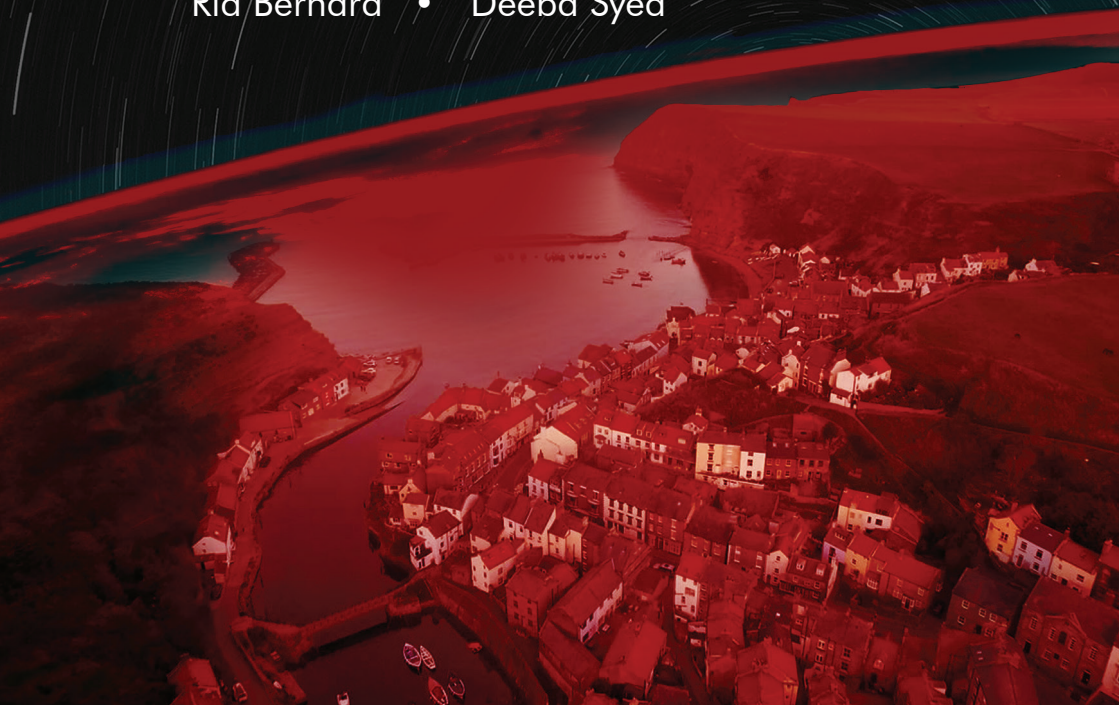


YOUNG  
FABIANS

# GLOBAL READY BRITAIN

TAKING STOCK AS  
WE GO IT ALONE

Ria Bernard • Deeba Syed



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**Edited by Ria Bernard and Deeba Syed**

**Global Ready Britain: Taking Stock As We Go It Alone**

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Young Fabian Open Day 2018

Fabian New Year Conference Fringe 2018

**GLOBAL READY BRITAIN: TAKING STOCK AS WE GO IT ALONE**

Report and summary of discussions

*Edited by Ria Bernard and Deeba Syed*

*with contributions from Young Fabian Networks*

*and members from across the UK.*

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# **GLOBAL READY BRITAIN**

**TAKING STOCK AS  
WE GO IT ALONE**

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**EDITED BY RIA BERNARD AND DEEBA SYED**

# LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

**The Editors wish to thank all Young Fabian members who attended the January Open Day, whose comments, ideas and feedback inspired this Report. Nonetheless, it should be made clear that not all views expressed in this report will be shared by all attendees. The list below is based upon those who RSVP'd online for the event; our apologies to anyone not listed, and to any who may be included in error.**

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# FOREWORD

**Ria Bernard**

*National Chair, Young Fabians*



At the beginning of this year, the Young Fabians hosted two events focusing on the theme of a Global-Ready Britain in a bid to evaluate where the UK stands in terms of its domestic policies as we look ahead to the future. As a nation, we need to be taking stock of our strengths and vulnerabilities, to determine how we measure up with countries around the world – especially as we look to a future of going it alone.

