on the growing geographical divide which has seen many parts of Britain 'left behind' in terms of social mobility. 65 parts of Britain are identified by the Social Mobility Commission as being social mobility cold spots – those with the poorest education and employment prospects.

Drawing on lessons for research and policy from international evidence, the conference will also look at how government, councils, employers, universities, colleges, schools and communities can work together with one core purpose: a more level playing field of opportunity in Britain. It will assess the influence that policy has had on social mobility trends and consider how policy makers might now respond to declining mobility.

Speaking ahead of the event, the Rt Hon Alan Milburn, chair of the Social Mobility Commission, said:

Social mobility is arguably the most important and challenging issue facing British society today. How to make our country one where aspiration and ability, not background or birth, determine where people get to in their lives.

Tinkering with change will not turn it around. A new and far bigger national effort will be needed if progress is to be made on reducing poverty and improving mobility. That will mean long-term

and fundamental reforms to our country's education system and local economies and in the labour and housing markets.

Today's conference is aimed at developing a shared agenda for social progress to create a more level playing field of opportunity. One that can unite educators and employers – indeed the whole nation – to action.

Professor Paul Gregg of the University of Bath, Department of Social and Policy Sciences added:

For children educated in the 1980s, Britain had an unenviable record of being a society where a person's origin determined their destiny. Being among the least socially mobile countries in Europe and performing less well than it has had in previous generations, this has made social mobility a key issue for social policy in the UK.

The policy challenge now is how all actors in society – from government to schools to employers – can best contribute to turning this around for the current generation of school aged children.

1) The Social Mobility Commission is an advisory, non-departmental public body established under the Life Chances Act 2010 as modified by the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. It has a duty to assess progress in improving social mobility in the United Kingdom and to promote social mobility in England. It currently consists of four commissioners and is supported by a small secretariat.

2) The commission board currently comprises:

- Alan Milburn (chair)
- Baroness Gillian Shephard (deputy chair)
- Paul Gregg, Professor of Economic and Social Policy, University of Bath
- David Johnston, Chief Executive of the Social Mobility Foundation

3) The functions of the commission include:

- Monitoring progress on improving social mobility
- Providing published advice to ministers on matters relating to social mobility
- Undertaking social mobility advocacy

For further information

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