



Library Note

Government Plans to Promote Social Mobility

This House of Lords Library briefing has been prepared in advance of a debate that is scheduled to take place in the House on 27 October 2016 on the following motion:

Lord Holmes of Richmond to move that this House takes note of Her Majesty's Government's plans to promote social mobility.

On appointment as Prime Minister, Theresa May made clear her intention to “build a society that works for everyone” and to promote a “great meritocracy”. The Government has announced several new initiatives to help achieve this aim. These include the development of six new (geographical) opportunity areas to target resources in identified areas of low social mobility, the further development of the National Citizen Service and a package of education proposals, including the expansion of grammar schools. This briefing focuses on these three subjects.

The briefing also presents information on recent reports including by the House of Lords Social Mobility Committee, and statistics published by the Social Mobility Commission. [Factsheets](#) published by the Commission in August 2016 state that:

- 51 percent of children eligible for free school meals achieved a good level of development at age five in 2015 compared to 69 percent of other children.
- Children in the wealthiest areas are 12 percent more likely to go to a good primary school and are almost 25 percent more likely to go to a good secondary school than children from the most deprived areas.
- A degree does not have the same value for all graduates. Even when institution and subject is accounted for, students from higher income families earn around 10 percent more. In addition Black African qualifiers are 14 percent less likely than their white peers to be in professional work six months after graduation.

The factsheets summarise findings from the Commission's [State of the Nation 2015 Annual Report](#) on the progress that Great Britain has made towards improving social mobility and reducing child poverty. This Library briefing concludes with a discussion of different views on social mobility.

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1. Introduction

On 13 July 2016, following her appointment as Prime Minister, Theresa May made a speech outlining the broad direction for her new administration. In the speech she focused on the subject of social mobility and equal access to opportunity. She referenced inequalities based on ethnic origin, class, educational background, gender, mental health and age, arguing that:

If you're black, you're treated more harshly by the criminal justice system than if you're white. If you're a white, working-class boy, you are less likely than anybody else in Britain to go to university. If you're at a state school, you're less likely to reach the top professions than if you are educated privately. If you're a woman, you will earn less than a man. If you suffer from mental health problems, there's not enough help to hand. If you're young, you will find it harder than ever before to own your own home.¹

The Prime Minister said that it was her mission for Britain to be “a country that works for everyone”, including “ordinary, working-class [families]”. She stated that her Government would “do everything we can to help anybody, whatever your background, to go as far as your talents will take you”.²

This briefing presents information on recent government policies on social mobility, provides a selection of commentaries and then discusses the views on social mobility by a range of bodies and organisations.

2. Government Policy

In answer to a written parliamentary question on 1 August 2016, the Government stated that it was committed to improving social mobility and “extending opportunity so that everyone has the chance to realise their full potential”. It said that this would focus on “tackling the root causes of poverty such as worklessness, educational attainment and family stability”.³ At the Conservative Party conference on 5 October 2016, Theresa May reiterated this aim, stating:

[...] if we act to correct unfairness and injustice and put government at the service of ordinary working people—we can build that new united Britain in which everyone plays by the same rules, and in which the powerful and the privileged no longer ignore the interests of the people.⁴

Several speeches made at the conference referred to existing policies. For example, Justine Greening, Secretary of State for Education, referenced the Government’s commitments to “creating three million new apprenticeships for young people”.⁵ This section of the briefing examines government announcements on the issue of social mobility made since the appointment of Theresa May as Prime Minister.

¹ Speech by Theresa May, Prime Minister, ‘[We Will Make Britain a Country that Works not for a Privileged Few but for Every One of Us](#)’, 13 July 2016.

² *ibid.*

³ House of Lords, ‘[Written Question: Children’s Centres](#)’, 1 August 2016, HL1311.

⁴ Conservative Party, ‘[The Prime Minister: The Good That Government Can Do](#)’, 5 October 2016.

⁵ Conservative Party, ‘[Greening: Speech to Conservative Party Conference 2016](#)’, 4 October 2016.