Our Young Fabian fringe event at Fabian Society New Year Conference examined exactly this with our panellists discussing a wide range of ways in which the UK compares in terms of domestic policy. Renowned economist and former joint Head of the UK Government Economics Service, Vicky Pryce, spoke about the need to focus on the UK's productivity record and an industrial strategy that targets the skills shortage, training and regional economic inequality. James

Hallwood, former Young Fabian Chair, opened the discussion acknowledging that the UK will never truly be alone before going on to highlight the need to focus as much on academic as vocational training to meet the skills gap. Finally, Young Fabian Finance Network Secretary, David Hale, emphasised the importance of recognising the scale and pace of change, in order to appreciate that social change is at the heart of our economic difficulties – something he will explore further in this report.

The Young Fabian Open Day on 20th January 2018, built on this with our members joining us for a day of policy discussion, debate and key speakers examining the idea of a Global-Ready Britain in which members examined the strengths and vulnerabilities of the UK across a range of economic and social policy areas.

We were joined by Lord Kerslake, former Head of the Civil Service, who offered an insightful overview of the challenges facing the UK in terms of the economy, health & social care, and housing. The process of policy development, delivered by Reema Patel from the RSA, set members up for a day of scrutinising and generating policy ideas.

Over the course of these two events, we hoped to engage our members in discussion around the following questions:

- What are the strengths and vulnerabilities of Britain's domestic policy in comparison with other countries?
- What are our core strengths as a nation that will enable us to effectively compete in the global community?
- What will undermine our place on the global stage?

This report provides a summary of the discussions and debates that took place over the course of these events, with members' input and ideas very much at



the heart of it. It is not intended as an academically rigorous report, but rather a summation of the breadth of ideas discussed and policy solutions generated by our members.

I would like to thank all of our members who made it to the Open Day, and who contributed to our fringe event – your enthusiasm for analysis, discussion and policy development is what the Young Fabians is all about. Thank you also to the Young Fabian Executive who worked hard to host these events for the benefit of our members – especially to Deeba Syed and Rob Newbery, who were instrumental in running the event and editing this report.

We look forward to many more events that facilitate this much policy debate in the months to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ria Bernard', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

**Ria Bernard**

*National Chair, Young Fabians*



# INTRODUCTION

**Deeba Syed**

*Editor and Young Fabian Parliamentary Liaison*

The aim of the Young Fabians Open Day was to pause and reflect on where the UK currently stands in terms of its domestic policies and how it measures up to other nations across the world. As we prepare to potentially leave the European Union (EU), there couldn't be a better time to take stock and audit the UK's strengths and our vulnerabilities.

The discussions that took place during the day focused on identifying the UK's core strengths as a nation as well as areas that we will need to strengthen to enable us to compete globally. Therefore, rather than focusing on 'Brexit' itself, we asked members to think about how those strengths will enable us to interact and thrive in the global community and what, if anything, could undermine our place on the global stage as we go it alone. By examining a range of domestic policy areas we tried to answer exactly how Britain compares with

the rest of the world. Drawing on comparisons with other countries, both inside and outside the EU, we asked what we can learn from their domestic policy decisions in order to begin the discussion around policy generation and the solutions needed to tackle the challenges ahead.

We were privileged to be joined by Lord Bob Kerslake, former Head of the Civil Service, who shared his thoughts on the UK economy and the robustness of our economic strategy compared to other countries. His invaluable experience highlighted key issues around productivity and crucial industry in relation to the UK economy, to ensure economic security for UK citizens. Turning to the NHS, there was much discussion on whether it is the most cost-effective way of delivering high quality, free at the point of use healthcare or if the system is no longer sustainable. Education policy in relation to skills and innovation was yet another topic of debate, with members discussing whether the English education model really does equip the next generation to play a part on the global stage, and whether the models in other countries can provide an insight into ways of improving early years and higher education. Finally, the UK's legal and judicial system was a key focus; with discussion centring on whether, in its current formulation, it remains up to the task of punishment and rehabilitation.

During the day, we were joined by some of our policy networks and it was a great pleasure to chair the Law Network's immigration discussion, as well as facilitating the training session on effective policy development with Reema Patel – there was certainly a great deal that we can take forward in our own policy-making capacity as Young Fabians.

The Young Fabians Open Day has become a flagship event and this report is an impressive example of what can be achieved by our members when we put our heads together in just a single day.

I hope you all enjoyed the day as much as I did – let's do it all again at the Young Fabians Summer Open Day!

# SKILLS & INNOVATION

## **Contributions from YF members**

*through consultation of IPPR's Future of Education  
and the OECD Getting Skills Right<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> IPPR: The Future of Education, ed. P.Hyman (2018)  
OECD (2017): Getting Skills Right: United Kingdom, OECD Publishing, Paris

As a nation, the UK has some of the most prestigious and academically rigorous higher education institutions in the world. These universities produce world-class, high quality research and form partnerships globally with many academics and students wishing to study here. The relationships forged through universities and private sector institutions has facilitated links between the academic world and the world of work.

