

# Ordinary Hope: A Mission to Rebuild



JOSEPH  
ROWNTREE  
FOUNDATION



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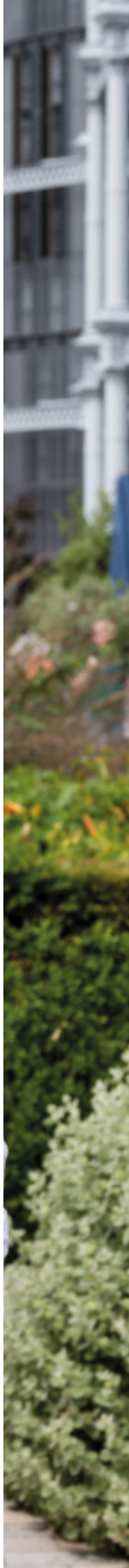
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# Ordinary Hope: A Mission to Rebuild

Brought to you by UCL Policy Lab  
and Joseph Rowntree Foundation



# Foreword

Britain needs hope. Of that there seems very little doubt. But what kind of hope does it need?

Over a decade and a half since the Great Financial Crisis and after years of austerity, Brexit battles, cost of living crises and international turbulence, so many people have given up on the future. There is a prevailing sense of hopelessness, of a country that is getting worse rather than better and of a new generation that will struggle to have lives as rewarding as those enjoyed by those who have gone before. People are especially sceptical when it comes to the ability of government or politics of any kind to turn their lives around.

In such an age, hope is difficult to muster.

But looking for it has been the primary purpose of the collaboration between the UCL Policy Lab and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, from which this publication emerges. Throughout that work, we have come to see that the best account of hope available to Britain today, is not the grandiose, blown-up, boosterism that has characterised much of the politics of the past fifteen years. Instead, it emerges from the textures of everyday life, from the real experiences of people in community, from the efforts that people have led to turn their own lives around and from the prospect that we can come together across differences and share our experiences to help build a better future.

That is what we have called Ordinary Hope.

In the collection of essays that follow here, we present versions of this argument from all of the central areas of concern to Britain's new government: the missions that it has set itself.

We ask how we might find ordinary hope as we seek to deliver greater economic prosperity for the country; how the idea might prepare us for the energy transition and the environmental challenges to come; how it might make our communities more safe and secure; how it could expand opportunities for young people; and help restore our health systems.





As we have drawn these pieces together, we have not sought to impose false order on the material or to present a clear blueprint for the future. This is not a manifesto nor is it the standard policy document. It is an effort instead to share some of the most inspiring ideas and examples to be found across Britain today.

Similarly, we have not decided to prioritise academic voices, even though we think new research is crucially important. We have pieces here from well-respected scholars, but the majority of what follows comes from those trying to build change on the frontline, be it in councils or community groups, campaign organisations or communications consultancies.

The goal, then, is to see what we can learn about the future from them and from each other. The common ground will be obvious to anyone who reads through all of the pieces, with an emphasis continuously on collaboration and partnership, staying grounded in the everyday and forging strong social connections and relationships between people and across difference.

But most of all, we find optimism. Those who say that change isn't possible are those who have never seen it upfront. The people in this volume all share that oft-quoted desire of the Welsh philosopher Raymond Williams, to "make hope possible, rather than despair convincing". By looking at what the everyday reveals around us, our contributors here find light amongst the gloom that has befallen too many.

# Meet the Ordinary Hope team

Ordinary Hope is a partnership between the UCL Policy Lab and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, facilitating deep relationships to support social and economic change. Over the last year and a half it has been organised by leaders from academia, philanthropy, media, community campaigning and organising, politics, public service and more, to platform a politics that is grounded in ordinary people's lives - one that restores trust, hope and respect. We bring diverse experience, perspectives, expertise, and networks to this work, and are all together driven by deep commitments to tackling social and economic injustices and working collaboratively across the differences that too often divide us. Its core participants include:

Tom Baldwin

James Baggaley

Nigel Ball

Emily Bolton

Anoosh Chakelian

Graeme Cooke

Chris Curtis

Piali Das Gupta

James Graham

Yasmin Ibison

Alisha Iyer

Chrisann Jarrett

Paul Kissack

Lindsey Macmillan

Maff Potts

James Purnell

Marc Stears

Jon Stokes

Xiaowei Xu

Also contributing to this publication are:

Sam Alvis

Stefan Baskerville

Wendy Carlin

Helen Chatterjee

Polly Curtis

Rebecca Deegan

Christian Dustmann

Naomi Fulop

Dan Honig

Ros Wynne Jones

Michael Little

Toby Lloyd

Rosie McLeod

Nick Plumb

David Powell

Jake Puddle

Nick Romeo

Luke Tryl

Rich Wilson

Fran Zanatta





# Ordinary Hope: A Public Philosophy

Ordinary Hope is intended to be a guiding philosophy for the next few years of Britain's renewal. In this first section, political theorist and speechwriter, Marc Stears, Director of the UCL Policy Lab, and UCL political scientist and strategic advisor to governments around the world, Dan Honig, ask what it might mean in practice and how it can be achieved.



# Closing the Gap, Marc Stears

For those of us who love political speeches, there are few moments in the calendar as exciting than a keynote from the 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama. Unlike his peers, Obama always seeks to combine emotionally resonant storytelling with deep reflection on the challenges of the time. And this year, at the Democratic National Convention, he did not disappoint.

The theme of this speech was one to which Obama has returned throughout his political career: the disconnect between our experiences in everyday life and the nature of our politics.

Politics, Obama was clear, is broken. “We live in a time of such confusion and rancour. Politicians and algorithms teach us to caricature each other, troll each other and fear each other.” But for all of the economic hardship of the moment, this is not because our actual lives are broken. When we step away from politics, things are profoundly different. “All across America, in big cities and small towns, away from all the noise,” he continued, “the ties that bind us together are still there. We still coach little league and look out for our elderly neighbours. We still feed the hungry, in churches and mosques and synagogues and temples. We share the same pride when our Olympic athletes compete for the gold medals. Because the vast majority of us do not want to live in a country that is bitter and divided.”

To cynical commentators, Obama announced, such ideas will appear “naïve”, little more than the sort of mawkish sentimentalism that is so often characteristic of Presidential Conventions. But he insisted that the idea was far more profound than that. And to anyone who has followed Obama’s arguments more closely over the decades, it is clear why the theme resonated. Twelve years ago, in 2012, the then newly re-elected President, had shared the same question with the novelist, Marilynne Robinson. “There’s all this goodness and decency and common sense on the ground, and somehow it gets translated into rigid, dogmatic, often mean-spirited politics,” Obama said back then. “The thing I’ve been struggling with throughout my political career is how do you close the gap?”

For all of the accusations of sentimentalism, most people in our own country today agree with Obama’s central observation. Over the past year, opinion polling and focus group work conducted by the researchers at More in Common with the UCL Policy Lab have made that abundantly clear. For all of the difficulties of the present time, most people still treasure their families, their neighbourhoods and their communities. They trust people in their own area, look out for them when they can, believe that they have the knowledge and kindness necessary to make a difference. But precious few think the same of civil servants in Whitehall or politicians in Westminster, irrespective of their ideological allegiance. The public at large thinks that those people put self-interest or party-interest before national interest; pursue their own advantage rather than serve the common good. Just as Obama said, there’s a gap between the ordinary and the political, between life as lived in our own communities and as played out on the screens of our smartphones or on television news. And you don’t have to be a President to see it.



In my own way, I have spent the past decade grappling with precisely this issue. I have published two books, *Out of the Ordinary* and *England*, the latter with Tom Baldwin, each of which argue that Britain's politics would be better -- and would achieve more -- if it was less weirdly disconnected from the rhythms and concerns of everyday life.

When I was close to completing the first, I went to Cambridge University to give a talk about it to academic colleagues. There I was told that I was wrong to be concerned. Politics, the wise and world-weary scholars told me, is *always* dark and depressing, the playground of the unscrupulous and the hypocritical, and it would be mad to expect anything more. The response to *England* has been much the same. The hope that our political life could ever respect the same norms, virtues and rhythms of our ordinary lives dismissed by one critic as "pure centrist erotica".

There is, of course, some truth in the pessimism. Presidents and Prime Ministers do not fully share the everyday experiences of normal citizens. Their lives are cloistered away, with security details and special advisors. When Obama says that "we still coach little league", in all likelihood he means that other people do. But if we dwell only on the inevitable differences between politics and the everyday, we miss the potential points of connection, and the reasons why they matter.

The Ordinary Hope project of the UCL Policy Lab and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation is comprised of people who believe that the gap Obama identified can be closed. More than that, they believe it must be closed if we are to have any chance of grappling with the profound injustices that many people face right across our country today.

These inspiring people have experienced first-hand how local initiatives, driven by people in communities themselves, drawing on their own ideas, can often outpace the big programmes drawn up in political backrooms and run out of London. Working together, those leading the Ordinary Hope project have developed a new understanding of how to close the gap between politics and everyday life. There are three parts to this.

First, they implore our politicians to abandon the grand abstractions in which they appear to find comfort and to place emphasis instead on real, tangible, practical progress in people's everyday lives. People don't hanker for a "shining city on a hill", at least not in this life, they are looking for improvements that speak to their own experiences: getting a GP appointment in decent time, being able to feed their families and still have something left over for the nice things in life, being able to look to the future knowing that the next generation will be able to afford a roof over their head.

Second, those who believe in Ordinary Hope also demand that our politicians acknowledge there are many heroes in the story of social change, not just those at the top. Improving the country in tangible ways means mobilising the talents of everyone and every place, not just of the established elite in the conventional corridors of power. Their experiences show that the most imaginative solutions to the challenges of the health service are just as likely to come from the minds of patient groups and

clinical practitioners as they are from the legions of public policy experts in London. Plans for regenerating housing across the UK will require the insights of those in local authorities, mayor's offices, the transport sector and of the young people who are currently locked out, as well as targets from the top and interventions from Whitehall.

The third lesson of Ordinary Hope is that as we seek collectively to deliver the change we need, we also need to recognise the fundamental role that human relationships and social connections play as well as the effectiveness of our plans on paper. It is the sentiments of affection, the bonds of trust between us -- "the ties that bind", as Obama put it -- that will enable us to work together, not just the incentives written into remuneration systems or the effective enforcement of inspection regimes.

As our UCL colleague, Dan Honig, shows in the next essay, those who work in the frontline of our public services are driven not by self-regard, but by their sense of mission, and that sense itself is fostered and facilitated by the human experience of working alongside both others who care and those who are cared for.

All of this has immediate political resonance today. In his very first speech after the general election result became clear, amidst party supporters in the echoing gallery of London's Tate Modern, Keir Starmer soberly outlined what he saw as the primary challenge facing the country today. "The fight for trust is the battle that defines our age," he said. And in searching for that trust, he continued, the first move must be on the part of the powerful towards the rest of us. "Respect is the bond that can unite this country."

The secret to such respect surely lies in closing the gap that Barack Obama identified so powerfully in his speech. In practice, that means it is time that our politics was less rancorous, less haughty, less inauthentic, less weird. For some people, that will involve drawing on technical excellence and "real time data". But vital though expertise is, it is not by itself enough. No kind of imagined "mission control" at the heart of power will sort everything out. Instead, the solution can be found much closer to our non-political homes. The answers to the problems we face lie in a government that is more ordinary.

# Mission Driven Government: Ordinary Hope and Public Services, Dan Honig

As I chat with strangers I meet in and around London, they often comment on how things are not going so well in this country (e.g. riots, transit strikes/delays, weather, football). As an American, I feel an irresistible urge to reply by pointing out some of the great things about this green and pleasant land.

There are plenty of things I can mention to get a smile and a cheerful nod. The most effective seem to be National Trust scones, British humour, Richard Osman, and millionaire shortbread. But when I'm searching for an argument, I mention what I think truly is one of this country's superpowers: its public servants. I include here the Whitehall civil service and the broader universe of public sector employees and service providers. The average Brit often thinks I am having a laugh when I say this. But I'm not. A new government, one searching to restore hope to the country, has the opportunity to unleash an incredibly powerful engine to assist that progress: what I call mission-driven bureaucrats.

## A genuine strength, worth celebrating – but under threat

I study bureaucrats around the world, and work with governments to help improve their performance. The British civil service is rightly the envy of many. An impartial, meritocratic institution with an ethos of public service didn't come easy. It is the product of long investment. Gordon Brown once said that in establishing the rule of law, "the first 500 years are the hardest." The same can be said of the civil service. With investment, patience, and time, the UK built a civil service second to none.

There has been an effort in recent decades to diminish this asset. If this had been the intention of the prior administration, I would celebrate their effectiveness. Job satisfaction in the civil service is historically low. The Institute for Government's most recent Whitehall Monitor paints a picture of declining morale, with increasing numbers of civil servants heading for the exits.

The tools the UK government employed to achieve this behaviour change are what I call 'managing for compliance'. The system is (over)burdened with rules, procedures, sanctions, and incentives. All are attempts to get bureaucrats to do what they otherwise would not. Compliance puts control and authority, those who set the targets and monitor the behaviours, at the top of the pyramid. Those lower down are meant to follow orders and respond to the reporting frameworks, carrots, and sticks dangled from above.

Tools of compliance succeed only by generating behaviours and actions that can be monitored, measured, rewarded or sanctioned. Using compliance to change behaviours generates good performance where what is to be done is observable and verifiable. This is why fast food restaurants and package delivery companies heavily use the tools of compliance: what can be monitored about a burger or a package on a doorstep is pretty close to all the firm cares about.

Unfortunately, most things that government strives to do are not easily monitored and measured. A teacher with a student, doctor with a patient, social worker with a vulnerable child can be monitored. So too can health or education outcomes far down the line. But long-term outcomes are very hard to attribute to the individual teacher, doctor, or social worker. Too many other factors contribute to their individual performances. It is impossible to get those workers to do the right thing through pure compliance.

Too often – in Whitehall, in local council offices, in the NHS, in schools, and far beyond – there are systems that keep the humans in them from doing the reasonable, positive things those humans want to do. Luckily, there is another way – managing for empowerment. As it happens, this is also the best, and likely only, way for Labour to deliver on its promise of mission-driven government.

For Government to change direction or perform better, individuals need to alter their behaviour. What can lead those people to change?

One option is changing the people themselves - chucking out the current lot and starting anew. But it's a prescription that doesn't fit the British public sector very well. The fact that the public servants of the NHS are good humans who want to do good things is generally (though by no means universally) true according to all available evidence. If it's the system that's the problem, there's no reason to believe that new personnel won't in turn be demotivated and constrained by that system.

Far more promising than changing staff themselves is changing the system to alter the behaviour of existing staff. The good news is individuals can and do alter their behaviour all the time. Getting public servants motivated by, and acting in ways aligned to, the mission requires a management system that supports and empowers those actions. My research shows these are practices that allow autonomy, cultivate competence, and help public servants fulfil their purpose.

When more empowering management is present, so too is greater motivation to fulfil the organisation's mission. More empowering management practices also decrease employees' desire to leave the civil service. Give someone who cares about their work the ability to feel they can meaningfully contribute to that work, and they will stay and work hard. Take away the ability of someone who cares deeply to feel they can contribute, and they will be demotivated – or leave entirely, taking their talents and experience with them.

### **The front line should (often) be in charge – including in delivering on Labour's grand missions**

The essays in this publication explore ideas for meaningful delivery against themes broadly mirroring each of Labour's five grand missions. I say "grand" because mission driven bureaucrats can be aligned to a lofty mission like those articulated in Labour's manifesto. Mission driven

bureaucrats can also be focused on the 'everyday' mission of the work they do: educating children, ensuring tax is collected, fighting fires.

Taking the mission of 'building an NHS fit for the future' for example, Health Secretary Wes Streeting has already put this centre stage. He wrote that in the NHS "more trust must be placed in staff to try new ways of working... Frontline staff will be in the driving seat of the reform agenda – this can't be done from Whitehall alone". So how to do this? In the 'everyday' sense, managers at every level of government – from minister to team leader – have the ability to make progress. But of course most of the attention is rightly on the new government's overarching aspirational goals – and these come with an additional focus on the mechanics of delivery, beginning with the establishment of HMG's mission boards.

The boards – and indeed, the infrastructure for delivering missions more broadly – offers a great opportunity, but also a risk. The risk, as my colleagues at UCL Policy Lab and the Future Governance Forum put it, is that mission boards will constitute a "re-heated Delivery Unit-style approach." The Prime Minister's Delivery Unit is reputed to have changed its name to the Prime Minister's Mission Delivery Unit, underscoring the danger that missions will simply be the old delivery 'wine' in new bottles.

Evidence on delivery units suggests they tend to focus on pulling control 'up' to the centre and managing for compliance. As a result, delivery units are often very good at accomplishing the narrow set of measurable things they focus on, for as long as the attention from the top persists.

