



**SOCIAL MOBILITY AND CHILD
POVERTY REVIEW CALL FOR
EVIDENCE:
A RESPONSE BY BRAP**

OCTOBER 2011

INTRODUCTION

1. brap welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Review Call for Evidence.
2. brap is a think fair tank, inspiring and leading change to make public, private and voluntary sector organisations fit for the needs of a more diverse society. brap offers tailored, progressive and common sense approaches to equalities training, consultancy and community engagement issues. More information is available at our website: www.brap.org.uk.
3. brap has worked extensively in the field of poverty reduction, with our work falling into two main areas:
 - research: brap has undertaken a number of research projects evaluating the effectiveness of anti-poverty strategies and exploring the factors behind persistent worklessness (see, for example, Afridi 2011).
 - project delivery: brap delivers on-the-ground projects which aim to tackle some of the causes of poverty such as low aspiration, disconnection from education or training, and (more specifically) the availability of support around entrepreneurship. Our most recent project, 'Back on Track', puts young people at risk of getting involved with gangs in touch with a team of mentors who provide support on issues such as self-esteem, anger management, job hunting techniques, application and interview skills, and so on.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE LINKS BETWEEN SOCIAL MOBILITY AND CHILD POVERTY?

4. We agree with the conclusion reached in *Unleashing Aspiration* (2009) that tackling child poverty is 'essential' to improving social mobility. There is a wealth of evidence showing that people from lower income backgrounds are more likely to suffer from physical and mental health problems, poor educational achievement, and lower levels of social capital – all of which are key drivers of worklessness (which in turn stifles social mobility). In addition, people growing up in poverty are more likely to have lower expectations and (more tentatively) lower levels of confidence manoeuvring within the job market.
5. As such, measures to address child poverty are likely to improve social mobility – especially if they recognise the importance of moving families out of poverty (which, of course, *A New Approach to Child Poverty* does).
6. In addition, however, we would also note the symbiotic relationship between poverty and 'equality'. This is not to reiterate the correlation between income inequality and mental illness, educational attainment, life expectancy, and, in fact, social mobility outlined in works such as *The Spirit Level* (2009). Instead, it is a reflection of the fact that there are a range of different factors that hold people back. In part, this is about how societal attitudes affect and inform people's perceptions of themselves and what they can achieve. Recent research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, for example, describes how outcomes for individuals are affected partly by the 'texture of everyday life', by which they mean the decisions and assumptions of individuals, communities and organisations (Barnard and Turner 2011). The effect of this on, say, experience of public services is clear: people still experience

discrimination in terms of delivery and access based on various aspects of their identity – including socioeconomic status (Davies 2008).

7. More widely, however, it is increasingly clear that many young people we work with feel disengaged and disenfranchised from a society that clearly does not value them. They receive services which do not value the entitlements they have as human beings and which do not believe in the potential they have as people. They live in a society which has watched with indifference as over a period of decades the most attractive and fruitful opportunities have been concentrated at the top, while those at the bottom have not been challenged or urged or helped to achieve and flourish. If social mobility strategies are to have any chance of success, they must help those at the bottom feel they are valued more than profits or the opportunities available to the best-off. They must convince the impoverished young that they have a stake in a society that believes in them.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN BARRIERS WHICH STOP PEOPLE MOVING OUT OF POVERTY OR WHICH PREVENT PEOPLE FROM SLIPPING INTO POVERTY?

