



Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister

Creating sustainable communities

The Social Exclusion Unit

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
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**Social
Exclusion
Unit**

What is social exclusion?

Social exclusion is what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, poor health and family breakdown.

In the past, governments tried to deal with each of the problems of social exclusion individually, but there was little success in tackling the complicated links between them, or preventing problems from arising in the first place.

What is the Social Exclusion Unit?

The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) was set up by the Prime Minister in December 1997. We were initially part of the Cabinet Office and moved over to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in May 2002.

Our remit is to help improve government action to reduce social exclusion by producing 'joined-up solutions to joined-up problems'. We work mainly on specific projects, chosen following consultation with other government departments and suggestions from interested groups.

The unit is staffed by a mixture of civil servants from a number of government departments and external secondees from organisations with experience of tackling social exclusion.

We work on issues that affect a range of government departments, and do not duplicate work being done elsewhere. We publish reports on specific issues and are involved in other cross-government policy relating to social exclusion.

How does the Social Exclusion Unit work?

The Prime Minister, in agreement with ministers, decides the direction of the unit's work and specific projects after consultation with officials and interested groups.

In preparing our reports, we draw extensively on research, external expertise, good practice and promising ideas. We visit and consult widely with

local authorities, business, the voluntary sector and other agencies. We pay particular attention to people who have direct experience of social exclusion.

Within Whitehall, we work very closely with departmental officials and ministers. Policy decisions in our reports are cleared through the appropriate government committees, and implemented by departments. Any policy changes proposed have clear follow-up action, targets and evaluation plans.

The unit's remit covers England only, but we keep in close touch with the devolved Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland administrations, which have their own strategies for tackling social exclusion.

The Social Exclusion Unit's approach

Our work has led to a change in the way social exclusion is understood within government and more widely. Our analysis has shown that issues facing teenage parents, rough sleepers, deprived neighbourhoods and young people at risk of social exclusion are complex and interconnected. Solutions need to be found that address these multiple problems.

The Social Exclusion Unit looks for solutions based on:

- preventing social exclusion;
- making sure mainstream services deliver for everyone; and
- reintegrating people who have fallen through the net.

What is the Social Exclusion Unit working on now?

Mental Health and Social Exclusion (2004)

Early in 2003 the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister asked the unit to work with other government departments to consider what more can be done to reduce social exclusion among adults with mental health problems.

We are looking at how to improve rates of employment through support both in taking up and retaining work, and how to promote greater social participation and access to services.

We will report our recommendations to ministers in summer 2004.

Jobs and Enterprise in Deprived Areas (2004)

In spring 2003 the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister asked the Social Exclusion Unit to work with other government departments to consider what more should be done to tackle the concentrations of worklessness that still persist in some neighbourhoods.

Although employment rates across Britain as a whole have been rising steadily for a decade and unemployment is at its lowest level for 28 years, there are still some communities across the country with many people out of work.

The general fall in unemployment has not been matched by an equivalent fall in inactivity. Individuals who are economically inactive now outnumber people who are unemployed four to one.

We are due to report to the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister in summer 2004.

Action on Debt (2004)

More than half of all households with serious debt problems are in the lowest income group – living on less than £7,500 a year. This can contribute to stress and poor health, eviction and child poverty and it can act as a barrier to work and neighbourhood renewal.

In spring 2004, the Social Exclusion Unit published 'Action on Debt: why it matters and what you can do', a short guide for local organisations demonstrating how they can work together to tackle debt. The pack is available from our publications centre (see back page) or on the SEU web site.

Impacts and Trends (2004)

The unit is currently taking stock of what has been achieved across government to tackle social exclusion and what more needs to be done. This wide-ranging programme of work is called Impacts and Trends.

Impacts and Trends aims to provide a clearer understanding of how government policies have worked to tackle social exclusion. This project will also identify future drivers and patterns of social exclusion and provide an evidence base for future policy making.

We are now beginning to collate the findings from this work. A flavour of the issues covered is presented in the discussion paper – 'Tackling Social Exclusion:

Taking stock and looking to the future – emerging findings’, launched in March 2004 by Yvette Cooper MP Minister for Social Exclusion. This is available from our publications centre or on our website.

Reports from the Impacts and Trends programme of work will be published later this year.

The Social Exclusion Unit's past work

Since it was set up in 1997, the unit has published 29 reports on five major areas. In each of these areas major policy changes have been made and tough targets set. These reports are now being implemented by other government departments or cross-departmental units. We are already seeing signs of real improvement in the lives of people who are socially excluded.

A Better Education for Children in Care (2003)

Young people who have been in care are hugely over-represented among rough sleepers, teenage parents and prisoners. Almost half of children in care leave school with no qualifications – making it difficult for care leavers to make the transition to adult life and increasing the chance of exclusion. The Social Exclusion Unit published its report, ‘A Better Education for Children in Care’, in autumn 2003.

