

Inclusivity Skills for Inclusive Growth: The importance of kindness and community

Recognition that social and economic inequality is a persistent and growing problem has given rise to increasing interest in inclusive growth agendas and the UK is no exception. The Scottish Government has placed inclusive growth at the centre of its [economic strategy](#), but to achieve these aspirations will require more than the current approach of management, measurement and targets. Realisation of inclusivity aspirations needs to include the development of less easily measurable 'inclusivity skills', such as kindness, empathy, relationship building and caring.

Inclusive growth is "a systemic, multi-faceted challenge" ([RSA Inclusive Growth in Action](#) 2019:7). which involves developing "a more human approach" (RSA [Inclusive Growth Commission](#) 2017:13) to growth, changing what is measured (and how), de-siloing economic and social policy, emphasising belonging, self-worth and participative "capacities and capabilities" (ibid: 27). However, to do this requires us to look in unconventional areas for answers and inclusive growth strategies.

The RSA Scotland recently funded research that sought to do just that by highlighting the vital, but underfunded, work done by youth work organisations in helping young people develop essential inclusivity skills, which help them to play a part in Scotland's social and economic prosperity. Given the persistence of youth social exclusion, and the Scottish Government's emphasis on inclusive growth, this research took a fresh look at policy assumptions and calls for a national conversation about inclusivity.

The research report, [The Social Exclusion of a Youth Population in Scotland](#), found that policy makers and youth work organisations had a radically different take on how to tackle the problem of youth exclusion. On the one hand, policy documents produced by central and local government focused on targets and outputs for inclusion. In contrast, youth work organisations - while supporting accredited achievements by young people - saw inclusivity skills in terms of less easily measured skills like kindness, caring and relationship building. In other words, they look at measurement and skills very differently, which has led to some core youth work being underfunded and unrecognised and may have hampered attempts to help people out of poverty and boost social inclusion.

From analysis of Scottish Government and one Local Authority's policy documents, and of narratives collected from the three youth work organisations in Glasgow, the report found:

1. A difference in problem framing between policy documents and youth workers:
 - Policy documents largely presented youth exclusion as a tame (manageable) problem with significant measurement, targets and outputs.
 - In contrast, youth work organisations framed it as a wicked problem.
2. A difference in success criteria:
 - The policy documents had quantitative goals.
 - For youth work organisations, success included the development of less easily measurable outcomes and soft skills, such as kindness, empathy, relationship building and caring. Interestingly, these are skills deemed essential by Skills Development Scotland for future economic prosperity.

The report strongly points to the pursuit of inclusive growth being incomplete without acknowledgement of and support for inclusivity skills – the development of which involves conceiving of measurement differently, putting young people at the centre of policy design by de-siloing economic and social policy, and emphasising belonging, self-worth and participative skills. These findings complement the RSA's ['Four Futures of Work'](#) report, and address Skills Development

Scotland's [concerns](#) about the capacity of the skills system to keep up with what the RSA terms the 'Empathy Economy'. As well as focussing on skills training and service providers, our report demonstrates the critical role of youth workers in modelling and developing inclusivity skills in young people about to enter the labour market, and the funding crisis affecting that provision. Putting the young person at the centre of policy design, not just in intent but in person, can make young people the agents not the objects in policy, and so this RSA report calls for more young people's stories and experiences to be incorporated into policy-making alongside statistics and targets, giving young people a greater voice in framing the policies which govern their role in society. Co-created and collaborative policy offers a greater opportunity for sustained impact, and we hope that policy makers will take the recommendations and findings of the report on board.

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