I think many readers will agree that the UK needs right now something broader, deeper, and more fundamental than that. If mission boards operate by pulling power 'up' to the centre in an effort to use data dashboards, targets, and performance metrics in a management for compliance approach, they will be able to show some successful delivery against targets – but they will ultimately fail in their transformational missions.

This need not be the fate of missions. Mission boards and the Mission Unit can be powerful tools for transformation, broadening the tools available to achieve the missions by coupling careful attention to how delivery structures need to change with the high-level authority to make necessary changes and study results. Where is more citizen voice and ownership (i.e. the ability to contribute meaningfully to decisions) needed? Where do bureaucrats need more autonomy? Where do accountability structures need to change so that bureaucrats who want to centre citizens' needs can do so, rather than focusing on delivering to targets unmoored from citizens' welfare?

Put simply, tools of empowerment, not compliance, are needed to achieve Labour's missions. The effects of changes in management practice can then be rigorously studied. Moving towards empowerment need not and ought not mean abandoning a focus on outcomes.

### **There are many ways to move towards greater empowerment**

Few readers will find themselves sitting on these boards with the power to drive change, of course. But there is a great deal that people at all levels of the system, and even those of us not employed by the British state, can do to make it better. This is true even for parts of the administrative state not directly affected by Labour's grand missions, for the millions of public sector employees who will continue to work towards the everyday missions of their agencies and teams in educating children, fighting fires, providing social care, etc.

There are a few very simple questions we can ask systematically:

Are there people, usually public servants but sometimes community groups, citizens, and nonprofits, who want to do good things in support of the mission, but are unable to act?

If yes, what is getting in the way?

Whether yes or no, how can we increase motivation in the workforce and restructure management to generate more value for citizens?

In the book *Mission Driven Bureaucrats*, I discuss various solutions tried in practice. These include (i) clarifying the mission, (ii) connecting employees to the impact of their actions, (iii) activating the power of peers and (iv) putting citizens at the centre of accountability. These strategies are but the tip of the iceberg; increasing engagement with missions can and does take many forms. Some forms require intervention from the very top of the organisation; others can be initiated by people at many different places in the system. Some forms require changing formal rules and structures; many do not.

I would forgive readers for thinking that at least some of this is blindingly obvious. It's hardly surprising that when people who care about a job do not have to focus on targets set from above they do better. I agree entirely. It is pretty obvious. But then why aren't we doing the things that will make the public sector work better and cost virtually no money, exactly? Why do we manage in ways that demotivate and undermine performance so often?

### **Accepting a different kind of risk**

I often hear concern that empowering people is risky, as it means some may misuse their greater agency. This is inevitable; people are fallible, sometimes with malice, but more often unintentionally. Public servants are people, and some will do bad things—just as the politicians who write the rules sometimes do. However, the inevitability of misuse must be weighed against the risk of strict compliance, where public servants follow the rules to the letter but fail to add value to the citizens they serve.

Acts of fraud and malfeasance happen in every system, but increasing compliance in response to bad actions often undermines the performance of many to prevent the mistakes of a few. Just as we don't stop driving cars due to traffic accidents, we shouldn't respond to failures by reducing autonomy.

'No compliance' is surely usually the wrong answer; but 'less compliance' is very frequently worth considering in a public sector too often obsessed with control from above. Public servants too often face a system that does not treat them like the dedicated professionals they very frequently are. This is bad for public employees; but it is also very bad for the broader public.

### **So let's build a government as good as the public servants who constitute it**

Concentrating power at the very top of the hierarchy has not yielded the state most Britons want; the recent election makes that abundantly clear. The grand missions can, implemented correctly, chart a path forward for the entirety of government. More can be accomplished by taking advantage of what I believe to be the government's most valuable asset: the talents, dedication, and mission motivation of the public sector.

The motivation and dedication of Britain's many dedicated public servants is part of what has led to this nation's greatest successes. It can do so again – if leadership is bold enough to let it. I hope for all of our sakes that the new government is up for the challenge.

**This essay is adapted from Dan Honig and Sam Freedman's post 'How Labour can fix the public sector: Figuring out how to let the workforce do their job' in [Comment is Freed](#). Dan's book *Mission Driven Bureaucrats* is being published by Oxford University Press in September 2024.**





# Growth, Prosperity and a New Economy

Britain's new government's mission for growth is its primary commitment, but will fulfilling it require a shift away from practices of neo-liberal economic theorising and practice? What might a new approach to the economy look like in practice? In this section, economists Wendy Carlin and Nick Romeo are joined by those trying to lead the transformation to a new economy on the frontline, Emily Bolton and Nick Plumb, and one of the country's leading experts on housing, Toby Lloyd. Together, they investigate what an economic alternative might look like and how it connects to the underpinning ideas of Ordinary Hope.



# The Alternative: how to build a just economy, with Nick Romeo and Wendy Carlin

As the general election campaign of 2024 reached its high-point, a small group of international economists and policymakers gathered together at the UCL Policy Lab to reflect on the possibility that the election of a new government would mark a turning point in the history of the British economy.

The immediate reason for the gathering was a visit to the UK from the celebrated American author, Nick Romeo. Romeo's book *The Alternative: How to Build a Just Economy* had recently been published to much acclaim. It sets out the possibilities of significant economic change.

In Romeo's own words, *The Alternative* is a book that aspires to do much. It searches for "plausible solutions to wealth inequality, environmental collapse, the evaporation of good middle-class jobs, the casualization of a growing number of workers, the outsized influence of investment capital, the erosion of democratic governance in private and public sectors, and more".

More than that, Romeo suggests that the answers to these challenges are already present amongst us, just waiting to be found. The "strongest evidence that alternative arrangements are viable is to show that they already exist", Romeo argues, before going on to outline a host of the most compelling new ways of conducting our economic lives together which he has detected in advanced economies across the world.

In conversation, Romeo is even more blunt. "There can be a sense that our big economic institutions have tended to treat economics as a kind of natural phenomenon," he said to us. "It is just something that happens. It's out there in the world. One can study it and observe it." And yet, Romeo insists, that is not the case. Economists, investors, business owners, entrepreneurs and economic policy-makers all have choices to make. And, what is more, Romeo believes they are increasingly making different ones than they have before.

"I think it is about shifting away from a naturalised view of issues – such as inequality – to a view that says we don't have to accept things as they are because they have always been. When, in fact, we have made choices to build the economy in which we live."

Romeo's book is littered with examples of those creating new tools and systems for growing a healthy economy and building a strong social settlement. And where lives are shaped by individuals and institutions choosing to question 'why does it have to be this way?'.

Yet viewing Romeo's work as romantic or radical is a misunderstanding of his core argument. Fundamentally, he is suggesting that we, as citizens and politicians, have choices – that there are options. Romeo believes we have a growing sense of frustration amongst the electorate because we have failed to question and explore alternatives.

It is in these alternatives that Romeo finds his Ordinary Hope.



“A big aim of my writing is to broaden our sense of what’s possible.”

One practical area that Romeo outlined in his discussions at UCL, and covers in depth in the pages of *The Alternative*, is the treatment of gig workers and their dependence on single large players in the technology-driven service sector. Romeo is not the first to point out that gig workers, and many small businesses for that matter, are forced to use new digital platforms that are taking a bigger and bigger share of the income being earned. Like others, he points out this is a significant market failure shaped by monopoly power. What is more, however, Romeo thinks he has seen an alternative emerge.

“What if you had a more horizontal market in which all the demand for labour was on a public platform that was not trying to profit maximise. So rather than taking 30 or 50% per transaction, per ride or delivery, what if you took 3 to 5% because it was a digital infrastructure dedicated to facilitating economic activity.” Romeo introduces us to the people who are leading just such an initiative.

And it is not just the gig economy. Throughout the discussion, Romeo combines the big and the small, often returning to the examples of state, regional, and city leaders who have led the way in helping major economic re-imaginings take hold.

“If you work at a smaller, more local level, it’s often quite plausible to find a lot of common ground with people,” he explains.

*The Alternative* dives into detail in several key areas. These include different models of ownership and corporate governance that have challenged conventional stakeholder capitalism in California to enable social enterprises to protect their core purposes. It also encompasses civic job guarantee programmes, which see local government bring local employers, training agencies and trade unions together to cut social security bills.

They also extend to participatory budget programmes, where democratic mechanisms enable citizens to participate in economic decision-making.

“There is a city in Portugal, just outside Lisbon, called Cascais,” Romeo explains. “A sizeable chunk of the municipal budget is allocated through a kind of direct democracy mechanism, where people can propose projects. They have to persuade other people that their ideas are worth funding. So, there’s a kind of campaigning and voting thing. This is very much at a grassroots civic level, think middle schoolers or high schoolers, as well as old people. Everyone’s eligible. So they go around and they try to persuade people at coffee shops, restaurants, parks, and they’re real projects that they can fund. They actually break ground on major infrastructure investments.”

For Romeo, believing in the possibility that comes from embracing local and human-level examples of change is crucial to delivering more systematic transformation for the long term. In the small, the big ideas can grow – from saplings comes a forest.

And it might just be that this new forest is taking shape. At the same discussion, the UCL academic Wendy Carlin, reminds the gathered groupings that a whole new paradigm of economic thinking might just be emerging in front of us.

Such a paradigm is characterised by new ways of thinking about the ethical foundations of our economy, our explanatory model of the economy itself, the key policy choices in front of us and the ways in which we talk about the economy in our everyday conversation.

When we have thought about those categories over the past 40 or 50 years, we have tended to see the economy in terms of negative freedoms and keeping the state out of our business. We have understood human beings as narrowly self-interested and rational. Our policymakers have called for the reduction of state expenditure and for the deployment of market mechanisms wherever possible. And we have talked about the economy, as Romeo says, as a kind of natural phenomenon, where human beings do well when they leave it alone, and where there is “no such thing as society”.

Now, though, Carlin suggests alternatives are coming into view.

We increasingly recognise that we should be pursuing a more just future, where we enjoy undominated social relations of equal dignity; where we protect the future of the planet and insist on an accountability of private and state power. At the same time, we recognise that rational individuals are not the only actors in an economy. Groups matter too, and power and influence is wielded in many subtle ways not just through market exchange. When those understandings shift, Carlin also outlines, then we become open to the kinds of policies that Romeo is outlining – job guarantees, new models of ownership and control, participatory budgeting. And we start to speak about the economy differently too, as dependent on a series of collective choices that must reflect what we care about in our ordinary lives.

As the participants at the UCL event listened to the exchange between Romeo and Carlin, and mapped it onto their own experiences, thoughts naturally returned to the agenda of the general election campaign and of the new government that was to follow.

Few of these ideas had explicitly appeared during that campaign itself. The debate had followed a fairly predictable pattern – with arguments about the parties promises (or absences of promises) on growth and spending, debt and taxes. But that is certainly not to say that the ideas were not percolating through nonetheless. Some parties, after all, were promising not just growth, but growth in every part of the country; they were arguing for prosperity that was not just compatible with a green revolution but dependent on it; and Labour, for one, were contending that strengthening the rights of working people in collective bargaining was not bad for productivity but likely to improve it.

Hidden in all of these claims might just be the beginning of what Romeo calls “the alternative”. It is the job of all of us who care about economic justice, he insists, to help the rest of the country to see it.

# Good growth for every part of our country, Emily Bolton

The current failures of our economic system and our politics are inextricably linked. In *End State*, James Plunkett highlights the connection between people's feelings about the economy and democracy "in America, 80% of the people who feel the economy isn't working are dissatisfied with democracy".

A 2024 OECD survey found that the UK has the second lowest trust in government of 30 countries. And this is indicative of a wider problem: people have lost trust with the whole "system" of business and politics that runs our country. The past year has compounded that with high profile stories reinforcing the sense that our current system is working at the expense of good people and the places we cherish, from the Post Office prosecution of postmasters, to the water companies' pollution of our beaches and rivers and the Grenfell tragedy.

Consequently, there are high stakes to the Government's growth mission. To be effective this mission has to be about more than money. It has to be about creating a system that benefits all, not just a few. If we are going to rebuild our country it cannot just be about growth, we need to be deliberate about the growth we need. The key question is: how can we create growth in a way that rebuilds trust, powers our national renewal and enables people and the places they love to thrive?

As a country, we have not historically managed the social implications of economic transitions well. In recent decades parts of our country have thrived and others have lost not just their prosperity and industry, but their heart. We need to recognise that there is a fundamental interconnection between how our economy works, the 'rules of the game', and the reality of people's day to day lives.

But there is room for optimism. We are on the vanguard of the green industrial revolution. The UK has led the world in wind energy and battery storage development and through both GB Energy and the National Wealth Fund we can advance this position. However, this shift will not feel, or be, different from previous economic transitions for ordinary people, unless we are intentional about it benefiting all of us.

Over the past two and half years my organisation, Our Future, has developed a new approach to seed the benefits of the green transition in post-industrial communities and to define the type of growth we are seeking. Our trailblazer is in Grimsby, a part of the country that is a microcosm of both the failures of the past and the opportunities of the future.

The town lost its fishing industry in the 1970s and this led to economic decline and a loss of identity, community and shared direction. The subsequent decades saw little change in the economic fortunes of the town. What the American economist Dani Rodrik calls "hyper-globalization" has not worked for Grimsby. At the same time, though, geographically the region is on the forefront of the UK's green economy. It is the gateway to the world's largest offshore windfarm and will play a central role in the decarbonisation of the UK's heavy industry, making up 40% of our national

industrial carbon emissions. People travel across the world to visit the offshore windfarm and learn from the cutting edge technology.

Our task is to make sure that the future really works for all the people of Grimsby. And that will not happen by chance. We need to be intentional about it.

### **It all begins by creating a shared definition of good growth**

This year we worked with Demos to run a democratic participation exercise, through Pol.is, to create a shared vision for the future of Grimsby. This was widely advertised across the town and available for anyone to participate in. 1,100 people got involved, voting over 50,000 times. Together they created a vivid picture of a thriving green town that believes in and backs its own people. People described how the town they wished to see would be “a renewable energy powerhouse” with “offshore wind and renewable energy benefits for local businesses and employs lots of local people in good jobs”. They also talked of inclusive cultures, young people having a reason to stay in the town and support for “local people to make small differences to create the ripple effect and make a massive change”.

When growth was referenced it was about what it delivers – a good quality of life and a place that is thriving. That also aligns with national voter behaviour. Prior to the 2024 general election [Pro Bono Economics](#) found that “increases in GDP that occur during a party’s time in office seem to bear very little direct relation to their electoral fortunes at a general election”. Increases in life satisfaction were a far better predictor of the government’s election success, perhaps feedback on what really matters to us all?

### **The next component of success is to build local economies with their own power and agency**

Post-industrial communities often suffer because distant decision-makers, disconnected from local realities, dictate their economic futures. Local Growth Plans, key to the new government’s strategy, need to provide the route map to build locally-rooted economies committed to their communities.

The plans need to consider not just employment and attracting new businesses but also ownership of economic assets of the past and the future. We need to create a model where those driving the economy in a place care about what matters to the town and that the town gets a share of the wealth generated. Currently, in Grimsby and many other places across the country, we have a model of asset owners, including absentee landlords and distant business owners, extracting wealth from the town and letting the things that matter to local people decline, from important historical buildings to the social capital in communities.

One route to this end is to establish financial frameworks that allow local communities to share in the profits. GB Energy and the National Wealth Fund offer a national answer. Alongside this, we need local communities to have a share in the wealth created in this green transition, especially when this wealth is fuelled by the natural resources of their hometown.

### **Reaching this goal will require us to create a local ecosystem that can help the town robustly respond to economic shifts**

The economic decline of towns across the UK proves the economic truth that areas relying on a single industry are unusually vulnerable. Between 1948 and 1960, the number of fisherman in the UK halved, and has been steadily declining ever since. Grimsby’s reliance on fishing meant that the wealth and job opportunities never recovered.

This is the way the economic roulette wheel works. Big external factors shake up industries and that leads some places to thrive and others to lose everything. Although, if we look a little further afield we see that some places decided not to enter the casino in the first place.

In the 1950s in the Spanish Basque region, a co-operative called Mondragon was established. It has created a local platform for building a diverse and robust economy that has weathered economic shocks. It now employs ~90,000 people across 95 businesses, generating ~11.4bn EUR in sales each year. In the aftermath of the global financial crisis Mondragon was able to help keep jobless levels in the Basque region to less than half the national average. It did this through enabling workers to move between businesses, make collective decisions to reduce pay, and provide access to an inter-business solidarity fund.

The new government’s growth strategy should support the creation of local economic ecosystems that are diverse; have access to flexible financial instruments to weather crises and are working in the long term interests of a thriving place and people.