However, despite the fact that thousands more are entering university, the jobs at the end have not adapted to the change in skills needed. There are simply not enough graduate jobs for the thousands of graduates entering the workplace every year, resulting in many graduates failing to secure positions within their

chosen fields. This leads to many highly skilled young graduates taking lower skilled jobs and pushing those without a degree out of a job. As Vicky Pryce noted at the Young Fabians' fringe event at the Fabians Conference, the UK economy focuses a great deal on manufacturing, yet manufacturing makes up only 30% of industry. This skill imbalance means the UK must improve matching the skill demand and supply.

The prevailing lack of career guidance means many are not equipped with the skills and knowledge for their chosen career path. Shortage of teachers and reduced funding means that schools are trying to meet an ever-increasingly demanding population with fewer and fewer resources. As a country, we are behind in terms of Science, Technology, Economics & Mathematics (STEM) subjects. We are also seeing a significant gender divide in relation to students choosing STEM subjects and careers.

The UK spends just 1.7% of GDP on research and development. This means we suffer from a lack of funding and freedom to research and put forward new ideas. Skills and innovation should be at the pivot of government policy if we are to educate the next generation to a level that enables them to compete with their international contemporaries.

### **Global-ready Britain: Taking Stock as we go it alone**

*Chaired by Rob Newbery*

# A GLOBAL-READY BANKING SYSTEM

**Ben West**

*Chair, Young Fabian Finance Network*

If any sector of the UK economy could be said to be global-ready, you might assume it to be financial services. Britain – or to be specific – the City of London, is the undisputed financial capital of the World. It is home to 251 foreign-owned banks. 588 overseas companies are listed there<sup>2</sup>. China ready? Of course – after all, 62% of all Renminbi traded outside of China itself is traded in London. And Britain does well out of it too. One in every ten pounds of UK tax revenue is generated by financial services<sup>3</sup>. The City is the golden goose at the heart of Britain's economy.

<sup>2</sup> London: Europe and the World's Financial Centre, City of London Corporation ([https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/business/eu-and-regulation/publications/Documents/london\\_europe\\_and\\_the\\_worlds\\_financial\\_centre.pdf](https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/business/eu-and-regulation/publications/Documents/london_europe_and_the_worlds_financial_centre.pdf))

<sup>3</sup> Total Tax Contribution of UK Financial Services – tenth edition, City of London Corporation and PWC (<https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/business/economic-research-and-information/research-publications/Documents/research-2017/total-tax-report-2017.pdf>)

But the question at issue here isn't just about whether financial services; a single, albeit vital, sector, is fit to compete in a globalised economy. While Brexit will bring significant change, Britain is, and is likely to continue to be, a leader in the business of moving and managing others' money.

But what about our banking system, as distinct from the commercial business of finance? Because banking isn't just a business, it's a service that's vital to the health of the whole economy. Banks are the lifeblood of any industrialised economy, because, in the process of taking deposits and lending them out, they create new money in the form of loans. Without credit, there is no money. And there's an increasing recognition too that the 'quality' of credit matters. It matters to all of us whether the credit being created by banks is the kind that supports economic activity (a loan to help a business expand, for example) or whether that credit is simply held in unproductive, existing assets, such as your parents' house.

And in those terms, while Britain's financial services sector may be global-ready, our banking system is manifestly failing us all, sending Britain out into the World with one hand tied behind its back.

How is it letting us down? In a single phrase: lack of diversity. Firstly, it's not diverse enough in terms of sufficient numbers of players to make a functioning or competitive market, and secondly, it's not diverse enough in terms of types of players either.

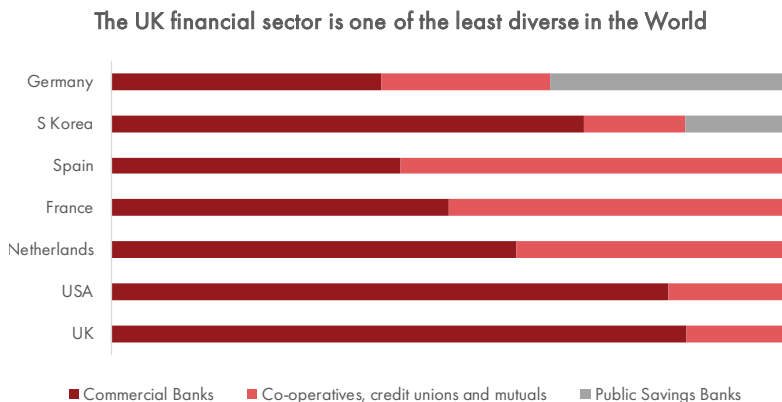
In the UK, 77 percent of all personal current accounts, and 85 of all small business banking is controlled by just four banks<sup>4</sup>. You can name them: Barclays, Lloyds, HSBC and RBS, along with their subsidiaries, such as NatWest. And it's not even like they're different types of banks. All of them are commercially run, shareholder-owned PLCs. Love markets? This isn't much of one.