2.1 Opportunity Areas

On 4 October 2016, Justine Greening, Secretary of State for Education, announced the Government's plans to introduce six new "opportunity areas". She described opportunity areas as giving "an extra push" for the education system to deliver knowledge, skills, advice and experience to children and young people.⁶ This would involve local partnerships being formed between early-years providers, schools, colleges, university, businesses, charities and local authorities.⁷ More specifically; it has been announced that:

- The "six opportunity areas" are West Somerset, Norwich, Blackpool, Scarborough, Derby and Oldham. The Department for Education will work with each opportunity area individually on each area's "local priorities and needs". The programme will be "widened out to other parts of the country in the coming months".⁸
- The six areas will be given "prioritised" access to a broader package of support to assist children in their education. This includes a £75 million "teaching and leadership innovation fund" over three years. This is to be focused on helping teachers and school leaders in "challenging areas" to develop.⁹
- The aim of the opportunity areas is to build the knowledge and skills of young people and give them access to the "best advice and opportunities". The Department for Education stated that this will include working with organisations "such as the Careers and Enterprise Company, the Confederation of British Industry, the Federation of Small Businesses, and the National Citizen Service".¹⁰

On the 'Education in the Media' blog on the government website, the Department for Education and the Government Equalities Office explain that the "new opportunity areas across England will receive £60 million of funding to help local children get the best start in life".¹¹ The initial six areas have been identified as the most challenged when it comes to social mobility, based on the Social Mobility Commission's [Social Mobility Index](#).¹²

2.2 National Citizen Service and Youth Investment Fund

National Citizen Service

In its announcement on the six new opportunity areas, the Department for Education explained that the opportunity areas will work "with organisations such as [...] the National Citizen Service" (NCS).¹³ The NCS is currently open to all 16- and 17-year olds in England and is run outside of term time.¹⁴ The NCS consists of courses during which participants experience outdoor activities, skills development in a "uni-style environment", working on social action

⁶ Conservative Party, '[Greening: Speech to Conservative Party Conference 2016](#)', 4 October 2016.

⁷ Department for Education, '[Social Mobility Package Unveiled by Education Secretary](#)', 4 October 2016.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Department for Education and Government Equalities Office, '[Opportunity Areas](#)', 4 October 2016.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ Department for Education, '[Social Mobility Package Unveiled by Education Secretary](#)', 4 October 2016.

¹⁴ The NCS is also available in Northern Ireland, and began to be piloted in Wales in the Autumn of 2014. Young people may apply to participate in the NCS at the age of 15, but must be 16 or 17 at the time of participation.

projects and formal graduations.¹⁵ Alongside social cohesion and social engagement, the NCS describes social mobility as one of the three reasons for its existence: “to build essential skills for life and work, investing in our country’s future talent”.¹⁶ The NCS states that it helps social mobility through several routes:

- Teaching teenagers the “skills you can’t learn in class”, it argues that NCS graduates leave the programme with skills that employers want and with “character strengths and confidence that will stand them in good stead for life”.¹⁷
- The NCS states that 91 percent of participants said that it gave them a chance to “develop skills that would be useful in the future” and that “we know one year after the programme, seven in ten NCS grads say they have already used those skills”.¹⁸
- Developing participants so that they are “more willing to ask for advice or a favour from someone from a richer or poorer background”.¹⁹
- The NCS states that the programme increases wellbeing and reduces anxiety levels “with the greatest impact being seen on those from the poorest backgrounds”.²⁰

The NCS is currently administered by a community interest company called the NCS Trust.²¹ The [National Citizen Service Bill](#), HL Bill 64 of session 2016–17, was introduced in the House of Lords on 11 October 2016. According to the Bill’s Explanatory Notes, it aims to:

- Incorporate the new NCS Trust as a Charter body and create a legislative mechanism to transfer the business of the Company to the new Trust. This creates a legislative framework for the NCS, with the aim of making it a national institution while preserving its independent ethos;
- Secure that the administrative and funding arrangements for the NCS Trust are appropriate for the increased level of public funds the Trust will manage, with proper accountability to government and Parliament; and
- Impose on the NCS Trust an appropriate level of government control for a body in receipt of public funds.²²

The Bill’s provisions would also allow HM Revenue and Customs to send information about the NCS to young people who would be eligible to participate in order to help in the promotion of the programme.²³ The Bill is scheduled for second reading on 25 October 2016 and the Library has published a briefing in advance of the debate.²⁴

¹⁵ National Citizen Service, ‘[What is NCS?](#)’, accessed 17 October 2016.