### **Achieving this will help businesses root in the heart of the community**

Due to the globalised nature of our economy, there are not enough incentives for businesses to back and develop talent in the places they are based. There is often publicity about the number of jobs provided when big employers set up a new factory in a region. This is important but feels like the very lowest rung on the ladder when considering how an industry can contribute to the place it is located.

We need to be far more imaginative about how industry can be a partner in the transformation of our post-industrial towns. Alongside the growing green economy we should develop the infrastructure to build local supply chains and create institutions that can build world class skills for emergent industries - enabling people, places and our country to be world leaders.

In Grimsby, we are exploring the potential for an accelerator which will support the growth of businesses that enable the energy transition. This needs to be done differently. It cannot just be “located in” Grimsby, it has to be woven into the place – competitive businesses that work together to share skills, ideas, and innovations, and are connected with the identity of the area, local skills, assets, and opportunities. Examples of these businesses exist in many places – our ambition is to create a system in Grimsby that makes them the norm.

**This should enable us to create growth that delivers tangible benefits to people’s day to day lives.**

The concept of growth is very esoteric, despite economic policy touching every aspect of our day-to-day lives. Alongside long-term investment that will generate structural, sustainable change in the future, we need growth that delivers change today for people and communities. In our Pol.is survey people talked about wanting a green economy that contributes to the town.

We have an opportunity to rapidly scale the delivery of community energy solutions so that all homes and small businesses can have access to cheap renewable energy and the financial uplift of selling back to the grid. There is a [US Department of Energy model](#) that enables renters to benefit from cheap renewable energy through community solar projects. If we want everyone to benefit from the renewable transition these are the sort of initiatives we should take inspiration from.

Britain’s new government has set out its plan to take a proactive role in driving our national growth. In doing so it has an opportunity to change the rules of the game to ensure that this is “good growth” providing the fuel to reignite our Ordinary Hope. The task now is to meet that challenge.



# Planning for decent homes, Toby Lloyd

The new government has placed housebuilding at the heart of its strategy for economic growth, setting itself the ambitious target of building 1.5 million homes in England during the five years of the new parliament . This makes a lot of sense, because the need for more and better homes is right at the centre of both an urgent social crisis and many of our national economic problems. More than that, our homes, the neighbourhoods they make up and the towns and cities they are built in are the centre of our family and community lives. When we get housing as wrong as we have been doing for at least 40 years it undermines our prosperity, our health, our sense of community, our very identity.

But by the same token we can make millions of lives better and happier if we get housing right. What hope could be more ordinary than that of a decent home to raise a family in? Housebuilding has been central to every major drive for social and economic progress since at least the Victorian era. So why are we still wrestling with worsening housing poverty and sky-high rents, while struggling to build the number or the quality of homes we so obviously need?

It really should not be that hard. Housebuilding is not that technically complicated. Many of our homes are well over a hundred years old and still perfectly functional. Nor does it change rapidly in response to scientific breakthroughs, like, say, healthcare: we've been piling rocks on top of each other for at least 10,000 years without the technology changing that much. So it's odd that we've managed to make this basic need such a contested policy challenge, one that successive governments have tried and failed to resolve.

I think the main reason is precisely because housing cuts across the personal, the economic and the social: its very centrality to so many aspects of our individual and collective lives. That leads us to overload it with conflicting objectives which can't all be met at once. Polling shows most people think we need to build more homes, but also that we don't want them built in our area. We cheer every increase in our asset wealth that rising house prices bring, but bewail the inability of first time buyers, or our own children, to afford a home.

Rediscovering the Ordinary Hope of a decent home for everyone means we have to face up to these contradictions. The hardest fact to accept is that we cannot all be decently housed and all get rich from our homes at the same time, because property wealth is a non-productive, zero sum game. The classical economists knew this, and devoted much of their intellectual energies to solving the problem of economic rent, such as with property taxes, albeit with little success: by the start of the First World War the vast majority of people had to rent a home from tiny majority of landlords, often paying most of their wages for cramped and squalid rooms. The pioneers of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century social reform responded to the poverty and squalor of urban slums with more radical intervention. Public housebuilding programmes provided decent housing as a route to health, economic security and respectability for the masses, while regulation tightly controlled banking and private rental markets.

But housing quickly came to be seen as more than just a safe, decent place to live: 'a property owning democracy' offered the prospect of wealth accumulation and social status for all. For a while rising homeownership seemed to deliver on this promise, as property taxes were scrapped and deregulated mortgage markets channelled more credit into stoking the asset values of the new homeowners. But this inevitably created a boom-bust housing market that fatally undermined the settlement that had delivered so much Ordinary Hope in the middle decades of the century. Within twenty years of the liberalisation of mortgage credit in the 1970s, and only ten years after the Right to Buy, the rise of homeownership had stalled, social housing was declining fast and landlordism was returning. Today, we remain on a course heading back to the Victorian era, a world of huge property fortunes held by a few and housing-induced poverty for millions. Having abandoned the powerful tools of public interest development programmes and market regulation governments were only able to make endless tweaks to a failing system.

If we are to rediscover the Ordinary Hope of a better housing system, we have to revive the central elements of that mid-century settlement: a mixed economy in housebuilding and careful regulation of credit and property markets. In the twenty-first century the details of this outline prescription offer huge potential for a more diverse and relational economy by expanding the tiny points of light that pepper our housing system. Older people's and multi-generational co-housing schemes like OWCH in Barnet are a friendly, efficient alternative to isolation and failing care homes. A few public spirited stewardship landowners have created thriving – and wildly popular – new communities, like the Duchy of Cornwall's developments at Poundbury and Newquay. Brave councils have started building beautiful and sustainable social housing again, like Goldsmith Street in Norwich.

These pioneers may be exceptions to the rule of mediocre, profit-maximising development here, but they are increasingly the norm in many other countries. The car-free, green streets of new urban developments in Germany are wonderful places for kids to play and families to thrive. Singapore's government enables almost everyone to buy a home by tightly controlling the property market. Vienna's legendary mix of high quality social housing, regulated private renting and co-operative developments make it one of the most liveable and economically successful cities in the world. The Dutch are building whole cities based on active and public transport in which individuals and families can buy a plot and build their own home the way they want it. The Mayor of Barcelona is launching an ambitious, multi-stranded strategy to make housing more affordable, while Paris has revolutionised urban transport and replaced failed suburban estates with beautiful new neighbourhoods of mixed tenure housing. These models do very different things in very different contexts, but are all shaped by governments that are not afraid to intervene strategically in the market, to set the rules of the game firmly in the public interest, and then hand control over the details down to regional and local authorities, communities and individuals.

If these places can learn from past success and mistakes to make housing work better for people, so can we. But to embrace them we will have to let go of some deeply entrenched beliefs – primarily the assumption that housing can simultaneously be a secure family home, the basis of a vibrant, thriving community, and a tax-free get-rich-quick-scheme. Surely, we all know which one of those three we should rather let go of.

# Fixing the foundations: renewing our economy and society together, Nick Plumb

The debate around ‘fiscal black holes’ is acerbic. Such debate has been a feature of British politics since this year’s general election. “The public finances are worse than we thought,” is the refrain we hear from the new government’s ministers, as they try to pin responsibility for this on the previous government. Amongst policymakers, debate rages about what to do. Cut public spending to shrink the hole? Raise taxes? Borrow to invest and hope this leads to growth and increased tax take?

Less widely noted than this fiscal debate, is another debate. The argument about a ‘societal black hole’ that Sir Keir Starmer spoke of in his Rose Garden speech in Downing Street in late August.

“Because imagine the pride we will feel as a nation. When, after the hard work of clearing up the mess is done. We have a country that we have built together. Built to last.”

He was speaking about how it was incumbent on all of us to help close this black hole too. This concept of common endeavour has roots in the Labour tradition and is one of the most prominent features of the political story that Starmer is trying to tell, alongside the need to rebuild trust between citizens and state. Government intervention should pass this twin test. Do policies engage people meaningfully in shared endeavour? Do they build and maintain trust through accountability, reliability and responsiveness?

And it might just transpire that the task to fix the societal black hole is just as important in righting the British economy as the fiscal one.

## Restoring trust

The factors which have led to a decline in trust in politics are complex and overlapping. The past couple of decades certainly have not been short of political and institutional scandal. Everything from MP’s expenses and the Post Office Horizon saga to Liz Truss’ ‘mini-budget’ and ‘partygate’ have played their part. But it is much more than that. We are faced by a growing sense that politics is unable to respond to fundamental issues like the lack of real-terms wage growth over the past decade and a half. A recognition that in a globalised economy, many of the levers the government used to pull no longer have anything attached to the other end. An understanding that we, as a nation, are subject to huge external shocks beyond our control. Fundamentally, a sense that people’s votes have less impact than they once might have.

Across the globe, countries are grappling with declining trust in politics in different ways. There is a job to be done to ensure our 20th century democratic norms and institutions are brought into the 21st century. Technology will play a role, as it has done so spectacularly well in Taiwan. But there is also a need to bring power closer to people, to ensure that democracy can engage with the messy reality of ordinary life and not just be limited to a trip to the ballot box every few years. So devolution must be part of this picture, but what else needs to be done to make progress?

### Fixing the social and economic foundations

Closing this 'societal black hole' will require action on economic and social fronts. Support for the relationships and connections that sustain communities and the rebuilding of economic security. Boosting economic growth is part of this puzzle. However all too often, there is a disconnect between how politicians and economists see growth and how people live it.

With trust in politics flagging and the electorate more volatile than ever, delivering growth that has a real impact on people's everyday lives should be a central concern for our politics. But how do we do that?

At present, our political economy is disconnected from the lives of ordinary people and their aspirations for where they live. Large multinationals might be able to identify countrywide consumer trends, but they're unlikely to know what the needs of a community might be, let alone what people want the place they live to be like. For many, 'the economy' and the state it is in is experienced in their communities and neighbourhoods as much as in their pockets. Does the high street feel vibrant or run-down? Do they have the services and amenities they expect – pub, post office, park – on their doorstep? To build an economy on these ordinary hopes means building a political economy that is closer to people.

This isn't about rejecting large-scale investment or the modern economy but about recognising, as the UCL economist Wendy Carlin has, that in a mature economy, sustaining local communities is good for growth and good for ordinary people.

### Shared endeavour

So, how do we get there through shared endeavour? Too often, when we talk about partnership between state and business we think only of the national state and big business. If we want to build an economy based on Ordinary Hope, we also need to think about partnership at the neighbourhood level. Community business is often the way this hope manifests itself in places. These are locally rooted and locally accountable businesses that trade for community benefit.

In places like Plymouth and Sunderland, organisations like Nudge Community Builders and Back on the Map are working alongside communities to turn around the fortunes of their local high street. It is a similar tale in Hastings and the Knowle West neighbourhood in Bristol. Hastings Commons is developing affordable workspace and residential property in the heart of their town centre. WeCanMake is innovating to tackle the housing crisis in Knowle West and they have developed a playbook for how this could be replicated across the country.

The common thread that links all of these examples? Economic change which people can touch, see, and feel. Economic change which is built from the frustrations and aspirations of the communities in which they operate. Here, they understand that the GDP of the nation going in the right direction doesn't

necessarily mean positive change for the people of Plymouth, Sunderland, Hastings or Knowle West. It will only mean that if they make it so together.

### An emerging policy platform which passes this twin test

There is an emerging platform agenda across government which, if done right, would pass this twin test. The government made its English Devolution Bill a centrepiece of its first King's Speech. Through this it can legislate for an expansive Community Right to Buy. This new power would give communities first refusal when assets – with existing or potential community use – come up for sale. It could help revitalise our struggling high streets, and do so alongside communities with skin in the game. This should be accompanied by a supportive policy framework. An extended, expanded, and improved Community Ownership Fund, accompanied by targeted capacity-building support, is a vital part of the picture.

There is also more work to be done to close the loop between this and the financial difficulties local authorities find themselves in. In places like Birmingham, where hundreds of vital public assets are due to be sold, how might a revitalised community ownership agenda help get these assets into community hands rather than seeing them sold to the highest bidder and lost forever?

GB Energy has garnered lots of political and public attention. Indeed it is one of the most popular policies in the Labour manifesto. Underneath the neat branding, there is something which again has the potential to pass the twin test. The Local Power Plan is set to support community-led energy projects through grants and loans up to a value of £1bn to councils and community groups directly. This has the potential to give communities a stake in our transition to net zero and unblock opposition to this vital national infrastructure, but there is lots that needs to be done to get this right. Money cannot just get stuck with local authorities.

### Communities need to see tangible ownership and financial benefit as a result.

As well as specific interventions coming out of relevant departments, the government should help build the foundations of growth from the bottom-up. Building a new wave of community-level institutions like community businesses that are controlled by local people, would grant them a stake in the economy, help improve lives locally, and sustain themselves once Labour leaves office. The formation of these businesses could be supported by a national institution – say a Community Growth Network – that provides support for people and communities who want to set up these institutions and can help develop capacity where it does not exist already.

The job of closing our societal black hole won't be quick or easy. It also shouldn't mean reinventing the wheel. So much of this is happening in pockets across the country. The job of government should be to support, get alongside and nurture our communities to do more of this vital work.







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# Powering The Future through Clean Energy

The second of the new government's missions focuses on the desire to make the UK a Green energy superpower. But what does that mean to everyday citizens and how might they help ensure the transition is a success? We asked leading thinkers and practitioners in the push for a new, more sustainable future, Sam Alvis, from Public First, research specialist Rosie McLeod, Rich Wilson, CEO of the Iswe Foundation and David Powell from Climate Outreach for their perspectives.



# Net zero and the everyday, Sam Alvis

Solving climate change can seem far from an Ordinary Hope. It will take an extraordinary effort to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees. Reaching net zero in the UK - a country further ahead than most - is still a monumental task. The new government likes to talk of difficult tasks now leading to a better future tomorrow. That it will be hard, but it'll be worth it in the end. Their efforts to rebuild the public finances for example mean lower spending than hoped or higher taxes for some. Net zero is not in the same category. While it will be hard, it is not just for a single payoff far in 2050, when the UK's net carbon emissions are zero. Instead, the process can be worth it too. Treating climate as a multitude of everyday consumer decisions can mean many individual gains along the way.

The UK's route to net zero is easier than others. There is broad public support for the country tackling climate change, indeed good research suggests that electoral success now hinges on it. The public sees net zero as important to mitigate climate impacts and to protect future generations. In recent years, other benefits have come to the fore too. Clean energy is seen as the route to national security and as a way of bringing down bills.

Some argue that high support is fragile, people haven't *experienced* the journey to net zero yet. Most people turn their lights on as they always have, it means little to them that their electricity comes from wind turbines rather than gas ones. Commentators also point to increasingly vocal campaigns against electricity transmission as further evidence of the nice in theory, poor in practice. The next stage of net zero will interact much more with everyday life. It will cross from an environmental issue into fundamental values like privacy, ownership or personal habits.

The last government used Germany as their fable for how net zero would lose popularity when it interacts with voters. The Conservatives argued that a rushed German heat pump law, rapidly transitioning away from gas boilers in the midst of an energy and economic crisis, empowered the far right.

But this risk does not have to mean shying away from the transition. The far-right in Germany has grown steadily over years, they did not start with a campaign against heat pumps. Instead they twisted climate action as an emblem for the public's pre-existing concerns. The German Social Democrat-led coalition was perceived to be out of touch with the public, more focused with internal fights, than addressing the rising cost of living. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) was able to paint climate policy as something expensive, happening to people too quickly, with no clear immediate benefit.

Furthermore, net zero does not have to be grandiose or distant. Making a virtue of everyday concerns can turn that risk into a strength. Organisations like Round Our Way have already made great strides in communicating climate impacts, locally. We need a similar approach to climate action, ensuring the transition becomes a visible record of the government's connection to ordinary life. The new government has made a strong start in this regard - bills and cost of living have been central to their message.

Yet there is still the political reflex to talk about new jobs. This can risk taking the argument away from the everyday. The public sometimes sees promises of many new jobs as abstract or unlikely to materialise. They feel burned by previous promises of green jobs under Johnson that turned out to be mere bombast.

“You’d have to be pretty certain you were going to be secure in it – there’s been so much uncertainty in the last year that it would need to be long term. It’s fashionable at the moment isn’t it [the environment] but if it falls out of fashion are you going to be out of a job?” Female, nursery worker, Rotherham, 2022

“[when asked what they thought of the green jobs] I don’t suit them... I don’t know. They just sound a bit complicated” Female, unemployed, Rosyth. Fife, 2024.

Moreover, for all the concerns about how things are right now, most people want the essence of their day-to-day lives to remain broadly the same, hopefully get a bit easier or a bit cheaper. Currently, aspects of net zero are seen as in competition with that sense of normality. While there’s a lot of goodwill, in focus groups we regularly hear things like “if I could”, “If money wasn’t a thing”. Any sense of forcing things too fast could well set us up for a German-style failure.