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<sup>4</sup> Retail Banking Market Investigation – Final Report, Competition and Markets Authority (<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57ac9667e5274a0f6c00007a/retail-banking-market-investigation-full-final-report.pdf>)



This isn't normal. Britain's banking system is the least diverse, and least competitive in the World<sup>5</sup>.



The banking system of every other developed country in the World contains a mix of hundreds, if not thousands, of independent banks, consisting of diverse business forms and types of ownership, each with their own priorities, focus, purpose and strengths<sup>6</sup>.

High risk, high return, high profitability? Like Britain, Germany has commercial and investment banks for that. But unlike us, it also has regional savings banks, Landesbanks, which are state-backed and dedicated to lending to small businesses and run not-for-profit. Or Sparkassen, which can be found in almost every small town in Germany. Prefer a co-operative bank? There are hundreds of them too, and unlike the UK's misnamed Co-operative Bank (which is actually a PLC formerly owned by the UK's Co-operative Group), German law enables co-operative banks which are actually owned by their depositors. Thanks to

<sup>5</sup> Stakeholder Banks Benefits of banking diversity, New Economics Foundation

<sup>6</sup> Still Exposed: Britain's Financial System in the Era of Brexit, New Economics Foundation (<http://neweconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/still-exposed.pdf>)

New Deal era regulations, even the United States, the home of capitalism itself, does better than us. When Breaking Bad's Walter White needs start-up capital for the creation of his small business cooking crystal meth, where does he get it? From his savings at the local credit union, of course<sup>7</sup>.

The point is that you don't have to make a value judgement about whether it's better for banks to be owned by shareholders, customers, the state, or even their staff. The essence of a successful market is choice and competition, and in every other developed country on the planet, there are hundreds of banks with different specialisms, different risk appetites, different financial motivations, catering to different communities and different sectors of the economy.

Meanwhile, the UK's banking system resembles our supermarkets 40 years ago – you can have anything you like, as long as it comes with potatoes and two veg. UK business investment is among the lowest in the developed world because, in the current economy, if you're a small business owner, you may well be better off investing your profits in a second home than you are in investing in upgrading plant and machinery to make your business more productive.

In a banking system dominated by risk-averse banks owned by shareholders looking for healthy returns, it makes no sense to make a 10-year loan to a modestly-growing small business when you could lend it to a buy-to-let mortgage. Mortgages as a share of bank lending has doubled in the past 30 years. It may be hard to lay all the blame for soaring house prices and flat-lining productivity at the feet of Britain's banking system, but it's easy to conclude it's played a substantial role.

While a few massive financial institutions with global reach may be good for their shareholders, good for their employees, good for Britain's status as a leader in the financial services industry, and perhaps even good for tax revenues, it's

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<sup>7</sup> Mesa Credit Union, Breaking Bad Fandom Wikia, ([http://breakingbad.wikia.com/wiki/Mesa\\_Credit\\_Union](http://breakingbad.wikia.com/wiki/Mesa_Credit_Union))

less clear that it's good for the sustainability or resilience of our economy. A global-ready economy means an environment in which businesses can invest in making themselves more competitive; contributing to growing productivity, the gains from which, when fairly distributed, mean higher living standards and consumer spending. At present, our banking system is failing to adequately contribute to such an environment.

Whether by breaking up the big banks, encouraging new challenger banks, creating new state and municipally-backed lending banks, changing regulation to support a new generation of building societies, supporting the growth of Britain's nascent credit union sector, or ideally all the above, it's clear that a future Labour government must support the global readiness of Britain's economy by creating a banking system that is more vibrant, competitive and diverse than ours is today.

### **Finance Network session**

*Chaired by Ben West & Ben O'Connor*



# INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

**David Hale**

*Fabian Society New Year's Conference Fringe Panellist*

Millions of our jobs won't exist in ten or twenty years' time – we have no real idea whose. Your job – or part of your job – could be being designed away right now in someone's bedroom in the States, India, China, France or Norway. Your next job – or something that makes it possible – could be being designed there too.

