

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol](#) ar gyfer yr [ymchwiliad i Gydlyniant Cymdeithasol](#)

This response was submitted to the [Equality and Social Justice Committee](#) on the [inquiry into Social Cohesion](#)

SC 16

Ymateb gan: Sefydliad Nuffield

Response from: Nuffield Foundation

Introduction

The Nuffield Foundation is an independent charitable trust which funds research to improve social policy. Our funded research includes our [Understanding Communities](#) programme, a collaboration with the British Academy, which funds research looking into how local communities function and can improve people's lives. The findings from these projects give insight into the potential of social cohesion – relationships within and between place-based communities – and its capacity to address problems and make places work. They provide insights into the potential necessary conditions of community, as well as the limits of what community can do.

We have drawn on findings from these projects in our response, as well as other relevant funded work from our wider research portfolio and insights from our lead Trustee in this area, [Professor Ash Amin](#), who is an expert in urban, cultural and economic geography. He contributed to the Nuffield funded [IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities, reflecting on the connections between community and inequality](#) In this commentary Ash highlights in the role of community and place in addressing inequality and particularly the importance of social ties, local assets and decentralised political systems. He explores the impact of economic opportunities, built environments, civic participation and how these things affect well-being and resilience in disadvantaged areas. He also clearly sets out the limitations of over reliance on local approaches and recommends a combination of community-based interventions and government initiatives.

Ash's latest book, "*After Nativism, Belonging in an Age of Intolerance*" is also pertinent to your consultation. He proposes a politics of belonging based on public interest politics, collaboration over common existential threats, the encounter, fugitive aesthetics, and daily collectives and infrastructures of wellbeing.

While most of the research focuses on the UK as a whole, the findings are still informative when considering social cohesion in Wales. We have only responded to the first two questions from the Terms of Reference, as we haven't funded research into support to community groups and organisations from the Welsh Government specifically.

In addition to the findings included, there are further projects underway which are relevant, but have not yet reported their findings. These include:

- [Research led by University College London](#) about the use of administrative data to gain insight into community wellbeing.

- [Research led by the University of Birmingham](#) about how schools can more effectively integrate pupils who need to change schools.
- [Research from the UCL Institute of Education](#) into the consequences of the Department for Education's Fundamental British Values initiative.
- [Research led by Helen Lomax](#) about the role of place for the well-being of children growing up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.
- [Research led by Meta and the Behavioural Insights Team](#) about how social capital can affect people's life outcomes.

1. The key issues which impact social cohesion in Wales and consider whether interventions need to target specific groups of people, geographical areas or particular key issues.

The Nuffield Foundation have funded a number of projects which look at the state of social cohesion in the UK, and the different factors which can impact it. The findings are grouped below under separate themes which are considered in the research.

Labour market integration

Two Nuffield-funded projects look at how migrants integrate into the Labour market, particularly focusing on refugees. [Research led by the Queen Mary University of London](#) in 2019 looked at the impact of different asylum and refugee policies on the socio-economic integration of host countries. Using data from across Europe, they found that refugees show a considerable gap in employment and other labour market outcomes, relative to immigrants with similar individual characteristics, and that this "refugee gap" only closes after 10-15 years of residence. The research suggested that being exposed to an employment ban on arrival reduces refugees' employment probability in the medium-term by 15%, and delays economic integration of refugees by four years on average. Moreover, the existence of a ban itself, rather than its duration, was the main driver of this (i.e. short-term bans still had long-term effects). The findings suggest that economic integration of refugees is not easy, but that Government policy can make a real difference. As well as the negative effect of work bans, the researchers highlight that restricting residential mobility of asylum seekers also damages their employment prospects. They conclude that asylum policies are often managed with an excessive attention to short-run effects, and underestimate the importance of long-run benefits.

Further [Nuffield-funded research from COMPAS at the University of Oxford](#) looks at the economic integration of refugees in the UK. The analysis suggests that the employment gap between the UK-born population and asylum migrants starts at over 30 percentage points for those who have been in the country less than 5 years, but decreases to below 3 percentage points after 10-15 years, only fully converging after asylum migrants have been in the UK for over 25 years. They also highlight the negative effects of employment bans upon arrival, suggesting that this could particularly amplify mental health problems among the asylum migrant population. The case for this may be even more important in 2025, when the waiting time for asylum decisions has increased significantly compared to when this research was published in 2019.