Going with the grain of the everyday is crucial but it means a new approach to narrative and policy. It will mean a shift in the language that the government uses when it speaks, and also for whoever else is given the platform to do so.

Language matters in all of this. The public do not talk about retrofitting their homes or greening them. People talk about renovations and upgrades. They’re not looking to find efficiencies, they’re looking for improvements. Charging an electric vehicle should be much more like your phone, little and often where you are, maybe with a spare charger if you’re out all day - rather than driving somewhere specific to fill up all in one go. Public First research points to central government being most effective when it’s talking about the broad national and personal benefits of the transition - but only if that’s made relatable.

Timing matters too. We’re not expecting people to make changes tomorrow. Most people will swap to an electric vehicle when they change cars anyway. Most people will install a heat pump when they’re doing other home renovations or their boiler fails. They need the information to be available when they make that choice, not feel like they’re being forced to make that choice too early.

Actors matter as well. Government will need to loosen the centre’s grip on net zero. Both the timing of, and type of changes will look different across the country. Some areas will go faster on heat pumps, other communities, like my hometown Bristol, will have a heat network. Rural areas will use more electric vehicles than urban ones. There are efforts under way. Local Area Energy Plans and Regional Energy Strategic Planners will hopefully

mean a transition that is more diverse across space, but also more effective.

As my colleagues said in ‘Upgrade: How to Deliver Better Homes by 2030’, no single actor is trusted at every stage of, for example, the home decarbonisation process. One way of overcoming this is to think more about relationships between people, rather than of organisations doing things to people. People care about climate change because they care about their families and younger generations. As the work of economist Robert Frank shows, people are also far more likely to pick up new technologies if families, friends or neighbours have already. This social contagion though will only work if the government recognises the importance of place, and therefore provides greater space for local government to act.

A relational approach could also send things backwards when things go wrong. It only takes one bad heat pump installation to put off those same friends and families. The downside of myriad actors is confusion from households over their rights and protections, and the possibility of bad actors using rapid growth of new tech to take advantage of them. Government needs to back up its rhetoric on benefits with clearly set out consumer protection frameworks for when things don’t go right.

Government should tackle net zero by turning it into a series of deeply ordinary decisions. Consumers make decisions for 1,000 reasons. Like buying the latest phone, they might just think it’s cool to have better tech, or to compete with a mate that does. They might see it as the route to better financial security. Or it might be that they want to do their bit for the climate. It doesn’t really matter. Central government cares about the sum total of the decisions, but households can benefit from each one along the way. Those decisions are not just influenced by Whitehall but a whole range of actors across the country. Focusing more on those moments, and providing the power to those local organisations best suited to support them, can move net zero from a single monumental government task, to an eminently achievable series of personal ones.

# Deeper democracy and the climate crisis, Rosie McLeod and Rich Wilson

Meeting the climate crisis means accelerating action by *everyone*: communities, government, companies and beyond. To do this, we need to get better at having conversations that don't need to be consensual but do need to build hope, respect and drive action.

More broadly, the new government will depend on citizens' participation and action to deliver its five missions, each of which is complex and ambitious. Action by the state alone, even if we could afford it, will be insufficient. Better decisions are made when they are done in partnership with people, and improved outcomes are only achieved when interventions truly reflect and respond to communities' understanding of the challenges we face, be they economic, public health or environmental. The government needs to create the conditions for politicians, civil servants, citizens and communities locally and nationally to come together to achieve these missions.

Old-style, top-down, statist approaches are not just too expensive and unpalatable in a mature democracy; they cannot generate the solidarity and empowerment our communities so desperately need. We all need hope that people around us want to think and act as 'we' and not just 'I', that we can and will resolve challenges together, and that the systems around us enable rather than impede that. So we need active practice and mechanisms to help us think about 'us', a common good, and a sustainable shared future.

Across the UK, people are already organising to create the new systems that build community power. The [Humanity Project](#) has identified over 60 citizens' assemblies being set up by communities across the UK to help them address the issues they face, in places like [Cooperation Hull](#) or the [Stroud Assembly](#). What's new about this wave of citizens' assemblies is that they are not initiated by government or funders like the lottery, but by communities themselves who have concluded their best course of action is to create new governance chambers designed specifically to address today's challenges. Uniting all these projects is the recognition that relying on governance as usual is high risk, and that citizens' assemblies might provide a fulcrum where new governance models and projects can be catalysed to address the crisis. It's the epitome of a Buckminster Fuller theory of change: "You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete."

Citizens' assemblies have been held on the topic at national and local levels in recent years, such as the 2020 UK Climate Assembly, 2023 'People's Plan for Nature' Assembly and several local authority-level assemblies. They have all produced recommendations for government, business and public action. Yet government institutions have implemented very few of these. Even if policyholders are in favour, they can get stuck in deadlock and political attention often dissipates.

For people to have a genuine stake, they need some power over the process and outcomes. When deliberation is framed simply as an event-based process that docks straight into an institution, it stays tied to top-down approaches. The chance to build solidarity and solve problems isn't

realised. At worst, there's a risk that deliberative events provide legitimacy for governments and nothing more.

Learning from deliberative approaches at their best shows that we need more power-literate approaches to dialogue and action, focused on systemic change, not just policy change. Deliberative conversation and mobilising action can go hand in hand when we use a more sophisticated analysis of where power lies and how to leverage it. [Iswe Foundation](#) believes its real business should be both influencing policy *and* helping citizens reclaim collective power to address the issues they want to. This means using the 'insider' route to change, but also embracing the power of 'outsiders' to shape debate and stimulate action.

The [Coalition for a Permanent Global Citizens' Assembly for People and Planet](#), being launched in September this year at the UN Summit of the Future, is an ambitious example. Its purpose is to accelerate action on climate change by inviting everyone to the table, improving COP30's chance of success through mass citizen action and mobilisation behind key priorities. It aims to demonstrate a new global governance infrastructure that's demographically representative of the global population, focused both on influencing powerholders and on building solidarity to galvanise action. For its Core Assembly, anyone can be invited to join a sample of 300 people who are selected by sortition and monitored to ensure global and vulnerability representativeness.

But it is also open: anyone can participate in Community Assemblies, with a digital infrastructure for people to run their own, in settings like community centres, libraries, schools and organisations. These follow the same learning journey as the core assembly but over a time period that works for the community. Participants themselves can shape the terms of debate, are treated as active agents, and empowered to act as spokespeople. Citizen action, increases in solidarity, and participants' learning are monitored as intended impacts.

Citizens assemblies like this are just one of the ways that we can strengthen and expand our capability to act on the issues we care about. UCL Professor and social entrepreneur, Sir Geoff Mulgan has argued for a 'hybrid fusion of approaches' – of formal representative democracy alongside open, participatory processes, with both active and passive engagement of significant proportions of the public. We can think of a democratic ecosystem in which we weave different democratic practices together, as Josh Lerner encourages in his recent [white paper](#).

Not everyone wants to participate in difficult conversations. Many powerholders are not committed to leasing any control. And no perfect solutions to our crises will be found. But a just transition will take a rebalancing of resources and support towards marginalised communities, and rebalancing our democratic processes at local, national and global levels will be essential to its achievement.



# A more ordinary climate story, David Powell

Just before the election, we went to the seaside. Together with More in Common, we at Climate Outreach ran focus groups in a few coastal constituencies, like Clacton and Hartlepool. We wanted to hear the real climate stories of people in places caricatured or even feared by greeny campaigners or commentators.

In Clacton, voters were set to vote in Nigel Farage, a man who hates wind farms and describes them as “useless”. So you’d have been justified in thinking people in Clacton hate wind farms too. There are no shortage of them to hate. Stand on the front at Clacton-on-Sea and you can’t miss the great big Gunfleet Sands offshore wind farm. It’s been out there for a decade, merrily spinning round on the horizon. Plenty of time to make enemies.

But here’s the thing. Pretty much everyone we spoke to thought Gunfleet is fab. “They look amazing,” said one of our participants, we will call him Adam, “and I think they’re a good thing.” Another participant, Katy, agreed. “I love them. I think they’re a good idea. I mean we should have a lot more out there.”

It was the same right across our seaside towns. People *really* like renewables: they are seen as good news, bringing jobs and secure energy to the country, and often something to be actively proud of locally.

Does that feel like a surprise? It surprised some of the politicians I talk to about it. MPs (and many of the rest of us) have long thought there’s more opposition to things like wind power than there is. It’s understandable, to an extent: parliamentary inboxes are dominated by the noisiest voices - amplified by social media and unhelpful bits of the press.

But we need to catch up with the new normal. You used to be weird if you cared about climate change. Try talking about it in the pub a decade ago and you’d find yourself drinking alone. Now though - with apologies to Tim Walz - these days the weirdos are people who don’t think climate change matters. In Climate Outreach’s pre-election Britain Talks Climate research, we found only 15% of people said they’d vote for a party that slowed down the pace of ‘net zero’.

There is, as the last Prime Minister found out, no real market for taking the wheels off climate action. Again I think this surprised some in policy and politics. That surprise may explain much about how politics has talked about climate change until now - strangely detached from ordinary life, and strangely timid - and why a new type of climate story is needed.

The new government has big plans for climate action, which is a good thing. It’s hit the ground running and can’t be accused of talking down the economic potential of its new clean energy mission. But the personal touch has still felt missing. This matters.

Listen to people and you find that phrases like “net zero” either don’t mean anything or, worse, feel cold, technocratic, uncaring. Instead people talk to us in plain language about the changing seasons they’re seeing, or the



flooding they've endured, or the worry they or their families have about climate change writ large. And where they get the most excited about the transition - like Katy and Adam - it's where it feels like something they can touch and feel, and perhaps even get excited about, as the backdrop to everyday life.

And that's where the danger lies too. The emissions cuts to come are going to be more up close and personal than anything seen so far. Political pitfalls lurk within.  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the emissions cuts ahead need people to in some way *do something differently* to help make them happen. Like our homes, and how we heat them. Our cars, where we can drive them, and how much it costs. The jobs we do now and those our kids will do. And plenty more besides. This stuff is ordinary, and its cultural, and authentic and empathetic citizen engagement is every bit as mission critical as engineering and economics.

The climate story for the next decade needs to feel like everyone's story. Normal, can-do, exciting, plain-speaking, and an answer to the stresses we all face. The risk is that by failing to connect with the ordinary then this grandest of projects can be portrayed as out of touch. At best that means progress will be slow, take-up weak, deployment rates less swooshy. At worst, it's a red rag to the populist bull.

Take heat pumps - an impressive, if currently expensive, technology to replace gas boilers. Only 1% of the country currently has them: that will need to increase ten-fold by 2030. The comms challenge is that right now most people would rather stick with the devil they know - their boilers - seeing heat pumps as newfangled, costly to install, and unreliable. That's a problem not just of a lack of demand in the short term, but also a honeypot for those seeking to delay or disrupt climate action. Look at Germany, where the far right have seized on that country's push for heat pumps as a powerful symbol of the wokepocalypse.

What's the answer? Well, making heat pumps cheaper and easier to install, for sure. But also in helping to make heat pumps feel like normal, a good option, and something people you know are already doing. After all the people we trust the most are those we already have strong relationships with in our lives. And heat pump owners tend to be evangelical when they've had the work done. This is persuasive. As someone in Edinburgh told us at the end of last year, while they weren't sure at first, "my parents got a grant to get an air source heat pump. They got it installed. It's already saving them money. They're finding it really good." Nesta's 'visit a heat pump' scheme is an excellent template for what could happen in every town and city across the UK: showing that tech like this is normal, already here, and brilliant.

Citizen climate engagement is, rightly, a new priority for this government and we're here to help. As a guiding principle, the more the climate story feels real, grounded in the things we care about in the here and now, and works out from trusted relationships we already have, the better.



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# Safe, Secure and Welcoming Communities

The summer of 2024 will not only be remembered for the heroism of the Olympics and Paralympics, but sadly also for the terrible unrest that stretched across England, with far-right attacks on vulnerable communities. It was a moment that reminded us all that hope is dependent most of all on security and safety. Polly Curtis, Chief Executive of Demos, Jake Puddle, Senior Researcher at British Future, Christian Dustmann, Professor of Economics at UCL, and Stefan Baskerville, Assistant Director at Citizens UK, reflect here on what this experience means for the government's mission to guarantee safe and secure communities.

# National mobilisation of communities after the riots, Polly Curtis

The enduring, horrific image of this summer's riots was of racist criminals trying to set fire to a hotel full of their fellow human beings. But it was followed by a powerful image of hope: of communities coming together afterwards to clean up the streets. These two images presented two versions of Britain, and it is in moments such as these that the nation has to decide collectively which it wants to be.

Those community responses to the violence across the country, with neighbours sweeping the streets and builders fixing damaged premises for free, told a story of Ordinary Hope in action. On that Thursday morning, when the country woke up braced for reports of more violence and were met instead with a sea of front pages celebrating the anti-racist marches and community clean-ups, it was as if a red line had been drawn. Not only the affected communities, but the police, the government and the media all spoke with one voice, saying that racist violence is wrong, and that isn't the country we want to be.

What hasn't happened since, but what offers the biggest potential, is to turn that story into a driving force for the decade of national renewal Britain's new government is promising. For all the warnings of how hard it's going to be to kickstart the economy, fix public services and unite a nation divided by hardship, we're missing a positive, aspirational goal that will help us weather the sacrifices and compromises we're going to have to make to get there. We need this story of Ordinary Hope to work towards.

The renowned political scientist Robert Putnam, in his book *The Upswing*, documents the fortunes of American society through a series of graphs charting the markers of a strong society: economic equality, social capital, trust, loneliness, and a more united and less polarised society. All have followed the same bell curve pattern over the last century - improving to a post war peak, then declining ever since. Putnam then examines not what the conditions were at the peak of that curve, but what happened to start the upswing in the first place. What he found is that while these markers all move together, economic equality lags behind the others. His hypothesis: to make a prosperous society, you need first to create a united one.

Putnam's first point is that economic improvement does not right the wrongs of society, but the other way round: you need a political project to unite people to make it happen. These things don't move without political leadership, a political narrative and a deliberate, explicit political project.

His second is that these changes need to be driven from the ground up - grassroots mobilisation is essential, local solutions should be shared on a national scale and national leadership is vital to turn those movements into a political project that can last. What the Ordinary Hope project has done is enable some of the middle part to happen, to create links between the grassroots mobilisations that already exist across the country, to share them and to propose that they inform a narrative to bring the country together for a decade of national renewal.

There are tantalising glimpses of this in the language coming out of the new government. Sir Keir Starmer alluded to some of this in his recent speech. “The riots didn’t just betray the sickness,” he said in his August address. “They also revealed the cure. Found not in the cynical conflict of populism, but in the coming together of a country. The people who got together the morning after all around the country - with their brooms, their shovels, their trowels - and cleared up their community. They reminded us who we really are.”

A similar national effort will be required to unite the country for the renewal the nation needs, and to deliver the new government’s missions. As we see elsewhere in this collection, we won’t achieve net zero without changing how we move around and consume energy; we won’t fix the NHS without changing our expectations of the health system and renegotiating the roles of hospitals, society and employers; we won’t reduce crime without rebuilding trust in the police forces; and we won’t achieve growth without embarking on a massive house-building programme that will require communities around the country to adjust to new neighbours.

We need a story that explains why we need to come together to achieve these audacious missions, and the world it will create for us, our children and our neighbours - whoever they may be. And alongside that story we need a different operating model to get there. The new operating model - what Demos has called the collaborative democracy - is one where our communities, our institutions, workforces, civil society and the private sector, come together to harness our collective energy to deliver change.

This means involving people in decision-making at different points in the policy cycle to build the mandate for changes and give everyone a stake in them. It means better communication about why the sacrifices are worth it. And it means politicians starting by trusting the people to be part of it. The scale of the challenges are such that we need a big state, a big society and the powerful influence of business and employers all weaponized in the same direction.

Ordinary Hope - of the kind embodied in the aftermath of those sickening riots - thrives in our communities on a daily basis. The challenge is for the system to learn that lesson, and the goal of the government should be to present the vision that can align all the forces of the state, society and the private sector in the same direction.



# Creating connections, Jake Puddle

Addressing the causes of this summer's unrest will require deep thinking about how we forge closer and better-connected communities, more resilient to hatred and misinformation. There will be no quick fixes to our creeping societal polarisation. Yet the creative arts may offer some important and underexplored ideas.

As part of new Creating Connections research by British Future and the Social Purpose Lab at University of the Arts London, we have investigated the unique potential of the arts to connect communities across generations, faiths and cultures. Speaking to arts groups and members of the public in a series of focus groups, we stopped in Bradford, a city with its own history of public disorder. The riots of 2001 led to a [report](#) by Lord Ouseley, claiming the city had "struggled to redefine itself as a modern [...] multi-cultural area and has lost its spirit of community togetherness".