Technological, social and global changes will transform our country and the work we do. Our society is getting older, the world is more connected every day and there are more people alive and participating in the global economy than ever before.

Despite the scale and range of the changes, the UK faces only a single major challenge in responding: making sure those changes are used to improve the

lives of every single person and ruin no one's. For that to happen, we need to do three things.

**First**, we need urgent action to cope with the changes in work.

We need to get to a place where most people, most of the time, are learning how to do a better or a different job. So, if the worst happens and somebody loses their job, they can get a new one. And if it doesn't, they're increasingly able to get work that's better for them. We need to empower everyone in our society to succeed, no matter the unexpected changes that come.

At the same time, we need to strengthen our social security protections to cope with the changes in how work is organised. Too often the growing numbers of self-employed are an afterthought – left out of the discussion on housing, pensions and training. So too are those who work from home. Challenges with loneliness, isolation, infrastructure, like broadband and even the condition of our housing stock, must be addressed if we're to help those working from home.

And we need to recognise that just as the way we work and what we do will change quicker, so the methods of exploitation that threaten economic security will evolve quicker too. Recent examples, from exclusivity clauses in zero hours contracts to exploitative unpaid internships, show we need to get much quicker at stamping out the exploitation that has always clung to the world of work.

**Second**, we need radical action to solve our long-acknowledged economic weaknesses.

That means putting an end to the terrible levels of low pay that characterise the UK's current economy, aiming not merely for people to have a living wage but a decent one. For example, sectors like care which are dominated by low pay and yet will become increasingly important as a greater proportion of us get older.

It means sorting out our weak management skills, so that our companies can thrive and grow, and so employees get the support they need at work. If we want people to stop having to ask when the UK is going to develop the next google, or why their management doesn't help them learn and improve, then we must revolutionise the support, awareness and training in place so management improves; as well as putting in place the financing and innovation support that's sorely needed to help us grow more successful companies.

It means taking the long-term investments in infrastructure that we have put off too easily and for too long. This includes revolutionising transport in every region in the UK, so no area gets left behind. Unbalanced regional growth will put increased pressures on society – not least by forcing physical distance between generations. We should set ambitious goals, for instance doubling the number of jobs available in reach of an easy commute throughout the country – and then meet those goals.

**Finally**, we need to recognise that our economic success relies on our social success. And social failure will bring economic failure too.

The employment rate for people with visual impairments is only 58 per cent, yet many more want to be employed. The employment rate for people with mental health conditions is only 32 per cent, yet many more want to be employed. Only 16 per cent of people with autism are in full time work, yet many more want to be. Overall, the rate of employment for people with disabilities and long-term mental health conditions is 48 per cent. That is a total moral disgrace for this country. It is also an economic catastrophe to miss out on so much talent. We must address it.

It is far from the only huge social injustice which puts massive constraints on our country's ability to grow. We must address the fact that many people don't get a job just because of the name on the top of their CV; that many women

don't get promoted even though they'd be better than a man who gets that job instead; that you can be less likely to get funding to grow your business if you're BAME; and that too often it's your class and where you went to school that's the best predictor of your working life.

We need to focus also on addressing the problems with our social and economic infrastructure that will breed the problems of the future – unbalanced regional growth which will make it harder for families to keep in touch as we get older if different generations live increasingly far apart, and housing costs that will make it harder for the UK to attract investment and for people to take new opportunities to work from home.

We need a cross-society effort to end the injustices that scar our economy, and the problems with our social infrastructure which hold us back. If taken alongside radical action on our long-held weaknesses and urgent action to make sure people are equipped for the new jobs of the future, then everyone in the UK can thrive. More change brings more opportunity, but only if we seize it.

**David Hale, Young Fabian Finance Network**

*David spoke on the panel at our 'Global-Ready Britain: taking stock as we go it alone' fringe at Fabian Society New Year Conference*



# EMPLOYMENT & WORKERS' RIGHTS

## **Young Fabian member contributions**

*in consultation with The Future of Work, International  
Trade Union Conference (ITUC)<sup>8</sup>*

8

<https://www.ituc-csi.org/the-future-of-work-ituc-report>

As the UK embarks on leaving the EU, we are facing a future in which we will need to fight hard to protect those hard-sought for rights in employment. Latest figures indicate that around the world only 60% of workers are employed in the 'formal economy', and yet 50% of them have insecure employment structures; 40% have no rights, no minimum wages and no security (ITUC). Additionally, it is becoming increasingly apparent modern slavery is becoming part of our communities as 45 million people are trapped in forced labour.

