

SOCIAL MOBILITY CONSULTATION ANALYSIS

Introduction

This paper summarises responses that were submitted during the consultation phase of the Heart of the South West's Skills Advisory Panel's (SAP) deep dive on Social Mobility.

The consultation was launched on 18th May 2021 to support the SAPs commitment to develop a dedicated Social Mobility and Inclusion programme¹. The consultation had three main aims, specifically to identify:

- priorities that the programme should address
- examples of existing good practice (especially those with potential for replication)
- recommendations for future activity

The consultation questions were developed in collaboration with the Social Prosperity Working Group and cascaded through the SAP, stakeholder networks and social media platforms. The consultation was hosted on the web-based survey software Snap. A [research briefing](#) on social briefing was published prior to the consultation to introduce the topic and explore the impact of Covid-19 on social mobility locally. These results will be presented at the forthcoming social mobility event on the 30th June 2021.

Thirteen responses were submitted during the four week consultation period. Job-related characteristics of participants were collected and the results of these were mixed, with a third working in the Education & training provider sector and a fifth in Local authority, and other private sector. The majority of respondents answered that they are responsible for 'partnership working with other organisations' in their job, and over two-thirds are responsible for 'designing projects or programmes and bid development'. Very few are responsible for 'front line delivery of services to clients'.

Local priorities

The first section of the consultation invited consultees to propose three challenges that the Social Mobility and Inclusion Programme should focus on. It asked for details of the problem that needed to be addressed, what success would look like, and who would benefit.

This question elicited the greatest number of responses within the consultation, with 45 priorities identified overall relating to multiple aspects and stages of life and reflecting the complex and broad nature of social mobility. Key themes raised included:

¹ See Chapter 5 <https://skillslaunchpad.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Heart-of-the-South-West-Skills-Launchpad-2021-2024-5mb-V2.pdf>

- Supporting educational attainment and training
- Raising aspirations of young people
- Digital inclusion
- Creating employment opportunities within the local area
- Support within the home with provisions, support, housing
- Rurality and in particular access to employment and training
- Models of delivery

The following sections will explore each of these themes in more detail:

Education and training

Education and in particular the attainment of qualifications was highlighted as a key area of concern:

“Education is key to supporting social mobility. Gaps in learning start early on and only widen thereafter. Early intervention is required to ensure good standard of literacy and numeracy to enable onward progression. This support needs to be joined up (both laterally – e.g. with good linkages re: social well-being/housing etc. – and progressively i.e. across different educational stages). Interventions need to be sustained over time as part of a progression framework if they are to be successful. Pupils are currently picked up and put down across a variety of well-meaning but disparate interventions or fall through the cracks altogether. Developing joined-up approaches across educational stages are more likely to be successful. Focus is needed not only on learning but facilitating behaviours and skills, and to encourage confidence and self-advocacy.”

Another consultee echoed the sentiment:

“All South West schools need to focus in the attainment gaps for disadvantaged children. There is too much acceptance that disadvantaged children will not reach the attainment of other children. While schools can’t improve other factors that affect children, they can deliver excellent teaching, which evidence shows makes a huge impact on all children’s progress. Too few schools are delivering excellent teaching. Home schooling is still insufficiently monitored.”

One respondent felt there are gaps in the curriculum for teaching financial literacy, as well as skills for “*making the link between having things/doing nice things and being able to handle money*”.

Focus also fell on shortfalls in training, particularly for vocational occupations and in more isolated areas:

“Improving the viability of vocational training in remote areas. Current funding structures for learning mean that training in key skills including agriculture and hospitality and catering is not available. Changes in funding to make this provision viable would strengthen outcomes for individuals and ease recruitment pressures for local employers”

While the focus tended to be on young people in schools, one consultee felt that up-skilling adults should be a priority:

“Focus is needed on enabling people within the region to skill up to support social mobility. Regional approaches are needed which encourage people to return to learning/training to enable them to skill-up e.g. affordable/accessibile opportunities, flexible working, industry-linked training/educational opportunities and advocacy”.

The significance of funding for people who might otherwise miss out on taking up opportunities due limited financial means was also raised:

“Funding so that people can take risks and try new things without losing out. E.g. being able to work in a lower paid job, take an internship.”

Within responses linked to education, a small number flagged specific groups as most in need of targeted support/interventions: *“girls from working class families”*; *“young men who want to drop out of the education system”*; *“young people with a disability”*; *“FSM children”*.