¹⁶ National Citizen Service, ‘[Our Story](#)’, accessed 17 October 2016.

¹⁷ National Citizen Service, [The Little Book of NCS](#), July 2016, p 14.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ [Explanatory Notes](#), p 2.

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ House of Lords Library, [National Citizen Service Bill \[HL\]](#), 20 October 2016.

Youth Investment Fund

On 11 September 2016, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Cabinet Office and the Prime Minister's Office announced a new Youth Investment Fund (YIF). The YIF will make £40 million available to projects in targeted disadvantaged communities. It also states that young people will be involved in “design and decision-making of the new fund”. The first awards are expected to be made in Spring 2017.²⁵

Alongside the YIF, the Government also announced that, along with the Big Lottery Fund, it would invest a further £20 million into [Step Up to Serve's #iwill](#) campaign.²⁶ Step Up to Serve is a charity which is running a UK-wide campaign that aims “to make social action part of life for as many 10- to 20-year olds as possible by the year 2020”.²⁷

On 11 September 2016, Theresa May stated that, taken together, this funding was part of the Government's “determination to build a country that works for everyone—and [to] ensure that young people can go as far as their talents allow, regardless of their backgrounds”.²⁸

2.3 Grammar Schools

The Conservative Party's manifesto for the 2015 general election included a commitment to allow for the expansion of existing grammar schools, stating:

We will continue to allow all good schools to expand, whether they are maintained schools, academies, free schools or grammar schools.²⁹

On 6 August 2016—following the appointment of Theresa May as Prime Minister—the *Telegraph* reported that the Government was seeking to lift the ban on creating new grammar schools in England.³⁰ The policy was subsequently confirmed by the Government.

The Government published a consultation paper entitled [Schools That Work for Everyone](#) on 12 September 2016, which outlined proposals for reform to the schools system in England.³¹ The consultation will run until 12 December 2016. The Government described its aim as being to increase the school choices available to parents regarding where to send their children, stating that it wanted to create a “diverse school system that provides all children, whatever their background, with schooling that will help them achieve their potential”.³²

As well as proposals for increasing the number of selective schools and additional selective school places, the consultation set out plans for independent schools to provide assistance to the state-funded sector and to increase the number of full-funded bursaries that they offered.³³ It also included proposals for universities to become involved in improving school quality and

²⁵ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Cabinet Office and the Prime Minister's Office, '[Government Delivers £80 Million Boost to Help Give Young People the Best Start in Life](#)', 11 September 2016.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Step Up to Serve, '[#iwill—About Us](#)', accessed 17 October 2016.

²⁸ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Cabinet Office and the Prime Minister's Office, '[Government Delivers £80 Million Boost to Help Give Young People the Best Start in Life](#)', 11 September 2016.

²⁹ Conservative Party, *The Conservative Manifesto 2015*, April 2015, p 34.

³⁰ *Telegraph*, '[Theresa May to End Ban on New Grammar Schools](#)', 6 August 2016.

³¹ Department for Education, [Schools That Work for Everyone](#), 12 September 2016.

³² *ibid.*, p 3.

³³ *ibid.*, pp 12–16.

pupil attainment and to remove the 50 percent cap on children admitted by faith at oversubscribed faith schools operating as free schools.³⁴

Regarding increasing selective school places, the consultation proposed that this would be done through the further expansion of existing grammar schools, the creation of new selective free schools and allowing existing schools to become selective schools. To enable this to happen, it stated that the current restrictions on selective schools would be relaxed.³⁵ Existing grammar schools, judged to be good or outstanding, seeking to expand would be provided with dedicated funding of up to £50 million a year, provided from the start of the expansion process, based on estimates of demand.³⁶