8. As both documents say, the causes of poverty are multifaceted and complex. The following are the main barriers we encounter in our work:
 - structural factors: most obviously, the availability of well-paid, long-term work (linked to broader patterns of the labour market)
 - employer attitudes and behaviour: there is a body of evidence showing that employers still discriminate against people at the point of recruitment based on: their ethnicity (Wood et al 2009; Heath and Cheung 2006; brap 2006); criminal record (Hartfree et al 2008); mental health status (Strategy Exclusion Unit 2004); and a range of other factors. In addition, our experience suggests that people from marginalised groups are still disadvantaged in many workplaces (both in terms of access to training and promotion opportunities and in experiencing harassment and bullying from colleagues). As such, levels of retention within these communities are considerably lower (for figures relating to incidences of workplace discrimination, see EHRC 2010 Chapter 11)
 - employment skills: connected with the above, seeking, applying, and interviewing for jobs represents a body of skills which not everyone possesses
 - personal/individual factors: aspiration most obviously, but important here are also ‘social norms’ – the achievements and activities of peers – and self-esteem. In the course of delivering our projects, we also come into contact with many young people who lack the resources to effectively deal with emotions such as anger, rejection, and despair. Underpinning all these factors is a sense of feeling valued and having a stake in society
 - in-work poverty: the Commission is familiar with Households Below Average Income statistics that show approximately 60% of poor children live in families where at least one adult is in employment. It is our experience that in-work poverty is becoming increasingly common – particularly among lone parents. We are increasingly dealing with people whose only choice is to work longer and longer hours, ultimately at the expense of accessing training and educational opportunities. Since this inevitably affects not only the social mobility of the individual but of the child as well, we welcome the Government’s commitment to address in-work poverty.

WHAT ARE THE BEST EXAMPLES OF PROJECTS WHICH HAVE BROUGHT ABOUT REAL PROGRESS IN CREATING A FAIRER, MORE MOBILE SOCIETY?

9. We are aware of a number of organisations that are delivering impactful projects in the sphere of poverty reduction. Some of these are mentioned in our recent report *Social Networks: their role in addressing poverty* (Afridi 2011). For example, Acumen Community Enterprise Development Trust in County Durham (www.acumentrust.org.uk) is a good example of a project that recognises that poverty reduction requires the promotion of social capital and the involvement of local people in community projects. In this way, the trust is able to engage with local people and help them gradually move towards economic activity.
10. In addition, brap itself has delivered a number of projects aimed at creating a fairer, more mobile society. For example, through the provision of business support, peer mentoring, and specialist enterprise clubs, we have helped hundreds of people from marginalised backgrounds establish and run their own social enterprises. Providing specialist support on fundraising, over the last few months, we have helped six organisations raise about £800,000 creating a minimum of 10 full-time posts.
11. Our 'Back on Track' project has also helped young people at risk of becoming involved with gangs access training and employment. The programme draws upon a field of expert mentors to provide support tailored to an individual's needs. Recognising that accessing and maintaining employment is dependent on a number of factors, the programme takes a holistic approach, providing, amongst other things, anger management techniques, opportunities to develop confidence in arts or sports, and the social literacy skills necessary to perform well at interviews.

DO YOU THINK THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES, IN PARTICULAR THE SOCIAL MOBILITY AND CHILD POVERTY STRATEGIES, WILL IMPROVE PEOPLE'S LIFE CHANCES?

12. brap is supportive of all serious initiatives aimed at reducing poverty and improving life chances. We might question, however, the long-term impact of some of the policies outlined in *Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers*, particularly those around raising aspirations (such as supporting inspirational speakers or establishing independent careers advice).
13. In our experience of creating change to promote equality, the most effective policies tend to deal with causes rather than symptoms. Practically, this means mainstreaming solutions into everyday practice, rather than creating 'add-on' initiatives which – whatever their short-term impact – are not conducive to substantive, long-term change.
14. Obviously, the issue of reduced aspirations by children from low-income families is multifaceted. However, research suggests that teachers' expectations is a key driver (see, for example, brap 2003). This is also borne out by brap's experience of delivering training to schools and colleges, during which we encounter teachers who have low expectations of pupils from low-income families and some Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. To tackle the issue of low aspirations, then, the Government may wish to focus on challenging the behaviour exhibited by this minority of teachers which reinforces the perception that some children are not 'supposed' to achieve (this might involve not addressing poor performance

or washing their hands of bad behaviour). brap has recently been exploring ways of delivering fairer services through inspiring and motivating the 'right' kind of behaviour, and we would be happy to discuss this further with the Review should they wish.