The world of work is changing dramatically as we look to a future of high tech solutions and automation. With that comes a need to adapt to ensure that we continue to protect and provide security, employment rights and an ability to balance work and home. With business models shifting, many workers are facing little option but to take positions in which they have no formal contract of employment or social security. In response, the UK will need to embrace technological advancements to ensure we keep up, but we also need to predict the challenges to workers' rights to ensure they are safeguarded and not lost altogether.

As an EU state member, individuals were well protected in terms of employment rights. Our economy is flexible and diversified with some industries embracing flexible working hours, self-employment, maternity and paternity pay. We have made progress on the gender pay gap, although there is still much to do.

However, it is the EU and not the UK, who are make big strides against tax avoidance by big businesses like Apple. The cost of such an endeavour is likely to make it incredibly difficult for Britain to tackle tax avoidance alone.

The decline in trade union membership has had a significant impact on the role and influence of unions in securing fairness and preventing exploitation in the workplace. The 'gig economy' has had a further impact with individuals working within it receiving far less protection, including sick pay and pensions. We need to be investing in our people to get the best and brightest into our economy. Reviewing our security packages, such as maternity/paternity and mental health will be crucial as we go forward into a world in which both parents work, and some suffer with mental health issues.

Looking ahead, the crucial outcome to prevent is a race to the bottom as we leave the EU. Rights that were fought for including the minimum and living wage, need to be championed and protected. We should be looking at models in which workers own shares in their companies to promote a buy-in from em-

ployees. Ethical automation will help to prepare for the changes to come by considering the social as well as economic impact of the greater dependency on automation and technology. For example, initiatives like flexi-time could be introduced as a standard across many industries to cater for the hectic lives of working people.

### **Global-ready Britain: Taking Stock as we go it alone**

*Chaired by Rob Newbery*



# HEALTH & WELL-BEING

## **Contributions from YF members**

*in consultation with World Health Statistics 2017: Monitoring  
Health for the SDGs and OECD's How's Life?<sup>9</sup>*

<sup>9</sup> World Health Statistics 2017: monitoring health for SDGs, Sustainable Development Goals. Geneva: World Health Organisation: 2017.

OECD (2017) How's Life? 2017: Measuring well-being, OECD Publishing.

Well-being and quality of life should be the fundamental human objective of any government and is comprised of many individual components. How does the UK fare as a nation in terms of the health and well-being of our citizens?

The NHS is one of the best healthcare systems in the world. The services it provides are free at the point of use, making it accessible to all, and covers a range of health needs. However, the 'winter crisis' that the Government alludes to is in fact a year-round crisis for the NHS, with a huge demand on services – many of which did not exist as part of our health service in the original NHS of 1948. While we have seen a re-structuring of the NHS in recent

years – costing billions – Lord Kerslake argued this does not make up for the increase in funding needed to run NHS services. A cross-party commission would enable us to generate the policy ideas needed to solve the NHS crisis.

Amongst OECD countries, the top 20% of the income bracket are twice as likely to report high life satisfaction as opposed to the bottom 20%. The implications of the financial crisis have been significant and long-lasting, and the impact on living conditions and job security has affected the quality of life of the population. For example, London and the South East are the only regions to have recovered post-crash, resulting in significant inequality between regional economies. Stress in the absence of security, such as unemployment rates, quality housing and access to welfare, means that the ratings of well-being have reduced across OECD countries.

It is clear that we have significant issue when it comes to supply and demand in the property market, and therefore house-building will be essential to ease some of the strains on quality of life in the UK. When looking to how we counteract the negative impact of poor access to good quality housing in the UK, it will be important to work alongside city planners and developers to consider factors that contribute to inequality of life. It will be necessary to think about pollution and noise and the impact that has on physical and mental well-being. Sound-proofing homes could be a consideration in noisier areas, such as those living around major flightpaths. Our capital, London, is one of the greenest cities in the world, but with a demand on housing stock, we need to be mindful of continued access to green spaces for our citizens. As we hope to alleviate the current housing crisis with house building initiatives, we need to be building good quality, purpose-built homes that meet the standards for our younger generation to flourish.

## **Global-ready Britain: Taking Stock as we go it alone**

*Chaired by Rob Newbery*

# WHAT SHOULD BRITAIN'S IMMIGRATION POLICY BE POST-BREXIT?

**Sam Bumby**

*Secretary of the Young Fabians Law Network*

The future of Britain's immigration policy is highly uncertain. After a nationwide referendum in 2016 where the issue dominated, immigration appears to have dropped off the news agenda whilst all the focus is on the Brexit negotiations.