In her speech to the Conservative Party conference on 4 October 2016, Justine Greening, the Secretary of State for Education, stated that grammar schools “have a track record of closing the attainment gap between children on free school meals and their better off classmates”.³⁷

The House of Lords debated the Government’s plans to expand grammar schools on 13 October 2016.³⁸ Responding for the Government, Viscount Younger of Leckie, Lords Spokesperson for the Department of Education, stated that the Government’s consultation “focuses on how selective schools can contribute more to ensuring greater social mobility”.³⁹ Baroness Andrews (Labour), who moved the debate, argued that “the fact that the heyday of the grammar schools between 1950 and 1970 coincided with significant social mobility driven by economic and technological change is just that—a coincidence”.⁴⁰ Lord Storey, the Liberal Democrat’s Lords Principal Spokesperson for Education, asserted that grammar schools “creamed off” children, teaching staff and resources, consequently secondary moderns “were perceived by parents as inferior schools and the pupils as inferior students”.⁴¹ The Bishop of Norwich argued that “the challenge for the Government, surely, in taking these proposals forward is to ensure that no one is educationally disadvantaged” and that the emphasis “must remain on ensuring that every child can attend an excellent school”.⁴²

The Lords Library briefing [Extension of Grammar Schools and Selection in Education](#) (7 October 2016) provides further details about the Government’s policy and the response to it by political parties, the education sector and think tanks.

3. Reports on Social Mobility

3.1 House of Lords Social Mobility Committee

On 8 April 2016, the House of Lords Social Mobility Committee published its report, *Overlooked and Left Behind: Improving the Transition from School to Work for the Majority of Young*

³⁴ Department for Education, [Schools That Work for Everyone](#), 12 September 2016, pp 17–20 and 30–4.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p 22.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ Conservative Party, ‘[Greening: Speech to Conservative Party Conference 2016](#)’, 4 October 2016.

³⁸ [HL Hansard, 13 October 2016, cols 2011–50.](#)

³⁹ [HL Hansard, 13 October 2016, col 2049.](#)

⁴⁰ [ibid., col 2014.](#)

⁴¹ [ibid., col 2040.](#)

⁴² [ibid., col 2026.](#)

People.⁴³ The report examined young people, social mobility, and the question of how to ensure that all school leavers are offered high quality career paths.

The Committee came to a number of conclusions, including that:

- Successive governments have focused either on university places and/or those who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs). The Committee argued that the majority of young people fall outside these two categories. The Committee’s report aimed to focus on these individuals.⁴⁴
- The current non-academic route for young people is “complex and incoherent”. The Committee argued that “careers advice and education are being delivered in a way which means that too many young people simply drift into further studies or their first job, which often has no real prospect of progression”.⁴⁵
- Despite the “benefits” of apprenticeships, with only 6 percent of 16- to 18-year olds following them “there must continue to be scope to support young people who do not follow a pathway to university or an apprenticeship to make a successful transition into the work place by other routes”.⁴⁶

The Committee made eight recommendations for the Government. These included:

- The development of a framework for people aged between 14 and 19 to enable as many people as possible to achieve a Level 3 qualification (which include A-Levels and Level 3 NVQs).⁴⁷ The framework should present clearer routes to good-quality employment, a new “gold standard” in independent careers advice and improved careers education in schools.⁴⁸
- A cabinet level minister should have responsibility for the framework and for the transition from school to work for young people.⁴⁹
- Transitions from school to work should be supported by publicly available data and this data should be made available to researchers.⁵⁰

In its response to the Committee, the Government, then led by David Cameron, stated that it agreed that the “ever-changing multitude of qualifications” available to 16- to 18-year olds was potentially confusing.⁵¹ It also stated that it had established the Independent Panel on Technical Education, led by Lord Sainsbury of Turville (Labour), in part to look at simplifying the current

⁴³ House of Lords Social Mobility Committee, [Overlooked and Left Behind: Improving the Transition from School to Work for the Majority of Young People](#), 8 April 2016, HL Paper 120 of session 2015–16.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p 5.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Gov.uk, [‘What Qualification Levels Mean’](#), accessed 19 October 2016.

