

Beyond 2015: Shaping the future of equality, human rights and social justice (12 and 13 February 2015)

Session 5: Where do we want to be? Future studies – how do we want UK society to look in ten years' time?

Discussion notes

In plenary discussion after speaker presentations, participants were asked to offer their visions for a future society:

- We should ask whether our vision is compatible with human rights, bearing in mind that there are two principles of human rights. First they are inherent; we are born with them, we don't have to earn them. The second principle is they are universal; we have them regardless of our identity including legal status.
- We could use Zia's [futures studies] model to think about having a broader framework and discourse around equality, human rights and social justice that – unlike the one we have got at the moment – recognises that equality human rights and social justice include and apply to a lot of the groups that have repeatedly been mentioned at the conference so far, like migrants and children, prisoners, homeless people, so we don't have the current silo approach to equality and human rights.
- The conservative model of reward being linked to effort was charged with being inconsistent by favouring certain groups. It was suggested that we should have a model of equality which recognises the efforts that all people make.
- Michael Young's term 'meritocracy' was challenged as a positive concept as it was argued it is a way of concentrating power amongst just a few people.
- The question of how to reverse the hostile environment for equality and human rights was addressed.
- It was argued that we should be thinking about the politics of space, where migration, space on the roads, GPs surgeries, access to schools etc are causes of fear and worth linking into the whole programme on equality.

- The stereotypes created by the mainstream media could be challenged by individuals in the more democratic space of the internet
- 33% of CAB clients are people who are disabled or have long term health conditions. Whereas the agenda for disabled people used to be equality, it is now survival and we would like that to be reversed.
- Election manifestos are dangerous documents. Parties prescribe their vision of the future; they want things such as more freedom, more productivity, and more efficiency. In other words more naked capitalism. So it is simply more of what we already have. In that sense it is not about the future.
- Will the future of equality human rights and social justice be secular?
- Could an inclusive form of Britishness be a helpful way of making people part of a community as many minorities came to Britain to take advantage of the positive features here.
- The majority of the public believe that fairness is about something for something, that you get what you put in. On benefits, for example, most people think that people in need should get a certain amount of support. I think the public are crying out for people who contribute more to get more.