Sat in a local church-cum-arts-studio, surrounded by the burble of conversation and the munching of biscuits, this tense chapter of Bradford's history felt distant. We spent time speaking to participants of [Cecil Green Arts](#) (CGA) a local community interest company that runs workshops designing lanterns, puppets and other fun crafts. A group ranging from a refugee to retirees who had spent their lives in Bradford shared what these activities had meant to them.

"Last year, my partner had died and within a further four weeks my mother had died. [...] Retirement parties or holidays were replaced with funeral arrangements and legal requirements. The first CGA workshops that I went to were pretty much the first significant thing that I did following those deaths. [...] Art can be very absorbing and keeps you in the moment, out of repetitive thoughts. It was fun and exciting. It was a completely new set of people and a new experience, so indirectly reaffirming that new possibilities can exist. There are fewer state support structures that exist and I think the arts are very important."

"I like making things, but you can get very solitary doing that. It's very nice to be in a space where people are just getting on with making things and you have a bit of social interaction. I'm not terribly good at chatting, without any structure so it's very good for me socially."

Society can often feel more fragmented and individualistic than any of us want, as we spend [more time online](#) and real-world opportunities to interact decline. Yet a golden thread running through our discussion with Cecil Green Arts was that the creative arts brought a joyful opportunity for coming together, with broad appeal across people of different ages and backgrounds. Older participants tended to speak of making friends and tackling isolation. The interactivity of arts helped lower the social pressure and daunting feeling of meeting new people. Younger and unemployed participants spoke of looking for 'something to do' and shared how getting involved improved their confidence. Internship opportunities and chances to help run sessions had given them a new sense of agency and independence. Participants largely did not come with the intention of seeking friends from different walks of life to themselves. Yet the gentle

process of co-creating and collaborating to design shared artworks and performances had knitted neighbourly connections and friendships across a wide mix of backgrounds that, in many cases, had lasted for years.

“I didn’t know who I was going to meet and then we all sort of gelled and talked.”

Bradford still had its tensions from a prejudiced fringe, and some residents in the group shared experiences of ableism and racial abuse. However, those old enough to remember the 2001 riots reflected how a growing majority now feel confident and proud of the city’s diversity. The participants come together each year for a number of parades to display their lanterns at the local park with music and fireworks, an event that attracts hundreds. This small, repeated tradition of bringing light in the darkness was felt to speak across cultures and, over time, participation had snowballed. In another local focus group with the general public, an attendee of the parade remarked how “it’s a really multicultural celebration of everything in Bradford.”

Crucially, these community connections were made possible by trusted grassroots facilitators in CGA, who over several years had built trust and recognition in the area to help all feel welcome, irrespective of class or culture. Bradford becomes the next *City of Culture* in 2025 and is gearing up to see an increase in arts investment, as part of a strategy to celebrate “its cultures and its people”.

As one facilitator of CGA explained, part of Bradford’s identity and pride came from its “DIY-ness, because of our poverty – there’s a lot of people that just make things happen, rather than assuming it’s going to happen”. The group’s success was felt to have been built on the foundation of being jointly owned and shaped by all involved. When asked about *City of Culture* in our focus groups, participants and members of the public wanted to see similar, proactive community engagement to feel valued and heard in the design of cultural programming.

As Britain confronts the far-right violence that spread rapidly across towns and cities this August, there is no silver bullet to fix the foundations of community cohesion. There has never been a proper social cohesion strategy in England, despite four substantial policy reviews over the past 25 years. Proactive thinking is needed across government departments and institutions to each understand the unique part they can play to support activity at local and community level.

Nonetheless, as policymakers look for remedies to the riots, this forward thinking should not overlook the connective potential of the creative arts, particularly at a time when funding and spending has seen deep, long-term cuts. Few other cultural assets are as powerful for inspiring a shared and inclusive sense of identity, nor for fostering the social contact across differences that research has proven can help strengthen trust and reduce prejudice.

In her first speech as Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport , Lisa Nandy announced a vision to “celebrate and champion the diversity and rich inheritance of our communities and the people in them”. The new government’s challenge now will be to turn rhetoric into reality, supporting communities not through top-down didacticism but with the spaces and resources to express themselves – widening opportunities for the arts to enable moments of common ground and coming together.

**Creating Connections is a research project by British Future, funded by the Social Purpose Lab at University of the Arts London. A full report, featuring polling, case studies and policy proposals, will be published in Autumn 2024.**

# Context and consequences: getting policy right for refugees, with Christian Dustmann

## James Baggaley

You have spent many years investigating the economics of migration and the ways in which refugees can be effectively integrated into new societies. One of the countries that you studied closely is Denmark. What have you learned from that?

## Christian Dustmann

Denmark experienced significant refugee migration in the 1990s and 2000s, and refugees came from countries of no dissimilar origin to those coming to Britain today. My colleagues and I studied a large reform programme called "StartAid" which was implemented in 2002. It cut the benefit transfers to refugees who got refugee status after the reform's implementation date by up to 50%. That reform intended to incentivise refugees to work and integrate into the labour market. We did see an increase in labor force participation, looking at those the reform directly impacted. However, overall, that increase only affected some individuals and was pretty short-lived. We hypothesised that one reason was a lack of demand for the type of low-skilled work refugees could supply. To test that, we utilised the fact that refugees were quasi-randomly allocated across municipalities. We found indeed that the reform was more effective in municipalities where demand for unskilled labour was higher. So, what do we learn from that? Reforms that are intended to incentivize labor supply are only effective if there is a demand for the type of work the target individuals can offer. This, we believe, is an important insight beyond the particular reform we have studied.

We also studied the effect the reform had on other family members, in particular, children of affected refugees. We found that crime increased, particularly among women, and here, especially subsistence crime such as shoplifting. We also found that crime among teenage children increased significantly in the longer term. Within the first five years, crime rates of refugees affected by the reform rose by five percentage points for adults and 12 percentage points for juveniles. Among school-age children at the time of reform exposure, the lower transfer rates reduced their average educational attainment by six months, driven by increased school drop-out rates at ages 16 and 17, where many children instead took up work to supplement family income. In the longer run, the lower educational attainment of children resulted in significant reductions in labour earnings. The reform also led to lower test scores among younger children, and lower pre-school enrolment and self-rated well-being. Overall, we find that 15-16 years after the implementation, the reform had generated a negative return for the average refugee family.



What do we learn from all that? StartAid failed to sustain employment and self-sufficiency, particularly in municipalities where low-skilled work is in low demand. Moreover, welfare reforms to increase labour supply through reduced transfer payments can have unintended and detrimental consequences for children. In our study, these adverse effects on children's education, labour market performance, and crime rates outweigh, in the longer run, the short-term gains from increasing the labour supply of their parents.

#### **James Baggaley**

I think one of the things that struck me is that it is a great example of where you've seen fairly simplistic political arguments come into contact with the complexity of the real world.

#### **Christian Dustmann**

So that's a very good way to phrase it. Many policies and implementations focus on the intended outcomes and ignore potentially unintended consequences.

#### **James Baggaley**

Are there examples from Denmark or other countries where they have understood this complexity and responded effectively in making refugee policy? What are the important measures that help integrate refugees?

#### **Christian Dustmann**

The decision about whether to grant asylum or not has to be made as soon as possible. Moreover, genuine assistance to integration is vital. Many countries don't allow asylum seekers to work, and that leads to alienation from the labor market. Research shows we want the decisions on whether to grant asylum to be made as soon as possible. If then the courts sustain the refugee claim, we want refugees to integrate into the labour market and the wider community. This needs support - further education, help to transfer existing skills, providing support to acquire language proficiency are important support measures. The labour market is the best integrator, and refugees should be supported to find work as soon as possible.

Many countries allocate refugees randomly to areas, to equally distribute the burden of providing housing, etc. But you really want to encourage refugees to go where the jobs are, especially the jobs they can do or want to do. Our work shows that the economic outcomes of refugees who have been allocated to areas with more of the type of jobs they can actually do are much better than when they have been allocated to areas where these jobs are in sparse supply.

If we look at the demand side, it's important to work together with employers to bring refugees into work and to use their skills. This is particularly important in institutionalized labor markets, like Germany, where many jobs require certifications, such as apprenticeship training. Refugees often have the training that is needed but lack the certificates. The role of policy, together with employers, is to find ways where these skills can be easily transferred to the host country's labor market.

And then, of course, many things can be done at the community level to help people find jobs, integrate, and be part of the community.

# Everyone's problem, Stefan Baskerville

“We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly”  
Martin Luther King, Jr

Seemingly in a flash, the tragedy in Southport was exploited and turned into racist and Islamophobic riots across the UK. Some people looked on in horror from afar, via TV news, or doom-scrolled on X. For others it was closer to home; their street torn up, the local library burned, shop windows kicked in, the temporary accommodation surrounded, the neighbourhood no longer safe. For others still it felt personal, targeted for being Muslim, a migrant, or a refugee. At Citizens UK we invited our members to an online meeting to share what was happening in different parts of the country. 120 people from our member organisations showed up with only a few hours notice. The mood was sombre. Fear and sadness, tinged with anger, dominated the feeling that evening.

We listened to each other as people shared their distress. Muslim women and children felt unable to leave their homes. An annual summer holiday for 100 families, organised by one London mosque, was cancelled for the first time in its 25 year history. Muslim leaders in Liverpool expressed disbelief; ‘I never thought it could happen here’. People recalled what it was like in the 70s and 80s when the National Front were on the streets. Staff at NHS trusts were taking taxis to work for fear of being abused or attacked on public transport. The list of target locations circulating online for the next wave of riots, struck fear into people about what was going to happen to their neighbourhoods. One woman in the north east told us she had been invited to go and stay elsewhere in her city, to keep safe. “I will not”, she said, “this is my neighbourhood and I am going to face it whatever comes”.

It was profoundly shocking and depressing, and for many it was a wake up call. The speed of the escalation was a stark reminder of the fragility of peace and order, and the role we all have to play. Our ability to live in safe, secure and welcoming communities depends on the behaviour of ordinary people, on their consent, participation and engagement. Just like our democracy itself. Apathy, disengagement, and the loss of hope are ingredients for chaos, division, and ultimately, if things are allowed to get that far, violence. The fact that this could happen is everyone's problem. We all have a common interest in law and order, in our streets being safe, in being able to go to school, to work, to the shops without fear. It's foundational to our social contract. We have a right to expect it and we owe it to each other.

Underlying what took place this summer lies pervasive and deep deprivation and a widespread sense that the country and its public services are broken. In Liverpool, for example, there is new construction down on the waterfront, and more investment yet to come, but the benefits are not seen less than a mile away in the north of the city where there is a housing shortage and significant poverty. When communities are excluded from the benefits of investment and growth, it compounds a sense of loss, isolation and alienation which sooner or later finds its expression in depression, or rage.

What hope is there if the country can slip that easily into violence? The Wednesday evening that week in August provided part of the answer, as the strength of the anti-racist counter-demonstrations became clear in Brighton, Bristol, Liverpool, Newcastle, Sheffield, Southampton, Walthamstow and elsewhere. Asylum Link Merseyside was on the list of far right targets for that night. Advice from the police had been sought and the windows were boarded up. A hundred asylum seekers who usually get their meal there, were asked to stay away for their own safety. In the event, hundreds of counter demonstrators packed the street outside St Anne's church, and the far right were nowhere to be seen. In defence of the building, the local Catholic priest, a veteran of Toxteth since the 1980s, stood alongside the leaders of Al Rahma, Liverpool's largest mosque, and it turned into a celebration. "This is who we are, and how we want to be known", he said.

Less high profile work was also happening. Quietly, in Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle and elsewhere, our member organisations were making phone calls, sending messages, paying visits in small groups to the targeted communities to let them know they were not alone. But beyond the immediate response, what will make our communities safe and welcoming in the long-term?

### **Hope, accountability and change**

First, civil society organisations need to focus on building relationships across difference and taking action together. Our experience is that practical action, focused on issues of common concern, provides the best means of sustaining ongoing relationships between different communities. The first issue is often small and local, like winning a new street crossing or improved lighting in a local park. But that can be an entry point into more and more ambitious campaigns which eventually lead to change on a much bigger scale, like the Living Wage movement. A mentor of mine once told me, 'as organisers we have to be peddlers of hope'. Hope requires action, as Jon Stokes argued in the first volume of *Ordinary Hope*, it means people are able to do something that has a measurable impact on the things that affect them. When we build a broad-based Citizens alliance, we're creating a means for people from our member organisations to have some power, to act together and have an impact on the places where they live. We're in the business of weaving trust, explicitly aiming to organise in a way that builds relationships across boundaries of difference.

Second, we need more devolution from central government, so that decisions are taken closer to the ground and there is more local control. We need politicians who are willing to be in accountable relationships with the communities they serve, who don't think that accountability starts and stops at election time. It means creating a seat at the table for the civil society organisations to which people belong and in which they participate: schools, universities, faith groups, health trusts, charities, unions and more. It means a dialogue about the solutions to the problems we face and room for civil society to influence and contribute to the decisions that are taken.

At Citizens UK we're ready to partner with national, regional and local government on policy and implementation.

Third, we need government to deliver tangible change in people's lives. Three days before the General Election, Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner attended an assembly of 2000 Citizens UK members from across the country and committed to work with us on a wide range of issues. We presented a manifesto to her that was rooted in the experiences of our people. It included ending the scandal of child homelessness, with more than a hundred and sixty thousand children living in temporary accommodation; providing statutory counselling in schools to get every young person access to the mental health support they need; making the pathway to citizenship timely, affordable and fair; and implementing the real living wage for all workers in health and social care.

What happened this August demands an urgent and sustained response from government and from civil society which goes beyond the prosecutions and the clean up. No one should be made to feel unsafe in the place where they live or targeted for who they are. Just imagine if the riots weren't a one-off, but a sign of things to come. We all have an interest in preventing them from happening again, and that requires a contribution from all of us.



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DRINK

# THE BEACH HUT



**SPECIALS**

Locally Made  
Beacon Farm  
Ice-Cream  
Lots of Delicious  
Flavours  
Please See other  
Board →

**Slush Menu**  
- Strawberry  
- Blue Raspberry  
- Mango + Orange  
- Small Kids Slush 1/2oz  
- Mix Flavours  
Slush + Whippy Top  
Slush sizes  
- small, Medium, Large  
- extra large + Twister Cup

Beacon Farm  
Ice-Cream  
other Board →  
Sweets, Rock, Lollies  
inside



**Fairtrade coffee**

Americano  
sm £1.25 reg £1.50 lg £2.25

Latte  
sm £1.50 reg £2.00 lg £2.50

Cappuccino  
sm £1.25 reg £1.75 lg £2.50

Mocha  
sm £1.25 med £2.00 lg £2.50

tea  
sm £1.10 reg £1.40 lg £2.20

Herbal + fruit tea  
sm £1.00 lg £1.50

**Milkshakes**  
Made with a scoop  
of Beacon Farm  
Ice-cream

Vanilla  
Chocolate  
Raspberry  
Strawberry  
Banana

**CRAB SET  
+ FREE BAIT**

**BUCKETS + SPADES  
FISHING NETS**

**CANDY FLOSS  
ROCK DIMMIES +  
LOLLIES**

A selection of  
booja booja vegan  
ice cream



# DRIFT





# Expanding Opportunities for Young People

Ever since the Great Financial Crisis, life in Britain has got harder for its young people. Denied the opportunities available to previous generations, locked out of the housing market and often feeling that mainstream politics has nothing to say to them, young people need hope more than almost anyone else. We invited award-winning journalist, Ros Wynne Jones, youth democracy advocate Rebecca Deegan and local government leader Piali Das Gupta to share their views on how a better future could be built for - and with - young people.

# Hope in the austerity generation, Ros Wynne Jones

Divine Mbaloula shows us around her home in north London. “Our bathroom leaks into the kitchen and living room,” the 14-year-old says. “The ceiling in the kitchen is rotten.” Damp is clearly visible throughout the house, with mould spores covering the walls, paint peeling on every surface, and the family’s possessions piled up in boxes. Her family suffers from coughs and ill health related to the condition of their home. But even worse is the impact on her disabled brother Axel who has learning disabilities and severe epilepsy.

This summer, during the interval between the election being called and decided, I – and colleagues Claire Donnelly, Maryam Qaiser and photographer Philip Coburn – had the privilege of travelling the four nations of the UK for a new election project ‘If Year 9 were in Number 10’. Our idea was to see the election from the vantage-point of young people born in 2010 – the equivalent of Thatcher’s Children – who had only ever known Conservative-led governments. The ‘Austerity’ Generation. When we set out, some parents warned us we’d only hear about Fortnite. It turned out that Cameron’s Children had a lot more than the latest update to the Epic Games megahit on their minds.

