

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

Please contact Kirsty Walker on 020 7227 5371 / 07768 446167 or kirsty.walker@education.gov.uk

[Press release: Alok Sharma celebrates 45 years of UK-China ambassadorial relations](#)

Over 300 guests attended the event at Lancaster House, including the Chinese Ambassador to the UK, Mr Liu Xiaoming, and a wealth of British and Chinese business representatives, government officials, parliamentarians and China Chevening Scholars.

The guests at Lancaster House were treated to a series of performances and displays from Weli Creative's 'Magical Lantern' exhibition, a string ensemble from the Guildhall School of Music, and a collection of Chinese and British manuscripts from the British Library. Also on display was ClothCat Animations' new children's series Luo Bai Bei, which is due to be screened in China and the UK later this year. Other exhibitors included the Victoria & Albert Museum, the British Museum and B&H Fashion.

Mr Sharma and the Chinese Ambassador each delivered a speech at the event, which followed the official anniversary on 13 March, before the London Symphony Orchestra performed a recital for the attendees.

UK Minister for Asia, Mr Alok Sharma MP, said:

Throughout the last 45 years, the UK-China relationship has been steadily strengthening. Today we see cooperation at an all-time high and a global partnership that is delivering real benefits for both nations.

Personal ties and mutual understanding are at the heart of any successful relationship. That is why promoting business, cultural and educational links is so important to us. Forty-five years ago, there were 200 Chinese students in the UK and today we welcome over 150,000 Chinese students at universities, colleges and schools across the UK. Through our Generation UK programme, we are working to increase the number of British students studying in China from 5000 currently to 20,000 by 2020.

As we look ahead to the future for the UK and China, it is important to reflect on what our two countries have achieved over the last 45 years. Trade between our two countries has increased 200-fold. We want to do even more. We are working together to address some of the significant challenges facing the world today, such as conflict in the Middle East and international terrorism. Our Infrastructure Alliance will allow us to work together to build the capacity of third countries, and we are tackling global health

issues such as anti-microbial resistance.

Since our countries established full Ambassadorial relations, the pace and scope of what we have achieved, individually and together, is extraordinary. We want to continue to build the links between our two countries into the future. I strongly believe that we have a great deal to look forward to.

The Minister personally thanked the sponsors for the event: The Bank of China; Ernst & Young; HSBC; and Huawei.

The UK has more dialogues with China than any other European country. Chinese visitors to Britain have doubled in five years, with around 150,000 Chinese students now studying across the UK. Last year, the UK Government funded 98 China Chevening Scholars and 15 China Chevening Fellows from 18 different provinces and municipalities to attend postgraduate study at UK universities.

Mr Sharma has visited Beijing, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Fuzhou and Xiamen, as well as Hong Kong, since his appointment as Minister for Asia last year. Prime Minister Theresa May attended the G20 Summit last September in Hangzhou and will visit China again later this year.

Further information

[Press release: Charity Commission finds 'basic and serious mismanagement' in selling land at charity](#)

The Charity Commission, the regulator of charities in England and Wales, has concluded that the trustees of the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain ([see 'Notes to editors'](#)) were responsible for serious mismanagement in the way they disposed of the charity's London property in 2010.

The regulator has today (30 March 2017) published a [report of its statutory inquiry](#) into concerns about the sale of the charity's property at Belgrave Square. The Commission received information that the property was sold on for £21 million by its new owners, shortly after the charity had disposed of it for £6 million in December 2010.

The Commission first became aware of this in 2013, over 4 years after some of the events took place. The Commission's report concludes that the trustees failed to fulfil their legal duties and responsibilities towards the charity,

and that 'the failures and breaches were not minor or technical in nature' but 'amount to basic and serious mismanagement'.

The report criticises the failure by the trustees to obtain a report from a surveyor who was suitably qualified as required under charity law for a disposal of this type. It finds that the trustees failed to seek independent specialist advice about how to ensure the charity would benefit from a possible post-sale increase in the value of the property if a change in the use of the property and/or enfranchisement was secured, as happened here. The inquiry's view was that the charity should have known that a commercial company would only purchase the property if it had good reason to believe it would secure enfranchisement or successfully negotiate a change of use. The inquiry also concluded that the trustees failed to take proper account of concerns raised by the charity's solicitor before the sale was completed.

Although the trustees told the inquiry that there was a financial imperative to dispose of the property and there was only one prospective purchaser, the report concludes that the trustees failed to conduct proper due diligence into the buyer of the property, a shell company with no assets.