Raising aspiration

Raising aspiration formed part of several responses. Role models were advocated with the suggestions that schools could invite local successful individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to talk about what they did to get where they are now, and show that there can be alternative routes to the top without university.

“FSM children need to be encouraged to aspire and dream big. Projects at school to help inspire FSM children to aspire and dream big, Visits from others from backgrounds like themselves who have managed to get a better life. Someone from a deprived area who grew up with not much who can talk about what they did to ‘get their own plumbing company’, ‘got to university and become a lawyer’, ‘learn coding and become an IT programmer’ etc.”

Self-belief and confidence were also mentioned as behaviours that need to be cultivated in young people, and one respondent stated that for interventions in education *“focus is needed not only on learning but facilitating behaviours and skills, and to encourage confidence and self-advocacy”*. One contributor called for “decent, well-rounded” careers

advice delivered at younger years than hitherto and “teaching the teachers” about the opportunities available.

Digital inclusion

Whilst the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on education has received wide media coverage, it was explicitly referenced in just one response which felt the Covid-19 gap in education is a priority, specifically *“ensuring pupils who don’t have access to digital devices or a space to work at home are caught up on the education they have missed”*, which also links to digital inclusion. This consultee felt the marker for success here would be good attainment and progression to A-levels and university.

Looking at adults as well as children, another response flagged digital inclusion as a priority:

“Digital inclusion making sure people have appropriate devices and capabilities to access IT and connectivity”

In terms of access to digital services, one response suggested local hubs for accessing these resources in-person:

“Use libraries and community centres as locations for access to digital skills training, devices and connectivity”

Another response highlighted that even through best efforts, not everyone will adapt and improve their digital literacy:

“Provide viable alternatives for those who cannot/will not become digitally enabled.”

Employment opportunities

Several consultees felt that improving employment opportunities was a priority; not only in rural areas but also within sectors of strategic importance to the area.

“Rurality of the counties of Somerset and North Devon influence additional burden on travel to work area, as there is reduced employment opportunities, with progression, to align to rural populations. This leads to an annual loss of 1,000 plus young people (18 to 20 year olds) in Somerset. This couples with lower student population due to the absence of HEI, impacts negatively the ageing population of the region. Creation of job opportunities which enable young people to remain in their localities while accessing career pathways”.

This sentiment was echoed by another consultee:

“The opportunities need to be in place in the first place to drive social mobility (e.g. motivation/opportunity to acquire skills; career progression; economic well-being, etc.) Joined-up approaches are needed to attract inward investment to the

region and lobby for the necessary infrastructure to stimulate economic growth. This requires join-up, strategy and lobbying right across the region. Without sufficient employment opportunities in place within the region, social mobility will be coupled with outward migration and associated loss of skills”.

The outward migration of young people in order to access higher wages was observed as something that was been happening for “over 30 years” and needed to be addressed by:

“ensuring more opportunities available to progressing up the career ladder in the local LEP area e.g. skills progression/management courses that do not necessarily require English and Maths GCSE and can be done in evenings, maybe working with Exeter Uni) and don’t just concentrate on one level or entry level only, but instead lead all the way through to management levels so attendees can either progress through the levels over several years or people can enter at a higher level if they have lower level skills.”

Other suggestions included:

- The “*introduction of additional nursing workforce opportunities via apprenticeships*” would help “*meet the health & care needs of the people in the South West*” by opening access and retaining local young people.
- “*encourage employers to offer higher level jobs, both full time, part time and job share (and wages) and in work-related training in the area*”.

Supporting families, health and well-being

Several contributors recognised the importance of the home environment and family relationships in providing the foundation for social mobility in later life, one suggesting that is difficult to look beyond basic needs if these are not being met:

“Access to support for immediate needs. These might include actions to support safe, secure housing, addressing food poverty, or provision of household essentials (such as a functioning fridge, cooking facilities, beds, clothing for job interviews or winter coats etc.) Without basic needs being met, it is incredibly difficult for an individual to look to accessing any further support for themselves or their families. Individuals who are currently lacking these resources could be linked to local support or specialist organisations to help meet these basic needs before taking further steps to support themselves.”

Another consultee focused on the need to raise awareness of the support that already exists:

“Guidance and support to increase awareness of opportunities and support programmes. While such opportunities - supported by national and local organisations, and covering a range of needs - do exist, without an easy way of knowing what's available, where they can find it and how to access it, these opportunities can be missed by people eligible for them. This could include

shortlists of bursary or grant schemes to pay for education, transport, childcare provision, etc. It could also include directions to more pastoral social/support groups whom individuals can reach out to and meet others in their situation / who share their ambitions, to reduce feelings of being isolated or not fitting in."

