



Social Mobility and Child Poverty Review: Call for Evidence from ECP Partners

Introduction

In August this year the Government appointed Alan Milburn as an Independent Reviewer of Social Mobility and Child Poverty. The appointment is a stop-gap measure made in view of the Government's delay in setting up the Child Poverty Commission. As part of his brief, Milburn is to undertake preparatory work for the new Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission which is likely to be established early next year.

The Cabinet Office recently put out a call for evidence to inform Milburn's work. It is anticipated that responses will feed into his recommendations for action, which in turn, will form the basis of the Commission's first report to Parliament next spring. While the call comes hard on the heels of the *Tackling Child Poverty and Improving Life Chances* consultation, it is **important for as many in the ECP Coalition as possible to make submissions to ensure that critical aspects of the child poverty agenda are not obscured.**

Call for Evidence

The call for evidence revolves around 10 questions which can be grouped as follows:

3.1 Diagnosis

Question 1 (What do you think are the links between social mobility and child poverty?) and question 2 (What are the main barriers which stop people moving out of poverty or which prevent people from slipping into poverty?) both allow ECP partners to share their understanding of the determinants of child poverty. While views clearly differ across the coalition as to the causes of child poverty, what is important to emphasise in any response is that **child poverty damages life chances**. Evidence shows a clear causal link between income poverty and poorer outcomes in terms of educational attainment, employment prospects and many health indicators.¹ It also shows that countries with a more equal income distribution achieve greater social mobility.² As a result, no social mobility strategy is likely to succeed without tackling child poverty.

¹ See, for example, Frank Field, *The Foundation Years: Preventing Poor Children from Becoming Poor Adults* (2010)

² See, for example, Independent Commission on Social Mobility (Report) 2009 available at http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/Social_Mobility_Report_Final.pdf

3.2 Current strategies

Question 3 (Do you think that the Government's policies, in particular the social mobility and child poverty strategies, will improve people's life chances?) provides the opportunity to reiterate concerns expressed in previous submissions on child poverty. In particular, it may be worth highlighting (i) the need to **increase participation of parents in the labour market** through, for example, appropriate jobs and better childcare provision (ii) that as 58% of children living in poverty have a working parent, there is a real need to address the question of **low pay and in-work poverty** (iii) **increasing family incomes** is critical to reduce child poverty yet the Welfare Reform Bill threatens to reduce them through the application of a higher taper, caps and sanctions.

ECP partners may also like to take issue with the way in which the social mobility strategy **underplays the role of income inequality** in determining life chances.³ While social mobility is impeded by a wide range of factors, it is disingenuous of the government to suggest that income inequality is not a critical constraint that limits people's opportunities. This position is also inconsistent with their ready acceptance that wealth inequalities act as a barrier to social mobility.

3.3 Actions

Questions 4 to 8 ask about the actions that the Government could undertake to improve outcomes. It is worth noting that with the exception of question 8 (What more should businesses, civil society and other non-government institutions be doing to improve social mobility and tackle child poverty?), all these questions focus on social mobility and opportunity as opposed to child poverty.

Specifically, question 4 asks 'Are there other policies that could be implemented for the same cost which would ensure that all citizens have the same opportunities?'; question 5 considers 'How can we create the right mix of practical and financial support to ensure that all people have opportunities to get on in life?'; while questions 6 and 7 ask 'What are the best examples of projects which have brought about real progress in creating a fairer, more mobile society?' and 'What are the best examples of where effective projects have been expanded and best practice shared with other areas or organisations?'

It is therefore important that responses from ECP members emphasise that an integrated approach is required and that **the reduction of child poverty must go hand in hand with efforts to increase social mobility**.

Question 5 also provides the opportunity to rebut the idea that money is not a significant part of the solution. ECP partners may like to highlight that **financial support to provide guaranteed incomes must remain an essential component** of any programme of action.

3.4 Measurement

Question 9 (What would be the best way to measure progress on social mobility and child poverty?) and question 10 (Do you think the indicators set out in the child poverty strategy and social mobility strategy are the right measures?) provide ECP members with the chance to caution against a too radical shift from quantitative to qualitative indicators. Given that analysis shows the critical role of income levels in reducing poverty and

³ See paras. 1.41 and 1.43 of *Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Social Mobility (2011)*.

increasing social mobility, it is **important that material resources are monitored** alongside softer indicators of well-being.

Finally, ECP partners may also want to point out that the government's **child poverty targets are legally binding, and act to galvanise action**. Consequently, it is important that in the future, they are not eroded or relegated to the status of indicators.

Practicalities

- 4 The call for evidence closes on 16 October 2011. Submissions can be made online, by email or by post. See <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/social-mobility-and-child-poverty-review-call-evidence> for further details.

About CPAG

CPAG promotes action for the prevention and relief of poverty among children and families with children. To achieve this, CPAG aims to raise awareness of the causes, extent, nature and impact of poverty, and strategies for its eradication and prevention; bring about positive policy changes for families with children in poverty; and enable those eligible for income maintenance to have access to their full entitlement.

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