⁴⁸ House of Lords Social Mobility Committee, [Overlooked and Left Behind: Improving the Transition from School to Work for the Majority of Young People](#), 8 April 2016, HL Paper 120 of session 2015–16, p 11.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ Department for Education, [The Government’s Response to the House of Lords Select Committee Report on Social Mobility in the Transition from School to Work](#), July 2016, Cm 9274, p 13.

system.⁵² The Government also stated that it was “committed to working with the [Social Mobility] Commission in its tasks of assessing improvement in social mobility in the UK and advocating for better social mobility in England”.⁵³

3.2 Social Mobility Commission

The Social Mobility Commission is an advisory non-departmental public body established under the Life Chances Act 2010 (as amended by the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016). Its remit is to assess the progress made in improving social mobility in the UK, and to promote social mobility in England. It is the successor body to the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission.⁵⁴

The Commission publishes annual reports on social mobility in the UK. The most recent report, written by the then Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, published in December 2015, argued that:

Contrary to today’s prevailing climate of cynicism about politics, those efforts [to boost social mobility] have produced real results. Child poverty has fallen by a third since 1997. There are fewer children in workless households than at any time in two decades. Employment is at record levels and educational inequalities, though wide, have slowly narrowed. More working class youngsters are benefiting from higher education than at any point in history. Britain today has the fastest growing economy in the G7.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, the Commission warned that:

[...] ours is a country where the class and income of children when they grow up is more related to the class and income of their parents than elsewhere in the developed world.⁵⁶

The ‘Social Mobility Overview’ section of the report provides a comprehensive summary of social mobility in the UK.

In August 2016, the Commission published a number of two sided summaries of social mobility indicators (written in May 2016) under the following headings: early years; schools; vocational training; higher education; and the professions.⁵⁷ These present recent statistics and recommendations for government by the Commission. These state, for example, that:

- 51 percent of children eligible for free school meals achieved a good level of development at age five in 2015 compared to 69 percent of other children.⁵⁸

⁵² The Government published its post-16 skills plan based on the work of the Independent Panel on Technical Education on 8 July 2016; Department for Education and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, [Post-16 Skills Plan](#), July 2016, Cm 9280.

⁵³ Department for Education, [The Government’s Response to the House of Lords Select Committee Report on Social Mobility in the Transition from School to Work](#), July 2016, Cm 9274, p 10.

⁵⁴ Social Mobility Commission, [‘About Us’](#), accessed 18 October 2016.

⁵⁵ Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, [State of the Nation 2015: Social Mobility and Child Poverty in Great Britain](#), December 2015, pp iii–iv.

⁵⁶ *ibid*, p 15.

⁵⁷ Social Mobility Commission, [‘Social Mobility Factsheets’](#), 16 August 2016.

⁵⁸ Social Mobility Commission, [The Early Years: Building the Right Foundations](#), May 2016.

- Children in the wealthiest areas are 12 percent more likely to go to a good primary school and are almost 25 percent more likely to go to a good secondary school than children from the most deprived areas.⁵⁹
- A degree does not have the same value for all graduates. Even when institution and subject is accounted for, students from higher income families earn around 10 percent more. In addition Black African qualifiers are 14 percent less likely than their white peers to be in professional work six months after graduation.⁶⁰

The Commission also publishes data on the '[Social Mobility Index](#)'. This is a data metric which:

[...] compares the chances that a child from a disadvantaged background will do well at school and get a good job across each of the 324 local authority district areas of England. It examines a range of measures of the educational outcomes achieved by young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and the local job and housing markets to shed light on which are the best and worst places in England in terms of the opportunities young people from poorer backgrounds have to succeed.⁶¹

Key findings in the most recent Social Mobility Index report include:

- London and its commuter belt are pulling away from the rest of the country. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who live in these areas are far more likely to achieve good outcomes in school and have more opportunities to do well as adults than those in the rest of the country.⁶²
- Coastal areas and industrial towns are becoming real social mobility coldspots. Many of these areas perform badly on both educational measures and adulthood outcomes, giving young people from less advantaged backgrounds limited opportunities to get on.⁶³
- England's major cities are failing to be the places of opportunity that they should be. While London is way ahead none of our other major cities do particularly well, although there is still a marked difference between cities like Manchester, Birmingham and Southampton (which are about average against the Social Mobility Index) and cities like Nottingham, Derby and Norwich (which perform very badly).⁶⁴

