



Time for Change: 20 years of social mobility policy

Equality Briefing



EQUALITY BRIEFING

FCE Position on:

[Time For Change: An Assessment of Government Policies on Social Mobility 1997-2017](#)

Re: Social Mobility

Socio-economic duty - Equality Act 2010

Life stages

Long-term Inequality



Background

The UK Government's [Social Mobility Commission](#) report calls for urgent reform to socio-economic policy as the current trends point towards further divisions and fragmentation of society across the UK.

The report recognises that "**often, long-term progress has too often been sacrificed to short-term change**" (p5) which has led to severe consequences and divisions threatening community cohesion.

Key areas of concern

The trend in inequality is particularly evident between generations, income groups and regions:

Generational divide

- 30% of young people are now classified as poor
- it will take more than 40 years before the attainment gap between poor 5 years-olds and their better-off peers is closed

Income and wealth divide

- Poverty among UK pensioners halved over the past 20 years period
- UK Pensioner income average exceeds the income of adults who are in work
- A major impact of this trend is in housing costs and whereby home ownership has become unaffordable:

Figure O9 - percentage of household income spent on housing costs by income quintile, financial years 1997/98 to 2015/16, Great Britain

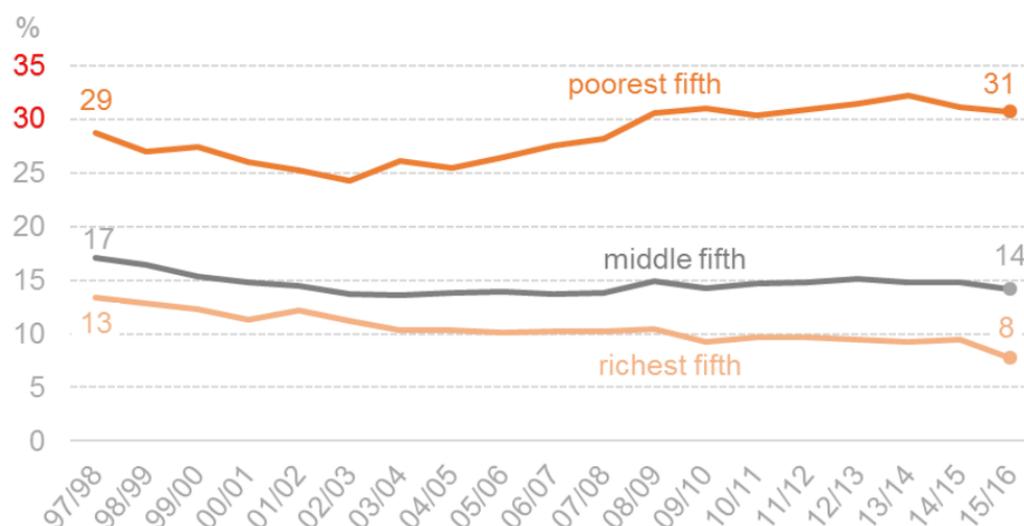
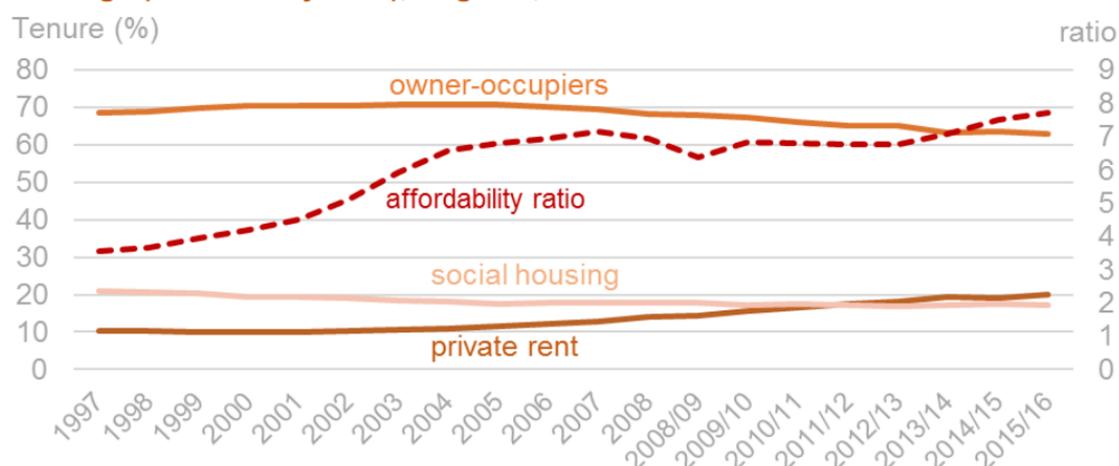


Figure O10 – Tenure rates and ratio of median house price to median annual earnings (affordability ratio), England, 1997 to 2015/16