This is not confined simply to the media; the number of people placing immigration in their top three most important issues has fallen from 47% in July 2016 to just 31% in January of this year.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> YouGov [https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/qup7nyq846/YG%20Trackers%20-%20Top%20Issues\\_W.pdf](https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/qup7nyq846/YG%20Trackers%20-%20Top%20Issues_W.pdf)

The Young Fabians' Open Day theme of 'Global-Ready Britain' provided the perfect opportunity for our members to explore the issue in an international context. The session compared the immigration policy of five countries, with the room broken down into groups to discuss each one. The countries were selected because of their close ties to the UK and/or EU: Norway, Switzerland, Australia, Israel, and Canada.

None of the countries were considered perfect, although Canada was the standout favourite in the room. Canada combines a welcoming attitude to both immigrants and refugees with a series of progressive policies to aid integration. Rather than the arbitrary cap set by the UK government, which is constantly broken, Canada has an immigration target. Their aim is to have a gender balance in terms of economic migrants, and provide a fast track system for women and girls who are refugees. They also provide free language and cultural lessons to help new arrivals settle into the community.

A similar policy of integration and language lessons is pursued in Norway, although with less favourable results. The emphasis is on creating a homogenous Norwegian society, rather than truly celebrating the diversity of its inhabitants, and there is a widespread public perception that the policy is not working. It was felt that whilst similar initiatives would be welcome in the UK, the emphasis had to be on building a society in which different cultures could co-exist.

Switzerland was an interesting model to consider as it shows a potential path for Britain after Brexit – outside of the EU but with close ties to the organisation. It shows an uncomfortable trajectory for Britain, one in which there are large skills shortages but also widespread hostility towards immigration. A 2014 referendum in favour of restricting European migrants was diluted by the Swiss Parliament to maintain close economic ties with the EU, in a move



strongly condemned by the populist conservative party. It is not very difficult to imagine a similar situation happening in Britain.<sup>11</sup>

Israel and Australia both have their own distinct immigration policies, shaped as much by their histories and cultures as by economic imperatives. Both states play a large role in setting quotas on migration following strict criteria. The Australian model was criticised for its treatment of asylum seekers, an issue which has drawn much international media attention<sup>12</sup>

The discussion touched on several issues. There was a general consensus that the refugee/economic migrant distinction was important when determining the numbers of people entering the country, but disagreement as to whether this distinction should continue once people arrived. Some believed that the government should give the same level of support to each person entering the UK, whilst others argued that economic migrants should have a minimum level of subsistence prior to arriving. We also discussed how to address negative narratives around immigration in the UK. Some of the suggestions included tackling the housing crisis, promoting integration through language lessons and having government produced annual reports which set out the levels of immigration which is required for our economy.

For too long, those of us in favour of an open and liberal immigration policy have shied away from any discussion of the issue. We have hidden behind the EU's free movement policy, rather than making the positive case for immigration and challenging the misleading narrative of the populist right. This event was the beginning of a discussion which will hopefully spread across the political landscape – how can we build an inclusive and dynamic immigration system which works for Britain in the 21st century?

### **Law Network session**

*Chaired by Deeba Syed & Sam Bumby*

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/16/switzerland-u-turn-quotas-on-eu-workers-immigration>  
<sup>12</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-28189608>



# HOW FREE IS BRITAIN'S PRESS? A GLOBAL COMPARISON

**Tristan Grove**

*Chair, Young Fabian Communications Network*

'The liberty of the press is essential to the nature of a free state.' So said judge and jurist William Blackstone in the 18th century. As an essential component of a free state, it's hard to think of many things more important for a 'Global-Ready Britain'.

But over 200 years after Blackstone's words, just how free is our press? Well, according to the world Press Freedom Index 2017: not very. In fact, the UK only just scraped into the top 40 states for freedom of the press – behind

almost all of central and Western Europe and not far above the 'Noticeable Problems' category.

According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), 'a heavy-handed approach towards the press – often in the name of national security – has resulted in the UK slipping down the World Press Freedom Index'. In particular, the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 or 'Snoopers' Charter', which the RSF describes as 'the most extreme surveillance legislation in UK history'. The Act gives the police the right to access journalists' (and the general public's) browsing history and hack their phones. It was specifically developed as a response to journalists and whistle-blowers: a legal framework to legitimise state surveillance after Edward Snowden revealed how far such surveillance already went.