Attitudes of non-migrant population to migration

We have funded a further two projects which look at the effects of migration on the wellbeing of the non-migrant population. The first – a [research project led by the University of Leeds](#) - looks at the effect of immigration on subjective measures of well-being in the UK-born population. The research found that higher immigration seems to have a small negative impact on mental wellbeing for the wider population, but that this was particularly notable for certain sub-groups. These groups include older respondents (those aged 60+), and those with lower incomes, no formal educational qualifications or without a job. The researchers point out a correlation between these groups, and those who voted 'Leave' in the Brexit referendum. The research suggests that some UK-born residents may be distressed by inflows of migrants based on the belief that it will lower their economic opportunities, even though the evidence suggests that this is misguided. It also draws on social identity theory to suggest that, for certain people, migrants are an “outgroup” who they consider untrustworthy, and that more immigration therefore impacts their subjective wellbeing. The researchers suggest that these findings highlight the importance of tackling misleading stereotypes (such as “job-stealing immigrants”) and appealing to ‘national self-interest’ motives by drawing people’s attention to the economic and social contribution of migrants (e.g. to an ageing society). They argue that this may be an effective strategy for lessening the negative impact of immigration for some people’s sense of overall well-being.

Further [research led by the University of Birmingham](#) looked at the impact of ethnic diversity on well-being and health of the wider population. It found that, in the short-term, individuals react negatively on average to changes in religious diversity, but that this fades over time. They examined the psychological mechanisms involved in these processes using questions in the analysed surveys about trust in others in society and frequency of contact with ‘outgroups’. They found that the initial negative effects were being driven by a reduction in trust of neighbours from countries with increased religious diversity. However, after a period of four to eight years, individuals started to report mixing with people from a different background, which improved their trust in others around them, promoting a positive impact on their quality of life. Importantly, the initial negative effect, whereby diversity was associated with reduced trust, was fully cancelled out by the positive effect of mixing with members of different groups.

Health inequalities

COMPAS’s research particularly highlights the high level of long-lasting health problems in the asylum population – both physical and mental - and the negative impact this has on their ability to work. They suggest that policy makers who are interested in the economic integration of asylum migrants may benefit from first considering how to address these health issues to remove this barrier to work. These findings are reinforced by [Nuffield-funded research from the University of Birmingham, in conjunction with Doctors of the World UK](#) into the wellbeing of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers. More than half of the people included in their analysis had an immediate mental or physical health concern, with many reporting challenges with accessing affordable healthcare. The report made various recommendations to improve this, including all residents of the UK being registered with a GP, regardless of their migration status.

COVID Pandemic

We funded [research from the University of Kent and the Belong Network](#) into how social cohesion was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The research was based on surveys which examine levels of unity and division between different groups, and the attitudes which groups hold towards one another. The research found that there was a period soon after the first national lockdown, when a strong sense of cross-national unity was shared across all social

groups, but that divisions had re-emerged by the early summer of 2020. Regarding division across age groups, ethnic groups, religion or nationality, well over 30% of respondents (and up to 45% in some cases) perceived groups to be opposed or strongly opposed to others. While perceptions of the seriousness of discrimination increased for all groups in the summer of 2020 (possibly due to the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement at that time), groups who experience a certain type of discrimination were more likely to consider it as serious than those who don't. The level of discrimination reported by Black and Muslim respondents in this research was very high, with four fifths of Black respondents and three quarters of Muslim respondents reporting that they had experienced some form of discrimination in the last month. In June 2021, 64% of respondents thought the UK was growing more divided, and only 16% thought it was growing more united.

2) Examples of best practice and other interventions/needed to support social cohesion and overcome tensions.

The research which the Nuffield Foundation have funded – particularly through the Understanding Communities collaboration - has highlighted a number of examples of how to support social cohesion. The response below gives examples of what interventions Nuffield-funded research suggests may support social cohesion, taking account of local context, including sensitivity to history, culture, identity and language, which are important themes across many of these projects.