There were mitigating factors as to why further regulatory action in the case was not appropriate, including a retrospective valuation of the property subsequently obtained by the charity that could be argued as being supportive of the 2010 sale price. Also, the Commission did not find evidence that the trustees, or anyone associated with the charity, derived unauthorised private benefit from the sale or any indication of bad faith on the part of the buyer, and the main person who authorised the disposal is now deceased.

Harvey Grenville, Head of Investigations and Enforcement at the Charity Commission, said:

One of the purposes of publishing inquiry reports is to ensure other charities have the opportunity to learn the wider lessons.

This case highlights that disposing of charity land can involve complex arrangements, which charities need to be careful about and obtain proper professional advice on. But even for simpler deals, it's a reminder of why it is so crucial that all charities and trustees understand the basic duties set out in our guidance, '[The essential trustee](#)'.

These duties include trying to get the best deal for your charity and complying with the specific legal requirements that apply in charity law when selling or leasing charity land or property. The law in this area is designed to ensure that a charity's assets are protected and that when disposing of charity assets it is only in the best interests of the charity. We have developed more detailed [guidance on disposing of land](#), which we strongly recommend charities refer to and use.

The Commission's report sets out wider lessons for charities to learn from

the case. The [full report](#) is available on GOV.UK.

Ends

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Notes to editors

1. The charity's full name is [The Spiritualist Association of Great Britain \(formerly The Marylebone Spiritualist Association\) Limited](#) (registered charity number 225455).
 2. [The Charity Commission](#) is the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales. To find out more about our work, see our [annual report](#).
 3. Search for charities on our [online register](#).
 4. Details of how the Commission reports on its regulatory work can be found on [GOV.UK](#).
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[News story: Help to Buy used by over a million](#)

The government has now supported more than one million people through its [Help to Buy](#) schemes, including 868,240 who have opened [Help to Buy: ISAs](#) offering government bonuses of up to £3000 for those buying their first home.

[Help to Buy statistics](#) released today (Thursday 30 March) show that:

- over 259,000 completions have taken place using one or more of the Help to Buy schemes, the majority of these are first-time buyers
- more than 215,000 (84% of total completions) first-time buyers are now on the housing ladder thanks to Help to Buy
- the average house price across the schemes is £192,854, which is below the national average of £220,000

Philip Hammond, Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

This government is committed to helping working people get on the housing ladder. Our Help to Buy schemes are proving hugely popular across the country. More than a million people are now using them to help achieve home ownership, particularly first time buyers.

Gavin Barwell, Housing and Planning Minister, said:

As our Housing White Paper sets out, we're committed to helping more people find a home of their own with the support of a range of low-cost home ownership products.

Our Help to Buy: Equity Loan scheme continues to make home ownership a reality for thousands of people, especially first time buyers right across the country.

Home Builders Federation Executive Chairman Stewart Baseley said:

Help to buy is absolutely central to the big increases in housing supply we have seen over the past few years.

Helping people who otherwise would not be able to purchase a home provides the confidence builders need to invest in recruiting and training new staff to ramp up production and bring forward new sites.

More than 112,000 completions have now taken place through the Help to Buy Equity Loan scheme, which offers buyers up to 20% of a newly built home's costs and 40% in London so they only need to provide a 5% deposit.

The North West, Yorkshire and The Humber, and the South West have seen the highest number of property completions using the Help to Buy: ISA. In total, 45,098 completions have taken place across the UK using the ISA bonus have taken place since launch in December 2015.

2,381 buyers in the capital across 31 boroughs also benefited from the London Help to Buy scheme between 1 February 2016 and to 31 December 2016.

The Government provides support via three schemes:

1. The Help to Buy: ISA is specifically for first-time buyers. For every £200 you save, the government will provide a bonus of £50. The maximum bonus you can receive on completion of a property purchase is £3,000.
2. The Help to Buy Equity Loan scheme offers buyers up to 20% of the cost of a new build home so they only need to provide a 5% deposit. It is open to both first-time buyers and those looking to step up the housing ladder.
3. The London Help to Buy scheme provides an equity loan of up to 40% for buyers in the capital with a 5% deposit. It is open to both first time buyers and those looking to step up the housing ladder.

Press release: UK energy statistics: statistical press release – March 2017

[Energy Trends](#) and [Energy Prices](#) publications are published today 30 March 2017 by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The publications cover new data for the fourth quarter of 2016.

Energy Trends covers statistics on energy production and consumption, in total and by fuel, and provides an analysis of the year on year changes. Energy Prices covers prices to domestic and industrial consumers, prices of oil products and comparisons of international fuel prices.