3.3 Views on Social Mobility

An Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report from 2010 found evidence that it is "easier to climb the social ladder and earn more than one's parents in the Nordic countries, Australia and Canada than in France, Italy, Britain and the United States".⁶⁵ The OECD report examined intergenerational social mobility which is the degree to which a parent's socioeconomic status predicts their children's socioeconomic status as adults. The OECD referenced several different ways of measuring social mobility, including wage

⁵⁹ Social Mobility Commission, [Schools: The Engine of Social Mobility](#), May 2016.

⁶⁰ Social Mobility Commission, [Social Mobility and the Professions](#), May 2016.

⁶¹ Social Mobility Commission, '[Social Mobility Index](#)', June 2016.

⁶² *ibid*, p 5.

⁶³ *ibid*, p 6.

⁶⁴ *ibid*.

⁶⁵ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, '[Obstacles to Social Mobility Weaken Equal Opportunities and Economic Growth, Says OECD Study](#)', 10 February 2010.

mobility and secondary and post-secondary education mobility. It also highlighted a number of challenges with doing so. These included:

- The difficulty in distinguishing between the effects of a parent’s socio-economic status from that of “inherited abilities or disposition of individuals that influence their wages and educational achievement”.⁶⁶
- The confounding factor of labour productivity, “which is often affected by schooling choices, parents’ private investment in education outside the educational system and individuals’ own investment in higher education”.⁶⁷
- Indirect effects such as social norms, work ethics and social networks that can be transmitted from parent to child.

The OECD concluded that it is those policies that facilitate access to education amongst people from disadvantaged backgrounds which have the strongest effect on intergenerational wage mobility. The OECD also argued that this effect was “likely to be good for economic growth”.⁶⁸ Examples of such policies include:

[...] inter alia school practices that start grouping or “tracking” students only late in their educational curricula so as to encourage the social mix within schools, or government-supported loan or grant systems that reduce students’ dependence on their families for financing their post-secondary studies.⁶⁹

In 2005, the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)—supported by the Sutton Trust—published a report entitled *Intergenerational Mobility in Europe and North America*.⁷⁰ The UK data were drawn from cohort studies. The report concluded that:

[...] social mobility—how someone’s adult outcomes relate to their circumstances as a child—had declined in Britain between children born in 1958 and those born in 1970. [The study] also showed that it was lower than in Canada, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland, and on a par with the United States.⁷¹

A subsequent report by two of the same authors, published in 2007, found that “the oft-cited finding of a fall in intergenerational mobility between the 1958 and 1970 cohorts appears to have been an episode caused by the particular circumstances of the time”.⁷² The authors also argued that this was accompanied by a rise in the association between educational attainment

⁶⁶ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, [A Family Affair: Intergenerational Social Mobility across OECD Countries](#), March 2010, p 184.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p 196.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Centre for Economic Performance, [Intergenerational Mobility in Europe and North America—A Report Supported by the Sutton Trust](#), April 2005.

⁷¹ Sutton Trust, ‘[Social Mobility](#)’, accessed 18 October 2016.

⁷² Jo Blanden and Stephen Machin, [Report for Sutton Trust: Recent Changes in Intergenerational Mobility in Britain](#), December 2007, p 18.

and family income. However, they said that:

[...] recent cohorts find little evidence of change and thus it appears that changes in social mobility may well have flattened out. However, at the same time, they have not reversed nor started to improve.⁷³

In an article which summarised a range of data from different sources (including the LSE studies referenced above), the organisation Full Fact wrote that there continued to be a lack of consensus on social mobility. It argued that:

Academics can't agree on whether social mobility has declined or remained the same over the last 50 years and whether Britain's mobility is average or poor compared to other developing countries.⁷⁴