We met a young woman whose community faces being submerged should sea levels rise, who wants action on the climate emergency. A young man who sees his mother badly paid and wants public sector workers paid fairly. Another teenager who wants NHS waiting lists fixed so his granddad can get the new knee he’s been waiting over five years for.

With moving synergy, Gordon Brown wrote a piece the same week we got the green light to hit the road. “For the past 40 years we have talked of Thatcher’s Children – the generation of children brought up in the 1980s at a time of mass unemployment and social security cuts, which I witnessed at first hand as an MP in a mining constituency,” the former Prime Minister wrote.

“The past 14 years have seen even more dramatic events – Brexit, Covid-19 and the energy crisis arising from the Russia-Ukraine war to name only three – but, damaging as these individual events have been to people’s lives, the one constant throughout has been austerity. The newest generation of children, whose families have never known what economic security means, are the biggest losers.”

Our journey proved to be a moving, energising antidote to the fripperies of the real-life election trail. We spoke to young people on a mountain side, in a boxing gym, on a beach, in a youth club, outside a Castle, on a housing estate, in their homes, outside their beloved football club, in a stable, and in the local park – asking young people like Divine who were born in 2010 what they would do if they had the keys to Number 10.

The election on July 4 bookended these young people’s lives not only as Cameron’s Children, but as May, Johnson, Truss and Sunak’s too. As we all negotiate a new Britain and a changed political landscape, these young people offer a blueprint for a different future. That’s why in September, we are bringing a group of them to the Labour Party conference to hold a space

between the loyal activists, the lobbyists who have switched allegiance after the last 14 years, and those attracted to power. Later this year, we also hope to bring them to the heart of Westminster to meet law-makers.

### So what did these young people want?

The same, of course, as the rest of us. A safe home, a doctor's appointment when they need one, some sort of guarantee our planet will be habitable in the future. But we were also struck by how much space – physically and mentally, online and offline – has been taken from this age group in recent years.

In Cardiff, Yahya told us everyone should have access to a boxing gym like the one he goes to in Grangetown, to get young people off screens and to do something. Hitting things and getting moving, he said, can sort your head out if you're not feeling good.

In Belfast's cramped Ardoyne, where high gates still close off the community at 10pm at night even in 2024, Rocha told us how much young people needed youth clubs. Space, she said, where we are safe, and we can be ourselves.

Others we spoke to were trapped on the bottom rung of the 'hierarchy of needs', battling for shelter. Divine told us her home became so damp and uninhabitable last winter that her family were moved to a hotel. On Christmas Day an administrative error led to the family being evicted even from this cramped refuge. So Divine and her family spent their Christmas Day back in their wet, freezing cold house. Asked what she would do if she were in No 10, Divine responds without hesitation that she would "solve the housing crisis so no-one needs to be homeless like my family were."

She told us: "I want to be an architect because I want to build better houses without leaks for everyone, especially those with disabilities. The government needs to understand the impact poor housing has on those with physical health issues." Divine also wants funding for education. "If I was in power, I would also sort out schooling," she says. "Our school lacks funding, which means they can't upgrade the computers – we need more resources, we have been running out of books a lot."

For transparency, the #Yr9No10 project has been personal for me. I also have a daughter born in 2010, whose 14th birthday was the day before the election. As one of Thatcher's Children, I knew the script. And sure enough, one of the Coalition government's very first actions was to get rid of SureStart – the family support service I'd been to for antenatal lessons.

But much as I guessed correctly that, like me, my kids would soon go to school in buildings with buckets full of rainwater, I couldn't have imagined the sheer brutality of austerity.

And while my generation experienced a world where things generally got safer and easier and more hopeful – Mandela was freed, the Berlin Wall came down, living standards broadly improved, nuclear war got more distant – this is a generation who have already lived through Brexit, Covid, Grenfell, Windrush, the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, and other world-changing events summed up in a single word.

They have been cannon-fodder for unregulated tech companies left to rampage all over this generation's mental health and social development. Their online space has been polluted by bad faith actors like Andrew Tate, while offline they have witnessed, sometimes at close hand, this summer's riots, whipped up by people who should know better, and others who did.

Our kids have lived through all of it. And, yet somehow, against all odds, all of the young people in our films and stories – in their own way – have managed to hold on to hope, kindness and integrity.

They stubbornly remain full of the positive, optimistic ideas we need now, at this change moment. Perhaps most usefully of all, they are naturally able to distil ideas that have become triangulated and hypothecated via the lens of politics and politicians into simple asks.

Why can't we have safe homes and safe places to play? An NHS that works? Respect for nature? Over the next few months, we'll be continuing to amplify the voices of Cameron's Children. Because we believe their clarity and wisdom will help all of us see how Britain can be a kinder, better, fairer place that values everyone.



# Youth engagement to end political inequality, Rebecca Deegan

I grew up in a household where no one spoke about politics because 'it doesn't matter who you vote for, they're all the same' and where the accepted view was that 'politicians down in London don't have a clue about how real people live'. My upbringing isn't unusual. An astonishing 96% of voters say that respect for ordinary people is an important quality for a politician - the highest of any attribute tested in research conducted by More in Common and the UCL Policy Lab polling following the 2024 General Election.

This isn't to say my family feel powerless, I was also told I should not take 'nonsense' from anyone, or to let 'them' grind me down, which suggests I should be fighting back against something or someone if I feel a sense of injustice. I understand why people, such as those in low-income working-class families like mine, who have been systemically marginalised by our political system, decide to disengage from politics – I didn't vote until I was in my late 20s. Therefore, it is to my own and my parents' bemusement that I've ended up living in London and working in the world of politics and policymaking.

I now see how much political decisions impact every single aspect of our lives and I've developed the skills and knowledge to engage with the decision-making process. I want to share this knowledge and sense of power I've gained with others who've felt ignored and unseen. To achieve this, I set up an organisation (I have a voice – IHAV) and its mission is to create: a future where young people, from all backgrounds, engage in politics and go on to become active citizens; and a future where our leaders are representative of the UK's population, with proportionate representation from all segments of the population.

Taking each of these in turn:

## Politics for all

IHAV tackles this head on by teaching young people from a diverse range of backgrounds how they can lobby and take social action on the issues that matter to them and their community. For example, we have supported young people in Yorkshire to organise a series of clothes swaps so that they can both educate and take direct action to tackle climate change. We intentionally brought together Asian British and White British young people around a common goal to improve social cohesion. They've also successfully lobbied MPs to sign an Early Day Motion and raise Parliamentary Questions about their idea to make companies include the carbon footprint and supply chain of an item of clothing on the label. Projects like this enable young people to develop all seven components of the [Skills Builder Framework](#). It is important that the newly established Skills England does not only focus on specific sectors like construction and healthcare – it must also focus on equipping young people with life skills like – how to budget, how to spot fake news and how to vote. No matter what drives economic growth and employment in the future, these core life skills will mean people have a say in their future.

## Representation matters

People in politics are not representative of the people they're paid to represent. This is true of politicians, though this is slowly improving, but it is also true of the thousands of us that work behind the scenes in roles that seek to inform and influence political decisions. Both the CIPR and PRCA publish regular 'census' data about the PR profession, which shows that men are more likely to be in leadership roles, with females being over-represented at more junior levels and it seems leaving the industry in their 30s. The sector is whiter than the UK population and less likely to have a disability, and like in many sectors data collection on socioeconomic background is still evolving.

I've been in rooms too many times where the lack of breadth in lived experience amongst the 'lobbyists' present means that the conversation is ignorant. I am not suggesting the individuals in that conversation are ignorant, lack empathy, or can't comprehend that some people's lives look different to their own lives. But a group of people with similar lived experiences leads to herd mentality and less robust decision making. As someone who suffers from imposter syndrome daily, I didn't feel like I could effectively speak up and challenge the common consensus especially when I felt I already stood out as an outsider, even though rationally I doubt the legitimacy of my presence ever crosses other people's minds.

IHAV is dedicated to making sure that in the future those rooms look and sound like all of us, not just some of us. The people working in policy, public affairs, lobbying, communications etc., have a huge sway over how the public and politicians approach an issue. More than the public realises. We get to shape what research is conducted, what policy recommendations are championed and what communication campaigns we thrust into the spotlight. This is an absolute privilege and it's the reason I love my job, but it is a huge responsibility that should not be taken lightly.

IHAV is improving representation through our career-focused programmes so that young people who are inspired to seek employment in the world of politics have a route to get there. Each year we pair professionals in politics with young people looking to understand what careers are available. Each year the number of volunteer mentors and number of young people keen to learn more has grown. This year we'll have almost 150 mentorships, running from September to May. Our career schemes have already supported over 50 young people into employment and some of our former mentees have signed up as mentors this year – a wonderful virtuous circle. It makes me tremendously proud and optimistic that people in the sector want to play their part.

As one of our mentees reflected, "My mentor match was perfect... any reservations I had about fitting in have been proven wrong."

## Optimism is a political act

We still have a long way to go. My litmus test is, and will always be, my dad. Sadly, he still thinks politicians are not trustworthy, don't understand people like him and that I am wasting my time. But we're finally – heatedly – talking about politics and why people can't turn their back on the system, and he has finally started voting – well sometimes. I tell him that my optimism that we will get to the point where politicians and the political system earn our trust is an active decision that I remake with myself on a regular basis – it is not naivety, it is my way of not letting them grind me down. I am hopeful that one day soon we will have a system that proves him wrong and gives me the last word.

# Ghosted by power, Piali Das Gupta

There is a phrase I read a few years ago about how young people view policy-makers that has always stuck with me: 'ghosted by power'. I'm one of those well-intentioned people who, if not precisely in power, has access to it and tries to believe that I'm genuinely trying to bring the voices of those affected by decisions into making them. That phrase hit me hard because it held up a mirror that showed me something uncomfortable.

Like so many people working in big institutions, I had got into the habit of deciding what I wanted young people's opinions on and how I was going to gather them. Sometimes I made an effort to go back and explain how I used their feedback; often, I didn't – hence, the "ghosting" phrase hitting me hard. I know I'm not the only one and, sadly, I probably should not be speaking in the past tense either.

Quite recently, I was part of an exercise where young people were meant to be setting the agenda for decision-makers and running the discussion the way they saw fit. Only it ended up mimicking exactly the sort of workshop I'm in all the time – breakout groups in conference rooms, post-it notes and all. At one point, I think the professionals even gave up any pretence of the young people leading the discussion through our body language, with us all turned to face each other. But here's the thing: none of us meant to.

That afternoon looms large in my head as I reflect on how the new government's national missions could apply in our local places. Missions, which are intended bring a range of partners and interests together to deliver long-term objectives, surely have to be designed to give young people a chance to have real impact, not just a voice. If we're talking about achieving positive action in the long-term, there's no one else for whom the stakes are higher.

Reflecting on the potential role of young people in missions has made me reflect on experiences of engagement with young people that have been game-changing for me. I started my professional career with the government of Canada, working on homelessness. One of the projects I was involved with gave Inuit youth in a small hamlet in Nunavut training in how to operate video cameras and a stipend to record some footage over the period of a few weeks. The footage they produced was gold in that it gave us a glimpse of the daily rhythm of not just their lives but that of their whole community.

As a result, some of the professionals such as social workers and police said they got a better understanding of the right time and place to try to open up a conversation with someone who might need their help but didn't necessarily trust them. Or to understand who those people did trust and turned to for advice and support. That was insight that a focus group in a community centre on a chilly evening could never have yielded. It came about because we let young people roam and tell a story on their own terms.

One example from a council colleague that has stuck with me was when a team of parks officers took a group of young people into some local parks to see how they could be made safer. Some of their insights were

predictable: spots where more lighting would be useful. But some were unexpected and counter-intuitive (to me). As in many areas, that council was combining a need to save money with a recognition that nature-positive solutions could help the environment and started to cultivate wildflower meadows. The older people loved them, but what the officers didn't realise was that they sometimes made their younger residents feel less safe as they obstructed their sightlines. Planning officers then started doing similar tours to inform the development of the local plan.

So going back to missions, what do those of us who may have the privilege to help shape how they are mobilised in our local areas need to keep in mind when thinking about the role that young people can play?

First, we have to challenge ourselves not to assign young people a box. I imagine that many of us are already thinking, quite rightly, about the role that younger residents could play in helping to scope out and deliver the national mission on breaking down the barriers to opportunity. Or if we're thinking about young people in relation to growth, it may be in terms of how to train them for the jobs of the future. But we would be missing a trick if we treated them like cogs in a wheel.

Second, we have to let go of our conventions about "how things are done". One of the people who inspires me most as a policy-maker is Anisa Morridadi, who was a teenager herself when she started Beatfreaks, an agency that specialises in youth engagement. Anisa created Beatfreaks to combine her passion for poetry and movement with an interest in big ideas and numbers. They have since found inventive ways to open up a community dialogue about dry topics like council budgets and the EU referendum. We all have those thought entrepreneurs in our communities to draw on.

Finally, we cannot let ourselves be inhibited by a fear of that we would build up unrealistic expectations in young people and then let them down. For many of us, that has become amplified during this decade-plus of austerity when it has felt like we have been trapped in a cycle of trying to do things differently with communities but ending up having to shut things down when the next round of funding cuts hit. Missions need not just be about long-term objectives but about the concrete steps that we need to take together to deliver. In my experience, partly because of austerity, many young people have become astute judges of the modest and pragmatic ways to stretch resources to make good things happen.

When I think of what missions could unlock for our communities and our country if we truly tap into young people's insight and ingenuity, it makes my imagination - and my confidence - soar.





# A Healthy Britain

The state of Britain's National Health Service was a major concern during the 2024 general election. Now a new government needs to move rapidly to convince the public that the health system really can be renewed for the 21st century. Leading voices on health reform, Naomi Fulop and Helen Chatterjee, Professors at UCL, Michael Little, co-founder of the reform organisation Ratio and mental health researcher and advocate, Fran Zannatta, plot a path forward here.



# New priorities for the NHS, Naomi Fulop

We all know that the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has a huge to-do list. These have not been hopeful times for England's health service. Waiting times are at their highest since 2010; the 62-day waiting time cancer target has not been met since 2015; ditto the 90% target for maximum 4 hour wait in A&E; life expectancy is stalling and health inequalities are widening; public satisfaction with the NHS is at a 40 year low. To restore public trust in the health system, it must be responsive to the everyday realities of patients and healthcare workers alike.

So what should the priorities be?

First, it is vital to change the narrative. The NHS is not a 'drain' on resources. Spending on the NHS is an investment. We know that economic growth requires a healthy population in the short and long term. More than a fifth of working age adults are economically inactive; a third of these due to long-term sickness. The NHS can contribute to helping people back into the workforce and to growing our economy.

Improved population health and addressing inequalities can also be supported through government action which doesn't have to cost, and will help the NHS in the longer term. Tighter regulation of the food, alcohol, tobacco and gambling industries protects the NHS in the longer term and, perhaps surprisingly, has public support. Improving both population health and the resilience of our health and care systems will help make us more prepared for and resilient to future shocks such as the inevitable pandemic. The new government confirmed its commitment to a UK smoking ban in the first King's Speech, and appears to have a desire to go further on public health measures to regulate the food industry. These stronger regulatory frameworks are a vital platform for further action to seriously address health inequalities. This entails concerted, long-term efforts nationally, across government, to address the social determinants of health and to support local institutions and communities to work in partnership to do the same, for example, through the mechanism of 'Marmot Places'.

Ambitions to address waiting lists (and waiting times) are important but there's a need to address the whole system of care to ensure 'flow' through services. Long waits in A&E are the result of hospitals being unable to discharge the estimated 13,000 patients – equivalent to 26 hospitals – who need social care support. Investing in social care, primary and community health services has to be high up the agenda as well as wider reform of these out-of-hospital services. Proposals for a National Care Service need to be fleshed out and funded.

Chronic underinvestment over many years, staff shortages, growing demand, the pandemic, and waves of industrial action also mean staff morale is on the floor. As Dan Honig outlines above, the new Secretary of State needs to take staff with them, not take them on in a fight. The culture of 'being done to' rather than co-producing the changes that are required needs to change. This needs to begin from the top. Which isn't to deny the serious failings and even worse, the institutional cover-ups, that have been exposed by the infected blood inquiry and more recent unacceptable care

failings in maternity services. Senior leaders need to support and listen to staff alongside changing the culture of organisational silence in which too many have participated. Patients, service users and families need to be at the heart of a cultural overhaul. For too long, they have been ignored (and worse) and the NHS cannot improve without listening to them, even when that means challenging professional vested interests.