15. As we have tried to argue, there is a need for interventions that address the structural causes of inequality. At this point, it would be disingenuous of us not to mention perhaps the most significant factor affecting inequality: reductions in public sector spending. Whatever validity the cuts have as a response to the deficit, it is clear the potential impact of any social mobility strategy must be considered within this context. Not only do the largest public sector spending cuts in recent years affect the complexity of the policies that must be employed to promote mobility, they also affect the very possibility of that mobility being achieved. The impact of both strategies has the potential to be diluted by the cuts. As such it's important that future decisions about the allocation of resources are conducted in the context of these two strategies.

WHAT MORE SHOULD BUSINESSES, CIVIL SOCIETY AND OTHER NON-GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS BE DOING TO IMPROVE SOCIAL MOBILITY AND TACKLE CHILD POVERTY?

16. As stated above, a key element of tackling worklessness is reforming workplace practices. In addition to the items contained in the Social Mobility Business Compact, we would suggest:

Recruitment

17. Organisations sign up to train key personnel in equality competencies around advertising, applications, short listing, and interviewing.

Workplace culture

18. A lot of discrimination in the workplace goes unchallenged and unaddressed, mainly because a) people are unsure of what discrimination actually is and b) people fear repercussions.

As such, organisations should be supported to make clear to staff what actually constitutes discriminatory behaviour. This should explain what discrimination 'looks like' in terms of people's day-to-day roles. Organisations should also make clear to staff what rights they have under equalities law and what avenues of redress exist should those rights be violated. This support may take the form of training, guides, and toolkits.

19. We would support the use of kitemark organisations could use to communicate their equalities credentials to the public and which commissioners could use as a criterion when deciding between potential suppliers.

WHAT WOULD BE THE BEST WAY TO MEASURE PROGRESS ON SOCIAL MOBILITY AND CHILD POVERTY?

20. We have tried to suggest in the proceeding answers that social mobility or poverty strategies cannot be divorced from strategies to create a fairer society. By fairness, we mean a society in which everyone is supported and encouraged to achieve the things that are most valuable

to them. The Equality and Human Rights Commission's Equality Measurement Framework – which is referenced in *A New Approach to Child Poverty* – has already undertaken work to identify what people think those valuable and central things are. Although the Equality Measurement Framework is explicitly **not** a performance measurement framework, the Review may wish to explore the validity of using some of its domain indicators as a baseline for measuring progress.

REFERENCES

Afridi, A (2011) *Social Networks: their role in addressing poverty*; Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/5sj7b6b>

Barnard, H and Turner C (2011) *Poverty and Ethnicity: A review of evidence*; Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/3utl3lc>

brap (2006) *Rethinking recruitment*; brap

brap (2003) *Race Equality and Education in Birmingham*; brap

Davies, M (2008) *The Effects of Discrimination on Families in the Fight to end Child Poverty*; Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/69mr5uk>

Equality and Human Rights Commission (2010) *How fair is Britain? Equality, Human Rights and Good Relations in 2010: The First Triennial Review*; EHRC. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/65pvh6t>

Hartfree, Y; Dearden, C; and Pound, E (2008) *High hopes: Supporting ex-prisoners in their lives after prison*; Department for Work and Pensions. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/5txoz6>

Heath, A and Cheung, S Y (2006) *Ethnic penalties in the labour market: employers and discrimination*; Department for Work and Pensions. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/69d4byb>

Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (2009) *Unleashing Aspiration: The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions*; Cabinet Office. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/3s53538>

Social Exclusion Unit (2004) *Mental Health and Social Exclusion*; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/6canmex>

Wilkinson, R and Pickett, K (2009) *The Spirit Level: Why more equal societies almost always do better*; Allen Lane

Wood, M; Hales, J; Purdon, S; Sejersen, T; and Hayllar, O (2009) *A test of racial discrimination in recruitment practice in British cities*; Department for Work and Pensions. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yjfbzuq>

MORE INFORMATION

For more information please contact:

Joy Warmington
CEO
brap
9th Floor Edgbaston House
3 Duchess Place
Hagley Road
Birmingham
B16 8NH

brap@brap.org.uk
0121 456 7400