Leadership and trust

The research from [the University of Kent and the Belong Network](#) into social cohesion (referenced above) found that the six local areas that had previously prioritised social cohesion were more resilient when the COVID-19 crisis struck and maintained higher levels of trust, neighbourliness, social connection and volunteering. The researchers recommended a long-term strategic plan to improve social cohesion, identifying five key levers for doing this:

1. **Leadership and narratives that stress interdependence at national, regional and local levels.** This means acknowledging real differences and disagreements, regional and national autonomy and pride of place, but within the broader context of a strong mutual interdependence.
2. **Actively build trust within every community and between communities.** Every local authority should establish and sustain a local cohesion strategy appropriate to their local needs and means. Local government requires the resources to work together with communities, business and public services to develop, implement and realise a shared vision of place. This should include strengthening local social infrastructure and promoting high quality bridging opportunities between local groups.
3. **Empower local government to build cohesion, trust and resilience.** A small investment of £50 million would enable the success of the Integration Areas programme and learning generated by it, to be shared and put into practice much more widely. Local authorities should use the funding to employ a full-time 'cohesion coordinator'.
4. **Support a sustained uplift in volunteering.** Policies and practices are needed to support a permanent increase in the number and breadth of people volunteering in their

local communities. National government should work more closely with local government and the volunteering sector to bring forward a comprehensive system of support for a sustained uplift in volunteering that is able to respond to local purpose and develop cross-locality cooperation.

5. **Tackle deprivation and discrimination.** Establish cooperative relationships across society where people can trust that it is in their, and everyone else's interests, to tackle and remove fundamental inequalities and deep-rooted discrimination and prejudice of all forms.

Community connectedness

A number of the Understanding Communities projects highlight the importance of places and opportunities to foster social cohesion, including places where people can come together to connect and solve problems. [Nuffield-funded research led by London South Bank University](#) looked into whether Transformative Justice can effectively promote social cohesion.

Transformative Justice seeks to develop community accountability and engagement as an alternative to top-down approaches to criminal justice. This research used an arts-based approach to Transformative Justice, and found that this can help communities examine their experiences with justice, look beyond the binary of victims and offenders, and have an increased understanding of 'grey areas'. The researchers argue that the approach shows the potential to promote social cohesion and equality in local communities. They also find that community building and collective problem solving cannot be rushed, as people need time to develop bonds and create the sense of community required for meaningful change.

“A shared communal space for people to meet is also an important factor in enabling and empowering them to bond and develop community cohesion. The provision of community meeting places is currently in sharp decline,... While there remains a strong sense of identity and pride within the city of Stoke-on-Trent, common experiences of adversity, most notably trauma and loss, emerged as a key theme.... These shared challenges appear to help galvanise communities...A shared sense of history can be a powerful tool for helping to build empathy and belonging; it provides a ‘safe’ focus for participants’ conversations, in which they share aspects of their geographical and social identities, e.g. memories of the area and bygone times.” (p10, final report)

A further [Nuffield-funded project led by Glasgow Caledonian University](#) looks at how community asset acquisition impacts the empowerment, resilience, and wellbeing of rural communities across the four nations of the UK. The transfer of public assets into community ownership is promoted at a policy and public authority level as potentially benefiting communities, including by addressing some of the long-standing challenges faced in rural communities, such as isolation and out-migration of young people. But this research found inconsistent, complex, and overly bureaucratic processes for this, particularly in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, with a lack of strategic capital funding to support rural communities to purchase, renovate, and maintain assets. The researchers recommend streamlined, and consistent asset acquisition processes across all local governments, and standardised measurement tools for social value which would enable communities and public authorities to quantify community benefit.

“...rural communities often take on assets in the context of threat rather than choice, and can be overburdened due to the complex nature of acquisition processes.” (p100, final report)

A [Nuffield-funded project led by Bangor University](#) looked at how access to social welfare legal advice interacts with community connectedness, (in)equality and wellbeing. [One of their four case study sites was Anglesey](#). The findings highlight that sharing information in social networks was key to seeking help and having problems resolved, and that places where people meet to build social networks are important. The research also highlights the limits of communities and effective advice provision when the problems people face stem from shrinking state provision and longer-term structural inequalities. It also finds that although some people might use social media to find out what was going on in their communities and connect with local activities and community centres, that 'digital by default' services do not meet people needs. Local in-person services are preferred for reasons of accessibility and because people want to build familiarity and trust with advisers.