Staff shortages in the NHS and social care also need to be addressed in both the short and long term. Implementation of the long-term workforce plan published last year is a key element. But it also entails a grown-up conversation about the contribution of the one in five of NHS and social care staff who are of a non-British nationality. Let's celebrate the huge contribution they make to our health and care system as part of a wider endeavour to change the narrative on immigration. Until the long-term workforce plan comes to fruition, we will need to continue to welcome health and social care staff from overseas

We should also celebrate the very best examples of how services shaped by patients and communities are already helping to drive both quality and efficiency in the health service, as we saw at the Britain Renewed conference the Ordinary Hope project ran in the spring of 2024. In developing overall plans for the future of the NHS, the Secretary of State should see his role as both leader and convener – learning from others as much as being a teacher or manager.

In times of crisis in the NHS there is a tendency for governments to reach for deceptively 'easy' levers – especially structural change. The Lansley reforms of 2012 are widely recognised as a disaster. But, instead, we should learn to work with the grain, making the best of the structures we have and focus on the knotty problems of delivery. Similarly, there is a tendency to rely on 'magic bullets' to improve efficiency and manage costs – digital technology and AI being the most recent examples. They can play their part, of course, but we should start at the 'simpler' end of using digital to improve working conditions for staff, patient experience, as well as productivity, such as electronic patient records and electronic reminders. And we must not forget the potential unintended consequences of moving to digital without taking into account the myriad of reasons people can be excluded if analogue alternatives aren't available, thereby exacerbating inequalities in access to health care. Similarly, addressing the deteriorating NHS estate wholesale isn't possible overnight, but we can and must get started on it to improve staff morale as well as aid productivity.

It has been said that the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care will need 'balls of steel' to tackle these challenges. But it is not all about one person. These challenges must be tackled quickly *and* collaboratively. Decisions cannot be locked away and made only in Whitehall, but should emerge from a genuine debate amongst those who have skin in the game. Patients and the public need to see and feel improvements to their everyday needs, and within a short timeframe. This is a necessary part of the new government's wider mission to increase public trust in politics and politicians.

As we've seen in UCL and More in Common research, the NHS and social care remain a central concern for the British public – they want change, but they also want the new government to respect the voices of patients and communities. The new government faces huge challenges but they also have an opportunity for a radical partnership to provide an ordinary hope that can deliver a healthier and happier nation. That's a mission in which we could all be partners.



# An NHS that belongs to you, Michael Little

It might be reasonable to assume that the state is responsible for building an NHS fit for the future. It is. But just as economic growth will not come without the input of civil society, nor will the health service reach its goals.

That means going beyond the formal civil society organisations already involved in healthcare. They are vital but we need to take a broader view. We should include the social infrastructure that brings people together with those they know well, and those they know not at all. Think cafes, parks and the school gates. These are contexts auspicious for conversations about how to live peaceably with each other, and for mutual aid, our natural propensity to help, and be helped. This is the foundation for a continually updated Almanac that records our shared moral order. It tells us unequivocally 'thou shalt not kill' but also sets out norms for what we eat and drink, and how much we exercise.

This civil society is as powerful as the state. It is the source of fundamental social change, and several health service innovations. Its power is most evident when the state is hamstrung by pandemic or catastrophe as exemplified in the response to Hurricane Katrina so powerfully described by Rebecca Solnit in *A Paradise Made in Hell*.

And yet, civil society is messy. It is a self-correcting system. There is no director of civil society, and no committee to propose 'let's change our relationship to food'.

Its function is to strengthen social bonds. It creates shared meaning. It generates a sense of shared destiny, that feeling of 'together we can'. It gives or denies us permission to be responsible for others. There are technical terms -for example collective agency, collective efficacy- and measures for each of these functions.

When the measures are favourable, people experience their world as predictable. They feel a sense of order. This encourages investment, in themselves, in their family and in their communities. That investment reinforces the bonds, and shared destiny and responsibility for each other. This virtuous circle gets us to better health (and less crime, and more economic growth and...)

## The balance between NHS and civil society

By the reckoning of some, for example Robert Putnam and Shaylyn Romney Garrett in their book *The Upswing*, collective institutions of the post-war age like the NHS are best seen as the product of the power and innovation of civil society. At its creation, citizens and residents rightly felt that the NHS belonged to them. My mother would resist going to the doctor so as not to waste the scarce resources of something precious.

But unhealthy dynamics generated by the size and power of the NHS and the medical professions has unsettled the relationship with civil society. Take one example. The Lancet Commission on *The Value of Death* found hospitals to be working ever harder to keep patients alive in the last year

of their life, sometimes prolonging and increasing suffering. As more people die in hospital civil society is robbed of the experience, conversations and rituals that surround death. That, in turn, diminishes resistance to clinicians wanting to try one more procedure to keep a loved one alive.

These days, nearly half of deaths take place in hospital. Most people want to die at home. No clinician or health manager entered their professions to fill hospital beds with dying patients. The cause is an imbalance in the relationship between civil society and the institutionalised NHS. I see this imbalance undermining maternity services, efforts to reduce long term conditions, and the effective use of scarce mental health services.

### Recovering equilibrium

There are some technical fixes for this disequilibrium, for example using system science to tackle the dynamics of addition, the propensity for health systems to find slots for every patient. But lasting solutions require a change in mindset not only in the NHS but also across government.

The starting point is shifting our conception of civil society. It is powerful -with the potential to enhance and undermine health- not powerless. It will engage with the NHS and other services on its own terms. It will not be co-opted. This means finding room for a 'we' mentality alongside the 'I'. When Julianne Holt-Lunstad finds that loneliness is as bad for health as smoking a pack of cigarettes a day, health and social care agencies rush to find and treat lonely patients. They don't know how to do that. So how about supporting civil society's natural capacity for social connection for all?

It is reasonable often beneficial for health experts to want to restrict people's agency, for example to smoke or eat processed food. But many of the greatest advances in health come from releasing individual and collective agency. The California Endowment's support for citizens and residents in Fresno to win a fight for more park space is one of many examples. The parks are health enhancing. But so too is the sense of shared destiny across Fresno's neighbourhoods that came from residents winning a multi-billion-dollar lawsuit.

We can turn this idea on its head. The collective will of the people can enhance health policy. Health policy can enhance the collective will of the people. I am impressed, for instance, with the design of social insurance policies for ageing populations in Germany and Japan that have strengthened social solidarity in those countries.

Ultimately, it is in everyone's interest for the NHS to belong, once again, to the people. It is in health managers' self-interest to welcome greater accountability to the electorate. Overall, the electorate want the same thing as those managing the NHS. The smart thinkers will create an NHS fit for the future with the people as well as for the people.

### The politics of change

As earlier pieces in this collection have shown, we know government must recover trust. The 'how' is now as important as the 'what'.

Over the last year, my colleagues and I scrutinised examples of mission led government that have been inclusive of civil society. They have shared features. Policy making tends to be proximal to the electorate. Devolution to combined and local authorities and Integrated Care Boards will aid the government missions. Policy tends to be tailored to places that mean something to citizens and residents, their town, or neighbourhood or travel to work area. Progress is facilitated by politicians who can relate to, listen to and debate with local people. The work of councillors and members of parliament in wards and constituencies matters as much as their work in town halls and the Palace of Westminster.

This is difficult territory for the NHS, which has thrived on its relationship with central government. But the readiness to devolve, be place based, and listen to local people and their elected representatives might well determine whether the Government gets the 15 years needed to rebuild an NHS fit for the future.

### Getting started

Let me bring all of this back to the lessons of Ordinary Hope for practical change, underpinned by human relationships and led by heroes everywhere.

There are now templates for civil society led change. Some focus on the citizens' capability to design policy and practice. Some rest on giving civil society the power to hold public systems to account. Some seek to find a common purpose between civil society and public services. And some simply give decision making power to service users, using direct payments for example.

When they work, these types of reform operate at scale. But one small example illustrates the potential. A few years ago, Ordinary Hope core group member Maff Potts and his Association of Camerados erected teepees in the foyers of UK hospitals. A thousand staff members, patients and visitors a week entered each space to connect and reflect. The objective impact was measured in terms of increased altruism and mutual aid in each hospital. The subjective impact was a tangible sense of 'together we can'. It is a simple way of discovering the power and potential of civil society.

# A new era for healthcare, with Fran Zanatta

In his 2020 book, *Together*, Vivek H. Murthy, President Obama's Surgeon General, spoke of his growing realisation that for all the complex medical challenges facing the United States, it was social connection and loneliness that came to define his time as the US's most senior health leader.

Murthy witnessed how the challenges of loneliness and disconnection came to define the health, well-being, and even the politics of a nation.

“So many of the problems we face as a society — from addiction and violence to disengagement among workers and students to political polarisation — are worsened by loneliness and disconnection. Building a more connected world holds the key to solving these and many more of the personal and societal problems confronting us today”.

Here at the UCL Policy Lab, we have been working with partners from across UCL and from overseas to ask how social connection might enhance the health of the nation.

As a new government in the UK looks to build an NHS fit for the future, the Lab's partnerships lead, James Baggaley, sits down with UCL's Dr Fran Zanatta, who has led work across psychology, mental health and citizen action, to explore why social connection and relational, participatory approaches to healthcare can provide us with a real opportunity to transform lives.

## **James Baggaley**

Your work explores how patients and clinical practitioners can be empowered to act, building relationships that can sustain healthy lives. Can you tell us about how this work came about?

## **Fran Zannatta**

I was working on a major research programme with young people in East London towards the end of the pandemic. They were interested in mental health, which, by accident, was the discipline that I was moving towards at the time, having previously worked in education.

We designed the project so that every Friday, we invited different artists to engage young people in a variety of methods to think about how they can take action within their community. We invited Citizens UK, an organisation focused on community organising, to run one of the sessions, which blew everything up by moving the discussion from just thinking and feeling, to planning and action. What was meant to be a single session ended up being a whole action that the young people planned themselves. From this one session came action and empowerment for the young people. Witnessing that was incredibly powerful.

### James Baggaley

How has this kind of approach developed more broadly in the NHS? Can you give some examples?

### Fran Zanatta

As part of our programme, Mental Health Research for All, Dr Jenny Shand suggested we'd coproduce a training package to engage mental health peer support workers in research. These are individuals with lived experience who have gone through a process of recovery, or management of their challenges, to support others through volunteering or as paid staff members in the NHS.

We agreed for one of the sessions to be with Citizens UK. It was incredible to see them talking about power and how to transform anger from something destructive to something productive. It clicks something into people, and it shifts the capacity for action.

Suddenly people become aware of their own agency. I guess it is an element of awareness, empowerment or "yes, I can do this". We're going to be doing some more work, in this autumn, on peer support workers and power and research.

### James Baggaley

Agency, or respect, often feels like it gets lost, even within well-meaning institutions like the NHS. Could approaches like yours offer people the tools to grasp back some of that agency. A sense of freedom when we need it the most?

### Fran Zanatta

It's about self-advocacy and awareness. A young person I was working with described agency as about having the awareness and knowledge that you have options, the capacity of making choices around your actions, and feeling like if you can ask questions or make a suggestion, that it won't backfire on you.

There are issues with the processes and systems, but I think what matters the most is the relationship and the need for all of us to be more person focussed. Because of limited resources, staff have a bigger caseload, and there's less time for thinking, for feeling and processing those feelings. There is a lot of holding that people working in the mental health services have to do, so the space and time for relating would also benefit staff.

Relationships, and fostering those relationships creates space for agency, for intentionality, for dialogue. And that is provides the space for healing.

### James Baggaley

How much of this approach is about listening and valuing peoples experience?

### Fran Zanatta

In some primary schools there is a designated mental health service, which is something being advocated for quite loudly by teachers' unions, Citizens UK and the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. Similarly, the Young People and Children Mental Health coalition has been leading on the 'fund the Hubs campaign'. Having someone who you can go to, even just for a chat, creates the knowledge that you can talk about things even when they're hard, that there's someone listening and that it's okay to not feel great.

One of the primary schools I worked in had a chat bench, which we would sit on and young people could just come up and have a little chat if there was something that was bothering them. It's nothing complex, but it shifts the internal way of working and the way in which you relate with yourself, with your difficult experiences and with others. Once you've experienced it yourself, you're more likely to replicate it in your relationships and connection with other people. Those little changes are quite crucial.

### James Baggaley

It feels like so much of your work is about building community – which again is often lost when all we think about is the immediate crisis – and yet it feels that with this community how can we expect long term change for patients.

### Fran Zanatta

Working with peer support workers has been quite enlightening because it's centred around creating relationships. One of these colleagues leads a community cafe where people can drop in and have a chat or take part in activities. It helps to tackle very complex issues such as isolation, loneliness, and not having a warm space or a cup of coffee or tea. These seemingly small acts of community can be incredibly transformative.

Another programme was an evaluation for a community garden in Essex with a community organisation called Trust Links. They do amazing work. I've met a lot of volunteers and so-called service users, the local community members, and it's just incredible to see how transformative it is because creates space where people can gather and cultivate, but also creates somewhere where you can go to shift the thinking, or address something that you're struggling with. It becomes a space where you feel safe to share and get support for the challenges that you're experiencing.

When talking with young people, what comes up a lot is how sterile and terrifying some of the mental health spaces meant for healing are. When you have a space full of plants produced by people in the community, and there are smiling faces and people who look like you, talk like you, and struggle like you, that shifts their experience.

**James Baggaley**

Researchers and mental health policy experts often talk about the importance of 'social connection'. Do you see part of your role to build connection?

**Fran Zanatta**

Yes, but connecting itself is not enough. The way I talk about it is more in terms of social action - having something to work towards together. Social connection is the beginning because it brings people together. It's the work of thinking about why we're so polarised.

How do we start? By being able to listen and to hear and to make space for different views and opinions. And that's probably one of the hardest activities that I had to engage with when working with Citizens UK, having to be more able to welcome different perspectives.

The work I do is around social connection. But also having a social connection to foster that hope for social action. It's a multi-step approach, about making sure that people feel like they can be actors and participants in their own lives, as opposed to passive observers or recipients of care.

**James Baggaley**

A lot of people would love to have the advocates that you've managed to secure, how did you get the leadership of your project on board, especially someone like UCL's Professor Peter Fonagy?

**Fran Zanatta**

Both Peter and Jenny Shand were super enthusiastic about the idea of exploring different ways of working with the community, as reflect in their Kailo project. The whole point of Peter's work in psychotherapy (mentalisation) is listening to and understanding your own perspective as well as others', so that's something that I think is already within their training and the profession.

There's often a fear amongst leaders – and Peter in my mind is a leader - that if they build a community and hand away power, that their power will be lost. But with Peter and Jen, it has been absolutely the opposite. He recognises the greatest act he can perform as a leader is to redistribute? share power, to ask 'what can I do to make things easier for you? How can I be of support'

I honestly think politics can take a lesson from this kind of approach. Instead of asking how can I use my power, ask how can I empower others?





# Community assets: a path to health equity, Helen Chatterjee

Fair and equitable access to community sources of support is fundamental to tackling health inequalities in our society. This is the core concept of the research programme, 'Mobilising Community Assets to Tackle Health Inequalities', for which I serve as the programme director. The number of people living in poverty, experiencing food shortages, unable to pay fuel and other domestic bills, or attain basic living standards, is increasing year on year. These so-called social determinants of health explain up to 80% of health outcomes, with clinical care only accounting for 20%. This stark realisation means that in order to tackle the root causes of poverty and health inequity we need to find 'creative' socio-economic solutions.

Research into health inequalities over the past two decades has shed light into the role of community assets, sense of place and community engagement in tackling the major social determinants of health. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the vital role that community assets such as parks and green spaces, libraries and creative, cultural and community organisations have in supporting vulnerable or marginalised people, and especially the poorest people, living in the most deprived areas. Cultural, community and nature-based activities helped to mitigate the adverse effects of the pandemic caused by public health restrictions including psychological wellbeing, social connectedness and loneliness. Furthermore, these sorts of assets showed that they can be agile and respond swiftly to major societal challenges offering locally-based solutions to people who need it most. Many community organisations have unique insights and a deep-rooted understanding of the needs of their local communities, but they face significant challenges in relation to scale and sustainability, with small-scale, short-term funding preventing them from reaching all of those in need.

Building on substantial evidence of the positive impact that community, cultural, and natural assets have on health outcomes, I worked with UKRI's Arts and Humanities Research Council to develop the Mobilising Community Assets to Tackle Health Inequalities programme. This research programme seeks to explore how these assets can be effectively integrated into health systems and enabled to act as a key conduit to address health inequalities.

The changing structures of health and social care in the UK, following the introduction of 'integrated care', offers both a challenge and an opportunity to achieve the programme aims. Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) in England, and their devolved equivalents in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, were introduced to ensure that care and support across services and resources is more joined up to tackle inequalities in outcomes, experience and access to health:

"Joining up care leads to better outcomes for people. When local partners – the NHS, councils, voluntary sector and others – work together, they can create better services based on local need." NHS England.