Transport and Social Exclusion – Making the Connections (2003)

Problems with transport and the location and delivery of services contribute to social exclusion by preventing people from participating in work or learning and from accessing healthcare, food shopping and other local activities. People in deprived communities also suffer the worst effects of road traffic through pollution and pedestrian accidents.

The report sets out 37 policy changes from across government aimed principally at improving access to jobs and services for people facing social exclusion. Accessibility planning, highlighted in the report, is to be incorporated in the Local Transport Plans, due in 2005. This means that it will be someone's job in every Local Transport Authority that produces a Local Transport Plan to help people access services and key locations.

Young Runaways (2002)

Running away is a clear signal that something is seriously wrong in a young person's life. In England one in nine children under the age of 16 run away from home every year, which equates to some 77,000 runaways. When they are away from home runaways sometimes put themselves in real danger, for example by getting involved with prostitution or drug dealing and sleeping in unsafe places.

The Young Runaways report was published in November 2002. It puts forward a detailed action plan aimed at preventing children and young people from running away and providing a safe place to stay for those who still decide to run. The report encourages agencies, along with central and local government, to be aware of their responsibilities in relation to runaways and respond to their needs effectively.

Reducing Re-offending by Ex-prisoners (2002)

The report, published in July 2002, found that rates of re-offending by ex-prisoners were consistently high and identified nine key factors which contribute to persistent offending behaviour: education and training; employment; drug and alcohol misuse; mental and physical health; attitudes and self-control; institutionalisation and life-skills; housing; financial support and debt; and family networks.

Moreover, the unit found that some existing institutional structures were in some ways not best equipped to deal with these inter-related problems.

The Social Exclusion Unit recommended that government develop a Rehabilitation of Offenders Action Plan, led by the Home Office, which would draw together the many strands and problems identified by the unit and take forward the government's work to bring about a reduction in re-offending.

In January 2004, the government announced the integration of the Prison Service and National Probation Service into a new, unified National Offender Management System. The Home Office is due to publish its cross-government Rehabilitation of Offenders Action Plan shortly.

National Strategy Action Plan – A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal (2001)

The scale and complexity of the problems in deprived neighbourhoods were highlighted in 1998. Government officials, front line practitioners and residents of deprived neighbourhoods were brought together in Policy Action Teams to work on solutions. After major consultation, the results were drawn together into an action plan, published in 2001.

The plan's vision – that within ten to twenty years no-one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live – was backed up by substantial investment, key floor targets and commitments to improve employment levels, educational attainment, health and housing and to reduce crime in the most deprived neighbourhoods.

Many of these goals are being delivered through local strategic partnerships. They bring together all the key players in an area, including residents and community groups, to help tackle deprivation and improve local services. At grass roots level programmes such as the New Deal for Communities and Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders are regenerating neighbourhoods and improving services in the most deprived areas.

The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, a cross-cutting Government unit based in the ODPM, is responsible for ensuring these goals are met in partnership with the rest of government.

Bridging the Gap – New Opportunities for 16–18 year olds not in Education, Employment or Training (1999)

This report explained why so many young people were outside education, training and employment for long periods after school leaving age. It set out an action plan to improve significantly all young people's chances.

Connexions, the youth advice and support service is now available for 13-19 years olds in England. All Connexions Partnerships are working towards targets for reducing the proportion of young people not in learning or work in their area. The Tomlinson Working Group on 14-19 Reform and the Treasury's review of financial support for 16-19 year

olds set out further reforms, which will make a major contribution to this area.

The Department for Education and Skills co-ordinates the follow-up action on this report.

Teenage Pregnancy (1999)

The report examined why Britain had the highest rate of teenage births in Europe. It set out a strategy to cut the rates of teenage parenthood and increase numbers of teenage parents in learning and employment.

Conception rates among teenagers have fallen by over 9% in the period 1998-2002.

The Teenage Pregnancy Unit within the Department for Education and Skills implements the report's recommendations.

Rough Sleeping (1998)

The report found that 1,850 people slept rough every night. It set a target of reducing individuals who slept rough by two-thirds by 2002.

This target was reached and has since been sustained. The 2003 national estimate of rough sleepers was the lowest on record.

The Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is continuing to work closely with local authorities and voluntary organisations to sustain the reduction in rough sleeping, and where possible, to reduce the number of rough sleepers further.

Truancy and School Exclusion (1998)

In 1996/97 at least one million children truanted. Almost 13,000 were permanently excluded from school each year. The report set out an action plan to deliver a one-third reduction in truancy and exclusion levels by 2002.

The number of children excluded from school reduced by one quarter in 2001/02, compared to 1996/7.

The Department for Education and Skills co-ordinates follow-up action to the report and introduced the Improving Behaviour and Attendance Strategy in 2002 which takes a whole school approach to tackling truancy and improving behaviour.

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Further information on the Social Exclusion Unit

All our reports, along with other information
on the SEU's work, are available on the website:
www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk

**The SEU's publications can be
obtained without charge through the
website or through ODPM publications:**

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