Regional divide

- Output per person is **£15,069** in Fife ([Fife's Economic Strategy 2017-2027](#)), compared to:
 - **£43,629** in London
 - **£27,750** in Scotland ([Quarterly National Accounts Scotland, 2016](#))
 - **£19,000** per person in the North East of England
- UK has greater regional disparities in economic performance than any other European country

Life Stages

Across the 'life stages' discussed in the report (Early Years, Schools, Young People, Working Lives), none attained a green rating:

- Early years and Schools get an **amber** rating
- Young people and Work get a **red** rating



20 years of government policy on social mobility. Here's our verdict:

Early Years	●	Young People	●
Child development by age 5	●	Participation in education after 16	●
Attainment gap at age 5	●	Attainment gap at 19 in level 3 qualifications	●
Parents' time spent on children's development	●	Youth employment	●
Socioeconomic gap in parenting time	●	Young people's wages	●
Parenting support	●	NEET young people	●
Early child health	●	Careers advice	●
Child poverty	●	Value of vocational qualifications	●
Children in unsatisfactory housing conditions	●	Further education quality	●
Schools	●	Disadvantage students' entry to university	●
Attainment gap at Key Stage 1	●	Disadvantaged students' entry to top universities	●
Attainment gap at Key Stage 2	●	Disadvantaged students' retention and success	●
Attainment gap at GCSE	●	Working Lives	●
Attainment gap at A level	●	Rates of employment	●
Regional equality in FSM attainment	●	Quality of jobs	●
Investment in education	●	Improving skills and qualifications	●
Inspection and accountability	●	Reducing low pay	●
Impact of structural reforms to schools	●	Opening access to top jobs	●
Number of qualified teachers	●	Adult learning investment and policies	●
Fostering social and emotional development	●	Effectiveness of welfare policies	●
		Regional disparities in opportunity and access	●

In summary, the report's key findings are that:

- government policies to improve social mobility have failed to deliver enough progress
- calls on current and future governments to learn lessons from mistakes and successes over the last 20 years
- warns that without major reform social and economic divisions within Britain's society are set to widen
- assigns rag ratings to government policies depending on how successful government has translated policy into social outcomes

FCE Position

Fife Centre for Equalities recognises the key points of the [Social Mobility Commission](#), and welcomes the life stages approach to understanding the shifting patterns of inequality across the different communities that make up our society.

Beyond Early Years, Schools, Young People, Working Lives, the report adequately discusses the importance of Pre-Natal Years and Parenting, and makes a strong call for reinstating parenting programmes and improving housing conditions of children and young people (p8).

A marked omission here however is the welfare of older people beyond the retirement age and the fact that this is not discussed as a social mobility issue. While



at the moment UK Pensioner income exceeds on average the income of adults who are in work (p5), thinking of pensioner as uniform group only fosters intergenerational division. Currently, 1 in 6 pensioners are in poverty ([JRF, 2017](#)). In Scotland in the years 2014-2015, 120,000 people of pensionable age were still living in poverty ([Fairer Scotland Action Plan, 2016](#)). Even for those the better off in the current cohort of pensioners, the future of pensions without triple-lock safeguards will make pensioner poverty be increasingly concerning.

While auto-enrolment as it has been rolled out has addressed some concerns, there is a marked disparity in income wealth – with the poorest fifth of UK society earning only 8% of the total income, whereas the top fifth collect 40%. This in turn affects income during retirement, effectively condemning a vast proportion of UK society in poverty throughout working lives and beyond ([Equality Trust, 2017](#)). Furthermore the pattern of pension enrolment is unequal across industries and sectors - currently private sector (9.3%) is markedly low compared to the public sector (48.2%) - ([CIPP, 2017](#)).

In terms of schooling and education, a rebalancing of the curriculum towards incorporating social and emotional learning is welcome, as in our view working together to develop Healthy Relationships is the bedrock of strong and cohesive communities.

Considering working lives, the report also highlights that Governments have not used legislation to drive improvement in social mobility in the workplace (p78). For instance, the socio-economic duty of the Equality Act 2010, requiring public bodies to assess their decisions' potential impact on social mobility has not been enacted and this has slowed the transparency agenda.

FCE welcomes the commission's call for making increasing socio-economic diversity in professional employment a priority, as making work cultures and practices become more inclusive paves the way to a more equal and inclusive society in the long-term.

Keywords:

#EqNews

#Social Mobility

#Socio-economic duty

#EqualityAct

#LifeStages

#Long-term Inequality



Fife Centre for Equalities aims to build a collective voice to champion equality, diversity, inclusion and social justice across Fife and beyond.

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www.centreforequalities.org.uk

New Volunteer House, 16 East Fergus Place, Kirkcaldy, KY1 1XT

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