“...we found that locally based organisations, sensitive to culture, identity and language, such as the lorwerth Arms, are central to community wellbeing, and have a crucial role to play in preventing social welfare legal problems from occurring or worsening, including by identifying people who are struggling” (page 5, Anglesey report)

“Digital by default’ and ‘Digital only’ approaches put services out of reach of many communities and create a disconnect between public service providers and those they are meant to support.’ (p 10, Anglesey report)

Nature

Nature provides another setting where people can come together. A [Nuffield-funded project led by Teeside University](#) explored the use of nature - such as parks, rivers, beaches and woodlands—to facilitate social integration between different communities, including migrants. They found that the natural environment helped to enhance social interactions, build new bonds, and foster community cohesion. Some participants also reported that engaging with nature helped them maintain their cultural identities and emotional wellbeing. These findings highlight the importance of incorporating nature-based strategies into integration policies. The research also looked at existing barriers to accessing natural spaces, which included financial constraints, and safety concerns – including experiences of encountering racism in natural settings. The research recommends developing accessible and safe natural spaces that involve the whole of the local community in their planning and management, and developing programs which promote intercultural exchange within these settings.

“It is vital to involve diverse community members in the planning and management of natural spaces, ensuring these environments meet the varied needs of all groups, reflecting their cultural practices and preferences.” (p6, final report)

Boosting social cohesion through schools

A Nuffield-funded [project led by Middlesex University](#) looked into the contribution children can make to community integration and how this can be encouraged. The project focused on Bolton, Preston and Blackburn with Darwen, and worked with hundreds of children, parents and local stakeholders to develop their findings. They found school is most often the way that children and parents connect across difference, but that children’s contribution to community integration depends on how comfortable parents and carers feel about this.

The research recommends that local authorities should support and invest in schools to enable them to act as community hubs, and invest in accessible and safe green spaces for children. They found that sport is a hotspot for connection and shared belonging, particularly football clubs, and that there are opportunities for other services, such as arts groups and libraries, to learn from how local football clubs operate and create spaces in which diverse families feel similarly welcomed.

“Support schools to be more diverse and, where this is not possible, invest in programmes that proactively support children and parents to connect with one another across difference (e.g. Schools Linking)...School is often a way that children and parents connect across difference. Fleeting interactions during drop-off and pick-up are important to parents/carers and connections can be strengthened through school events and provision of clubs and activities.” (p6, final report)

‘Hyper-local provision works best for families as it reduces anxiety in parents/carers. If hyper-local services and activities connect with one another across town, there is an opportunity to bring people together who not normally socialise.’ (p29 final report)

Further [Nuffield-funded research from Bristol University](#) suggests that school choice and admissions can lead to social segregation. Their research shows that the vast majority of secondary schools still use geography-based criteria, like catchment areas, distance, or travel time, to prioritise which children are offered places. This results in families with lower incomes being ‘priced out’ of access to the best schools due to house prices, patterns of segregation within neighbourhoods being reinforced, and schools lacking diversity in terms of children’s social and cultural backgrounds.

To overcome these problems, the research suggests schools could allocate some or all their places through other means, such as:

- Ballot – a purely random allocation amongst children who have applied.
- Fair Banding – selection by ability but with places allocated to children with a range of test scores, ensuring a ‘spread’ of pupils with different capabilities.
- Pupil Premium – prioritising places for disadvantaged children eligible for Pupil Premium funding e.g. from families on low-incomes and/or benefits.

More widespread use of a mixture of these options, perhaps in combination with a quota or some geographical criteria, could help eliminate the problems of the location-based approach. Reduced segregation would also help children learn with and from people with a range of diverse backgrounds and perspectives, providing a broader set of social understandings and experiences and equipping them for a fuller, richer, more successful life.

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