The concept of integrated care acknowledges the crucial role that the voluntary, community, faith, and social enterprise sector (VCFSE) plays in maintaining a healthy population. However, integrating this ‘community assets ecosystem’ with the health and social care system presents significant challenges. Both systems are diverse and complex, with substantial regional variations—each community is unique, with different population structures, strengths, and weaknesses. To improve the integration of community assets with health systems, we must first identify the barriers and enablers of collaboration, establish clearer processes to streamline partnerships, and build capacity and sustainability within the community asset ecosystem. Given the significant support community assets provide to vulnerable, marginalised, and excluded communities, there is great potential for them to play a key role in addressing health inequalities. However, further research is needed to determine the best ways to integrate these two complex systems.

The £30m Mobilising Community Assets programme, coordinated by my research group at UCL in partnership with the National Centre for Creative Health, is pioneering new models for cross-sector collaboration to support and scale up community and health partnerships. The programme responds to [our research](#) which suggests that in order to tackle health inequalities, a new research approach is required – one which is multidisciplinary, and places lived experience and community expertise at its heart. So far, 28 funded projects have been completed under this programme, each embedding these research approaches across a range of community asset types, geographic regions, communities, and health inequalities.

Twelve of the 28 projects were pilot research projects that adopted different approaches to explore community asset interventions in communities affected by health inequalities. The remaining 16 projects focused on developing cross-sectoral consortia incorporating health, community, lived experience, academic and local authority partners. Given the diversity of these 28 projects, it is difficult to capture the incredible work that has been achieved in different communities across the UK. Here is a very brief description of just three of them:

The Arts for the Blues project worked to integrate arts therapies within NHS talking therapies, scaling up their intervention within healthcare and cultural organisations in North-West England.

Prescribe Heritage Highland examined the conditions for delivering non-pharmaceutical cultural and natural heritage interventions in remote and rural environments at scale and improve referral pathways for mental health services.

The Pathways project in Southampton worked with young people to understand their cultural experiences and health choices, foster collaboration between young people and different organisation in the city and develop culturally engaging health programmes.

My research group have been collating and analysing data from these 28 projects, and although there is more analysis to be done, key lessons are

clear. First, community-based approaches can offer targeted solutions to reaching those most in need, living in the poorest areas. Nonetheless, we need to make sure we know what we have. Asset mapping is required to identify strengths and gaps - and to ensure that offers are relevant to the needs of the local community. As health and care systems continue to develop, local people need to be meaningfully involved in decision-making processes and it needs to be made easier for decision makers (such as commissioners, referrers, funders, and health and community professionals) to respond to the issues they identify. We have further recognised that optimal funding and commissioning models are location specific, but co-location of services and collaboration across organisations and programmes is almost always more effective than its alternative and offers the most cost-effective solution to tackling inequalities.

These findings will be explored in greater depth over the next three years, in 12 new larger and longer research projects which started this year. Within these projects, place-based partnerships across the UK will work with some of the countries’ poorest communities to co-produce solutions for better integration between communities and health.

To tackle health inequalities and ensure that the positive impact of community assets on health are accessible to everyone, a whole-system approach is needed. Health impact must be considered in all policies and embedded across the new government’s missions. It is crucial to acknowledge the importance of prevention—helping people stay healthier for longer—and the significant role of creative, cultural, natural, and community assets in this effort. Creating the conditions for community assets to flourish can work to reduce pressures and support a sustainable NHS and social care system in the long term.







# Afterword

All of the efforts at reform outlined in this publication emerge from the distinctive political moment in which we live: a time when the public are demanding change but remain deeply sceptical of those who claim that they will deliver it. In closing this collection, therefore, we asked one of Britain's leading opinion pollster and political strategists, Luke Tryl from More in Common, to identify what he thinks the future might hold.



# The Politics of our New Moment, Luke Tryl

Speaking to the public about the state of our politics and democracy has been a sobering experience over the last few years. In focus group after focus group hearing the extent of disconnect between Westminster and the everyday concerns of the public has been both striking and depressing. In conversation after conversation, voters' frustration at not just individuals, but a system that they felt was rigged against them is palpable - with their priorities seemingly ignored, their contributions undervalued, their country feeling increasingly broken.

It was in this context that the 2024 election became the third 'vote to change the status quo' that British voters have delivered in under a decade - first in the Brexit vote of 2016, then at the last General Election in 2019 and now again at the 2024 election. There is a very real risk that if change goes unheeded, more voters will follow those who decided to opt out of the political mainstream this July.

Understanding what that change looks like and how it can be delivered will be the crucial mission of this government. There is a tendency in politics to associate change, especially after an election victory with grand narratives or vivid portraits of sunlight uplands. Given the mood of the country, the politics of Obama-esque hope and change or of grandiose visions of radicalism are unlikely to land. Instead the public's ask is both simpler and more pressing - change that is grounded in every day improvements in their day to day which makes life for them and their families that bit easier.

That demand for 'everyday' change is reflected in Labour's changing voter coalition between 2019 and 2024. In 2019, Labour's electoral coalition was more ideological, in 2024 it was much more pragmatic - motivated by a desire to eject the last government and to give another Party a chance.

More in Common's Seven segments shine a further light on that shift - in 2019 the difference in Labour's vote share between the most left leaning and conservative segments of the population was 58 points. By 2024 that gap had almost halved to just 27 points - with those on the right more likely to vote for Labour, and some segments on the left actually less likely to back Keir Starmer's Party. The result is that Labour's electoral coalition is broader but also shallower than in previous Parliaments. Add to that growing electoral volatility and it is clear that following previous governments in adopting a governing strategy built around partisan wedges is unlikely to provide a glue to keep this coalition together. Instead, the best way to maintain and grow the new Labour coalition - and more importantly to strengthen the faith in the ability of politics to deliver for ordinary people is through delivery on practical everyday improvements.

## Delivering on the mandate for change

What does delivering on that practical mandate for change mean? First and foremost it means making people's everyday less of a struggle. If the 8am rush for GP appointments persists, if people still feel they are working to live and living to work, if anti-social behaviour continues to render local parks

and high streets unusable, if the immigration system feels disorderly and chaotic, and if energy bills remain high, then the public will remain disillusioned and will increasingly look elsewhere away from the mainstream offer of political parties.

Top of the list of the public's practical expectations is the NHS. The struggles of the NHS in recent years, whether it be waiting lists, delays in being able to get an ambulance or the shortage of dentists have had a particularly corrosive effect on public morale. Why? First and foremost because the NHS is a service that the public rely on at their most vulnerable, when they or their loved ones are in need of help. But beyond that, the NHS has long been the most cherished and trusted of British institutions and, regardless of their own experience, seeing it struggling has undermined confidence in the state itself.

That is why almost two thirds of the public (63%) say it will be the measure through which they benchmark Labour's success or failure - higher than any other measure. Bluntly put, waiting lists need to be lower and GP appointments more accessible soon. But voters also want to see significant progress in other areas too - particularly on the cost of living. In focus group after focus group, participants told us they were fed up of a situation where despite working hard, they had to put things back at the end of the weekly shop, to tell their kids they couldn't go on holiday this year, or simply they ended the working month with nothing left over to show for it.

### Beyond delivery, a politics of respect

Hand in hand with practical delivery, the change voters demanded at this election is rooted in a desire to see a return to the politics of respect. A politics where success is not equated with wealth or having a top degree, but is instead based on contribution and recognises the role of those - from hauliers to shop assistants - who really do keep the show on the road. More in Common's research over the last year with the UCL Policy Lab has shown that political leaders 'showing respect for ordinary people' is actually ranked as highly as delivery or 'getting stuff done' in voters' minds.

Not only that but new multilevel regression poststratification (MRP) analysis shows that such a politics of respect will be central to helping Labour build and maintain an enduring voter coalition and help it navigate the twin challenges of voter volatility and electoral fragmentation.

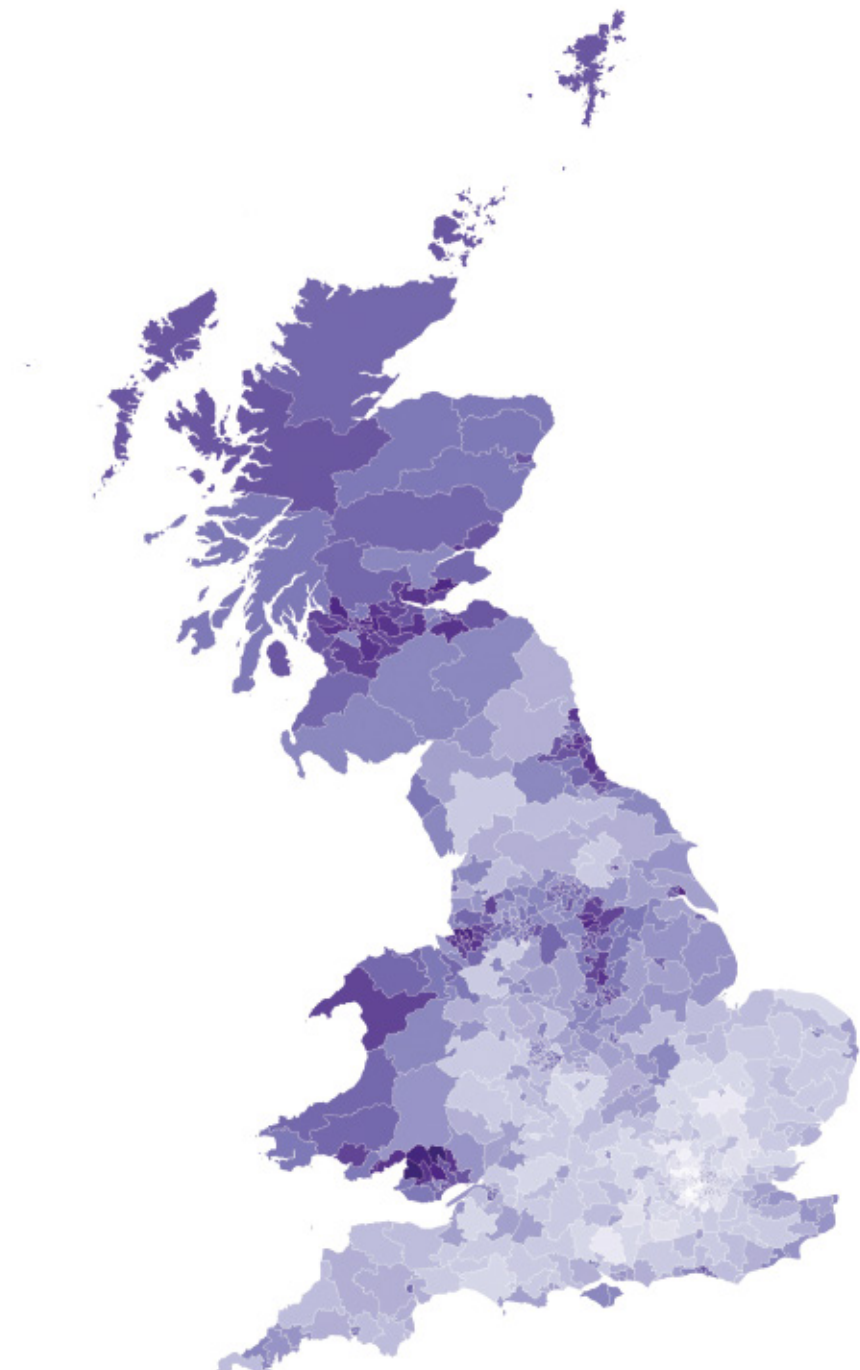
The MRP reveals that two areas that were fundamental to Labour's electoral success - Scotland's central belt and the Red Wall are far more likely than average to prioritise 'showing respect for ordinary people' as the key attribute they want to see in political leaders. Keir Starmer's direct appeal of both respect and service resonated with these vital constituencies.

The new political landscape means that as Labour grapples with difficult decisions in office it will not just face a challenge from the Conservative's but also pressure from Reform on the Right and the Greens, SNP and Gaza independents on the left.

### Where does respect matter?

Proportion of each constituency who considers "showing respect to ordinary people" the most important attribute for a political leader to have.

22%  31%



Because of that, reconnecting with the public through a politics of respect offers a greater likelihood of being able to see off multiple threats to its electoral coalition, than a strategy more narrowly rooted in attacking the Conservative brand.

### **How have the government started on the politics of respect**

In turning a respect agenda into a governing mantra, the first few months of the Starmer administration have seen mixed success - with a strong response to the riots on the one hand, but a less sure-footed and more narrowly tactically focused response to its fiscal inheritance on the other.

For many, the riots were an anathema to the public's notion of respect for their community and their neighbours. It is unsurprising then that the public backed the government's tough response to handling them with a robust law and order approach. Sir Keir Starmer's approval on handling of the riots jumped 11 points over the course of August, and sits much higher than his general approval rating. Quickly tackling the disorder with the rapid sentencing of rioters, alongside also focusing on the contribution of those involved in the community clean-up was the right one for the public and one which embodied the politics of respect.

The government's approach on public finances has been less assured. The government's change mandate is first and foremost to fix a country which feels broken to many - where the cost of living and energy bills are too high, waiting lists too long, and where anti-social behaviour and levels of immigration feel out of control. People voted to fix those things. While fixing the public finances is an important step towards achieving progress on those practical and policy objectives, it's a means to an end for most voters, not an end in and of itself and certainly was not front of mind as people cast their ballots. This is 2024 not 2010 and concerns about the state of public services and fixing practical problems now trump concerns about the debt and deficit. Repeating the Coalition's political playbook will not work in the same way for the new government.

This misreading of public opinion and the election result has shaped some early missteps on the government's approach to fixing the public finances. The public want to be levelled with on the difficult decisions to come and don't want the type of cakeism that builds up hopes only to let down the public again - the epitome of disrespect. But they also want to know what life will look like after that, how will their everyday feel better and how will life be less of a struggle.

They also want to know that contribution will be rewarded. Public opposition to the cut to pensioners' winter fuel allowance reflects a broader frustration that ordinary people who have worked hard are not seeing their contributions to society valued and rewarded. Cutting winter fuel allowance for pensioners (bar those on pension credit) has been received by many pensioners as penalising those who've worked hard, saved and contributed to British society across many decades. The public recognise that the

public finances need mending, but they want it done in a way that is fair and that respects their contribution. The fall out from the decision should act as a cautionary tale to the government as to how they can better deliver the politics of respect.

As the government navigates its first year in office, its success will be measured not just by fixing the country's economic foundations or through more efficient delivery. But by how it meets the challenge that many people feel their lives have just become too difficult, and what it now does to make ordinary people feel heard, valued and respected in society. How well the government can translate that sentiment into how economic decisions are made, and how policy is designed and delivered will be the central test of this Parliament.







# About the UCL Policy Lab

The UCL Policy Lab brings together extraordinary expertise and everyday experience, connecting researchers and the broader community with the tools and resources required to bring about real social and policy change.

Launched in 2022, as a new initiative of UCL's Departments of Economics and Political Science, the UCL Policy Lab builds on UCL's near 200 year history of creating new opportunities for people, whatever their backgrounds, and generating new ideas to shape the world.

Today, the Lab's work connects people across the UK and further afield with those developing new policy ideas and possibilities. In its first two years, it has been proud to bring together some of the most famous decisionmakers in the country with some of the most celebrated scholars and those who have direct, lived experiences of issues on the front line. The Lab is dedicated always to building new connections across competing political traditions. It enables people to find agreement where possible and encourages us all to disagree well where we cannot. Our researchers put issues on the table that otherwise might not be there and always stand ready to help policymakers of all kinds as they grapple with the problems facing us all.

It is for all of these reasons that the vision at the core of Ordinary Hope and the Lab's partnership with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation are reflections of the Lab's core values.

# About the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

JRF is an independent social change organisation, working to support and speed up the transition to a more equitable and just future, free from poverty, where people and planet can flourish.

JRF supports and undertakes many different types of work in all four nations of the UK. This includes policy development and insight gathering, advocacy and campaigns, impact investment, funding pioneers and visionaries, field building, and supporting those building grassroots movements. We are unusual as an organisation in embracing so many methods, but we see value in building bridges between people working across different disciplines and horizons, shaping new coalitions for change.

You can find out more about the principles guiding JRF's work and how we seek to understand the contribution we are making to our mission here: [Vision, mission and principles | Joseph Rowntree Foundation \(jrf.org.uk\)](https://www.jrf.org.uk/about-us/our-approach)

To find out more about our work and events programme, sign up for our newsletter.

We are also very keen to hear from you, about ideas and collaborations.



Please scan to register for Policy Lab updates

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@UCLPolicyLab



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### **Contact Us**

[policylab@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:policylab@ucl.ac.uk)  
[www.ucl.ac.uk/policy-lab](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/policy-lab)  
@UCLPolicyLab