Worse, there is a new proposal currently being debated that could send the UK ignominiously tumbling even further down the global press freedom rankings. The so-called 'Espionage Act' would essentially allow the UK government to treat journalists who have 'obtained or gathered information' as 'spies' and face up to 14 years in jail. The News Media Association, which represents UK news publishers, said, "[the Act] would deter, prevent and punish investigation and disclosure of wrongdoing and matters of legitimate public interest." If the UK's current ranking is shocking for one of the world's oldest democracies, be prepared for it to slip further.

The UK government's draconian press regulations only add to the growing arsenal of global threats to the freedom of the press in 2018. Two key forces in particular are threatening global press freedom: a drop in general faith in the press and declining pluralism and independence.

The first problem especially affects western democracies. As RSF said in their Press Freedom Index, "violations of the freedom to inform are less and less the prerogative of authoritarian regimes and dictatorships. Once taken for granted, media freedom is proving to be increasingly fragile in democracies as well."

In the UK, France, the USA and across the West, populist upheavals have attacked the press establishment, promoting instead new, highly questionable news sources. There has been, in many quarters, a revolt against the very idea of objective reporting and, as former Guardian Head of Media described it, a growing “sense that anyone’s truth is valid.”

It is a view that has been globally legitimised by the US President. The presidency, once an office held by advocates of liberal democracy around the world, is now used for almost the opposite. Since his inauguration, Donald Trump has used the term ‘fake news’ in over 180 tweets and countless press conferences and speeches. He has accused some of the US’s most established and reliable news outlets of purveying lies. By doing this, Trump has not only helped to attack the notion of objective reporting; he has also given autocrats the world over a stick to beat the free press. From the Philippines and Cambodia to Syria and Russia, autocrats have taken to using combatting ‘fake news’ as a smokescreen to cover the repression of the legitimate newspapers and media outlets attempting to hold them to account.

If media outlets in the UK and other broadly liberal democracies do not face the risk of outright repression and violence, the attack on the idea of objective news curtails their freedom in other ways. It diminishes their value in the eyes of the public: makes them care less when attacked and stand by when governments repress them. This was evident in the UK when the ‘Snoopers’ Charter’ was passed with next to no opposition or public outcry.

The attack on objective news essentially curtails the freedom of the press by weakening the established media. This also applies to the second major threat to global press freedom: the growing power of social media giants.

In 2017, Facebook generated \$29.6bn in advertising revenue, which, combined with Google’s \$79.4bn, made up one fifth of the world’s advertising revenue. Twitter is not far behind, increasing its ad revenue by an astonishing

734% between 2012 and 2016. Today, 67% of Americans say they get 'at least some' of their news from social media. The proportion is even higher for younger people: in the UK, 28 % of 18-24 year olds say social media is their main source of news.

There are plenty of arguments to be made for social media increasing the amount of news certain sections of societies consume. The problem, however, is the growing reliance of newspapers and other media outlets on a small number of internet giants. Having a large proportion of all news essentially filtered by powerful, undemocratic and opaque companies raises questions, not just about the plurality of the press but also about its very independence.

The true and disturbing power of internet giants over the press was perhaps best revealed when Facebook trialled its new layout in October 2017. The new design, which moved the majority of news content to a smaller sub-section, was trialled in Serbia, Slovakia, Bolivia, Guatemala, Sri Lanka and Cambodia. Newspapers and media outlets across the guinea pig states found themselves losing up to two-thirds of their readership overnight. It seems today that undemocratic social media platforms can, in effect, shut down press outlets around the world at the flip of a switch.

There are now grave, tectonic threats to the freedom of the press not just in the UK, but around the world. In recent years, however, our government has seemed determined only to compound these international woes with draconian domestic laws attacking the most basic freedoms of journalists. We cannot even be close to 'Global-ready' until our government responds to criticisms from the National Union of Journalists, the NMA, the RSF and even the UN and restores the essential liberties of its press. Only then can the UK be ready to face the world as the progressive, democratic and truly free state it should be.

### **Communications Network session**

*Chaired by Tristan Grove & Stephen Hall*



# GLOBAL READY BRITAIN

## TAKING STOCK AS WE GO IT ALONE

As the UK prepares to leave the European Union, the UK urgently needs to think about its global position, ensuring that we are in a position to compete and prosper economically and socially on the international stage.

In a bid to examine our strengths and vulnerabilities as a nation, a group of Young Fabian members evaluate a range of domestic policy areas to determine how Britain measure up to nations around the world, seeking to answer the question

- Is Britain Global-Ready?

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