Providing stability was also highlighted as priority both in terms of supporting adult relationships:

"Evidence indicates that children and young people growing up without stable adult support are most likely to be disadvantaged. Providing support either directly to the young people or their parents/carers could provide the stability required to improve learning outcomes. This support could be on a 'cohort level' (e.g. former sure start centres) or if viable, on a family basis".

Housing was proposed as a key priority by some:

"Lack of larger social housing resulting in overcrowding"

"Affordable homes to buy are unaffordable to most people. Unstable housing situations lead to high mobility for families and children and this disrupts their education and impacts their life chances'.

In addition to affordable housing, consultees advocated the provision of affordable childcare (*"to support working parents enabling better prospects increasing social mobility and creation of jobs in this sector"*) and support for the victims of domestic violence, particularly children.

Rurality

Perhaps unsurprisingly, rurality and the inaccessibility of education and training opportunities for rural inhabitants is another key theme mentioned by consultees:

"We have poor physical infrastructure and a large geographic area with small communities around rural and coastal areas. Being physically mobile leads to the ability to be socially mobile too."

Those who are unable to be physically mobile, for example young people without the means to learn to drive, *"have limited horizons that often leads to limited aspirations"*. Consultees recommended prioritising *"innovative travel solutions"* as well as the *"creation of job opportunities which enable young people to remain in their localities while accessing career pathways"*

Delivery models

Looking at the issue from a delivery perspective, some consultees considered the underlying issues behind addressing social mobility, which centred around funding and delivery:

“Funding and support for existing grassroots and community initiatives. This could include local carpool or transport groups, who serve areas with limited public transport, support for local community centers offering life skills support for individuals who need it, food banks, housing initiatives etc”

“True levelling up investment from government rather than money going to the red wall”

Existing activity

The second section asked participants to provide details of any existing local activity they are aware of which addresses social mobility challenges. There were 15 responses to this question, 10 of which were aware of activity and subsequently detailed it.

The majority of the activity detailed links to education: the West Somerset Opportunity Area, Ted Wragg Trust, Centre for Social Mobility, and NCS scheme were all named as examples of good practice, alongside mention of outreach and fair access schemes and widening participation for access to HE. Most respondents who detailed existing activity felt there are opportunities to extend or replicate this.

Opportunities that could be realised within the **short term** and/or at low cost included:

- *“Additional teacher supply via GSE trainee teachers to specific schools. University working with more pupils and schools to support transitions to university”*
- *“For every school to have a dedicated member of staff trained to identify anxiety and how to support a young person experiencing it.”*
- *“Further Education could do more, but would require funding support to enhance existing enrichment activity”*
- *“Community Renewal fund bid is submitted, but its principles are to support place based funding to stabilise Mendip employment opportunities. Investment in place and create the market vibrancy which can foster collaboration and reduce the net youth loss, and prosperity of employees by supporting the progressive workforce models across sectors and education providers.”*
- *Disseminating effective strategies from organisations successfully tackling these challenges to other organisations. Facilitation for distributed networks across the south west is needed with staff time to provide organisational support. The challenge is that no two contexts (eg for affordable housing schemes and in schools) are the same.*

- *“Putting in place strategic infrastructure and plan of action to ensure partners are in place, working towards joint goals and a single plan of action. Not much else will be achieved without this in place.”*
- *“It may be possible to identify existing family support from statutory services and community groups at a low case. This would provide a basis for identifying gaps and next steps.”*

Opportunities that could be realised within the **medium-term** and/or at moderate cost included:

- *“Developing stronger partnerships between post-16 providers to enable more flexibility in learning provision. This requires trust and collaboration between providers. There may be some structural / funding system challenges.”*
- *“Expansion of nursing apprenticeships within the area. First cohort of pre nursing apprentices to full nursing degree requires an investment from the employer of £500,000 for 15 students. this funding is not covered off by the apprenticeship levy, so some growth support funding to recompense/mitigate the investment costs (nursing and civil engineering apprenticeship attract additional/high release percentages) to promote and realise high level opportunities for local young people.”*
- *“Compliance enforcement of developers by planning authorities to deliver on developers' Section 106 commitments. More stringent S106 requirements for affordable homes. This requires much better resourcing in planning departments. Most are so stripped of staff they are ineffective in managing planning applications - they have lost control. School Improvement work requires rethinking. Many schools are choosing to join academy trusts because the support from Devon County is so poor. Those who are still Local authority schools feel very isolated. There is a culture of secrecy around problems within academy chains and commercial sensitivity is used as an excuse to not deal with problems in failing academy trusts.”*
- *“Regional approach to identify and address gaps in educational and associated provision to support target learners. Would require a gap analysis, consensus on where priorities lay, sufficient funding to create/provide interventions and deal with associated logistics.”*
- *“For professionals to be trained in coercive control elements of domestic violence and its complexities.”*
- *“Further Education could develop an experiential enrichment programme that took students out of their comfort zone and opened their eyes to new opportunities.”*

Longer-term and/or high cost opportunities were:

- *“Capital investment in an HEI/University Centre for Somerset, ensuring there is investment from HEI's and high value employers to engage and maintain the access to opportunities through the widening participation agenda. This is particularly relevant to rural areas where early talent is spotted and developed to ensure young people are able to maximise their education and progression without disadvantage from living in low skill rural areas.”*

- *“A complete rethink of planning priorities in Devon and Cornwall. Devon and Cornwall councils first need to own the problem in order to really make the radical strategic changes to planning priorities. They are in denial about the depth and damage of the housing crisis. The fragmentary nature of planning authorities is a huge problem. The counties need a joint taskforce.”*
- *“Resolving physical distance issues requires innovative thinking around public and personal transport and financial investment to trial different options.”*
- *“Creation of regional lobbying arm and related infrastructure to campaign for government funding and inward investment. Fragmented infrastructure across the region.”*
- *“Investment of larger social housing stock, of 4, 5 and 6 bedrooms (which currently don't exist) instead of 1 and 2 bedrooms... as the families waiting for these houses are currently occupying 2 and 3 bedrooms, that could be freed up.”*
- *“Develop a full experiential enrichment programme for all FE Students, including visiting speakers, experiential visits and international residential. Significant funding”*

New opportunities

The final question regarding the social mobility agenda locally asked about opportunities to improve local response. Although there were few responses to this, those that answered highlighted better co-ordination and collaboration across sectors with regular communication through networks and meetings; access to FE and HE particularly for rural and deprived areas including a dedicated centre; and insight into skills needs and aspirations of deprived communities.

Short term and/or at low cost opportunities suggested were:

- *“Improved coordination and collaboration within or across organisations. Join together all the organisations working on this.”*
- *“For local authority to work more closely with the third sector, perhaps through regular network meetings or road show type events to bring these leaders together.”*
- *“Implementation of a strategic plan and resource to support better access to further education in rural settings and the most deprived areas supporting aspirations, engagement and social mobility omitting the need to travel”*

Opportunities that could be realised within the **medium-term** and/or at moderate cost were:

- *“Local authority to commission third sector organisations to help resolve difficulties.”*
- *“Feasibility study on the skills needs and aspirations of those in deprived areas to meet the business needs and start ups”*

And the suggested **Longer-term** and/or high cost opportunities:

- *“Procurement opportunities for third sector organisations to assist with the bigger picture.”*
- *“investment in physical and digital infrastructure”*
- *“Adopt a bespoke further/higher education centre to drive up aspirations linked to educational settings for young people. Encouragement of entrepreneurship and social enterprise. This offer could be an arm of existing FE as outreach programmes”*

Conclusion

This consultation analysis has provided insight into what people have experienced and observed as challenges which are affecting social mobility in the Heart of the South West LEP. These results will form the basis of discussion for our event *“How can we effectively and successfully improve social mobility locally?”* on 30th June 2021 alongside influencing the development of the Social Mobility and Inclusion Programme.

What has been clear from analysing local challenges for social mobility is that whilst a lot of responses clustered around issues in education, employment, geographical disparities, and support networks, most responses cut across multiple ‘categories’ and reflect the complexity of the topic. The key themes that we identified which respondents feel should be addressed in the Social Mobility and Inclusion Programme are:

- Supporting educational attainment and training
- Raising aspirations of young people
- Digital inclusion
- Creating employment opportunities within the local area
- Support within the home with provisions, support, housing
- Rurality and in particular access to employment and training
- Models of delivery

In terms of next steps, this brief analysis will provide food-for-thought in the lead-up to our workshop event, and will give attendees an idea of priority areas ahead of break-out room discussions.

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