Full Fact referenced a 2012 article written by John Goldthorpe, of Oxford University's Institute of Social Policy. In this, Dr Goldthorpe argued against the "consensus" view that social mobility in Britain had declined in recent decades. Referencing the work of the LSE, he stated that this consensus "emerged from the research of a group of economists into intergenerational income mobility". However, he asserted that an alternative view, based on research into social class mobility, was that:

[...] the only recent change of note is that the rising rates of upward, absolute mobility of the middle decades of the last century have levelled out, while relative rates have remained more or less constant back to the interwar years".⁷⁵

The Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA) has challenged the view of the UK as a country of low social mobility. In a briefing published in October 2015, the IEA argued specifically against then Prime Minister David Cameron's claim in 2015 that "Britain has the lowest social mobility in the developed world".⁷⁶ The IEA argued that it was extremely difficult to compare rates of social mobility internationally because of methodological differences. The IEA also asserted that:

[...] the claim that (relative) social mobility has declined is based on a much smaller body of evidence than the less pessimistic view that mobility has been steady or rising.⁷⁷

It also argued that there were great advances in social mobility in the post-war period, but that these were due to "structural changes in the labour market which are unlikely to happen again".⁷⁸

In his book *Social Class in the 21st Century* published in 2015, Mike Savage argued for caution in "thinking social mobility is in decline. A lot depends on how it is measured".⁷⁹ As an attempt to provide a "more multidimensional lens on contemporary mobility rates", Professor Savage drew on the Great British Class Survey (GBCS), which sought to move "beyond the purely

⁷³ Jo Blanden and Stephen Machin, [Report for Sutton Trust: Recent Changes in Intergenerational Mobility in Britain](#), December 2007, p 19.

⁷⁴ Full Fact, [Measuring Social Mobility: How Does the UK Perform?](#), 5 September 2014.

⁷⁵ John H Goldthorpe, [Understanding—and Misunderstanding—Social Mobility in Britain: The Entry of the Economists, the Confusion of Politicians and the Limits of Educational Policy](#), 2012, p 4.

⁷⁶ Conservative Party, [Prime Minister: Conference Speech 2015](#), 8 October 2015.

⁷⁷ Institute for Economic Affairs, [Social Mobility in the UK](#), 8 October 2015, p 1.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Mike Savage, *Social Class in the 21st Century*, 2015, p 190.

economic or occupational [measures]” and instead consider “the additional role that social and cultural capital play in class movement and division”.⁸⁰ He argued that:

[...] in the middle ranges of the social hierarchy the chances of making a significant change in life’s trajectory are good. Yet, despite the fact that there seems to be a lot of movement into this middle part of the class structure, mobility into the upper echelons and the traditionally high-status professions is markedly more difficult. Moreover, even when the upwardly mobile are successful in obtaining a privileged position, they often fail to amass the very highest levels of economic, cultural and social capital. Those upwardly mobile into the GBCS’s elite category, for example, are paid less, are less well-connected and engaged in traditionally high-status culture than those from the stable elite echelons.⁸¹

4. Further Reading

Social mobility takes in a wide range of policy areas including education, poverty and discrimination legislation. The following resources draw together some recent public reports that provide further reading on some of these issues.

- House of Commons Library, [Recent Policy Developments: Grammar Schools in England](#), 30 September 2016
- House of Commons Library, [Careers Guidance in Schools, Colleges and Universities \(England\)](#), 27 September 2016
- House of Lords Library, [Causes of Poverty in the United Kingdom](#), 7 July 2016
- House of Commons Library, [Early Intervention](#), 7 July 2016
- House of Lords Library, [Black and Minority Ethnic People in the Workplace in Britain](#), 29 April 2016
- Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, [Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice](#), May 2016, Cm 9258
- [Westminster Hall Debate on the ‘Social Mobility Index’](#), HC Hansard, 9 February 2016, cols 571–90WH
- Universities UK, [Working in Partnership: Enabling Social Mobility in Higher Education—The Final Report of the Social Mobility Advisory Group](#), 10 October 2016
- Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*, 2010
- Mike Savage, *Social Class in the 21st Century*, 2015

⁸⁰ Mike Savage, *Social Class in the 21st Century*, 2015, p 192.

⁸¹ *ibid*, p 216.

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