

# RSA JOURNAL

21st century enlightenment

Issue 4 2018-19

## Generation angst?

**María Ojala** on how young people are coping with an increasingly uncertain future

**Andrew Hunter Murray** explodes the snowflake myth

**Magid Magid** talks about representation and tradition



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Matthew Taylor



**“We are committed to amplifying young voices; they bring us the new thinking we badly need”**

I suspect RSA Fellows of all ages will see the point of an edition of *RSA Journal* dedicated to the experiences of younger people. But it is still worth asking why we have deemed this subject worthy of such attention.

Attitudes to late ‘millennials’ (born in the late 80s or early 90s) and the ‘Generation Z’ that followed are complex. There is an acknowledgement that younger people have it tough in important ways. Tuition fees saddle them with debt and mean they spend their early, lower earning, years with a high marginal tax rate. House prices in areas of strong demand like London make it almost impossible to get on the property ladder without the help of the bank of mum and dad. For young people from disadvantaged backgrounds the work on offer is often low-paid and insecure.

There is also a feeling that young people have been politically disenfranchised. In the Brexit vote, three-quarters of 18-24-year-olds voted Remain. In the 2017 general election, two-thirds of young voters supported Labour and only a fifth supported the Conservatives. The young have to accept some collective responsibility for these outcomes, as they are less likely to vote. But, in the UK, we have a government with very little legitimacy among under-35s.

The sense of intergenerational division goes deeper. Over the past 40 years, Labour’s three to one lead over the Conservatives among working-class voters has evaporated, to be replaced by almost exactly the same advantage among young people. As Maria Ojala argues in her piece about the psychological impact of climate change on young people, trust that mainstream institutions, including politicians, are adequately addressing the issue will be critical to encouraging activism and new habits. No wonder the exciting but unconventional leadership of Magid Magid, a young Green Party councillor and current Lord Mayor of Sheffield, attracts attention (see my interview with him).

But while the views and interests of young people deserve attention, and it is important that we have

more young voices shaping the debate (as Joseph Holland argues in relation to sports stars), there are also pitfalls in an uncritical focus on age as the big divide in society.

It is important to avoid caricatures (like the ‘snowflake’ insult, given short shrift by Andrew Hunter Murray) and to recognise cross currents. For example, education and geography were big divides in the Brexit vote, so we cannot assume that a working-class young woman from Lincoln has that much in common with a graduate professional in London. It is true that policy has favoured the old over the young by increasing pensions and refusing to tax older people to help pay for social care. But the advantages of these policies have also gone disproportionately to better-off older people.

People’s stage in life shapes their insights. For example, young people who have grown up in the world of social media tend to have not just a closer, but a more sophisticated, and in some ways more sceptical, relationship to it than their parents. But older people have the wisdom of experience. This is valuable at a time of social pessimism, when we can too easily forget the ways in which life has got better over the past 50 years, and of volatility, when we can lose confidence in our ability to get through difficult times.

The point is surely to use the different perspectives offered by different life stages to illuminate issues and interrogate solutions, but not to stifle debate.

Much of the RSA’s research and action seeks to benefit young people, from the pupils in our Academy schools to those being failed by the system (the subject of Laura Partridge’s piece), to the generation entering a changing world of work. The RSA Fellowship is getting younger and our fantastic new space at John Adam Street seems to be a particular draw. We may be a very old organisation but we are committed to amplifying young voices; not simply because of their age but because, as this edition shows, they bring us the new thinking and sense of possibility we badly need. ■

Matthew Taylor is Chief Executive of the RSA

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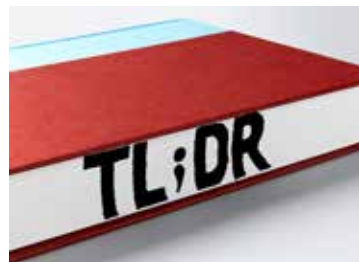
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- 1 There are three key coping strategies young people use regarding climate change: emotion-focused, problem-focused and meaning-focused (pages 12-13).
- 2 In the 2018 US House and Senate primaries, 256 women won seats, an all-time high (page 16).
- 3 The World Wide Web turns 30 this year. Is it time for a reset? (Page 19.)
- 4 In 2007, Sheffield became the UK's first City of Sanctuary, offering welcome and safety to people in need (page 22).
- 5 In 2018, only 2% of members of the National Association of Headteachers said they had sufficient top-up funding to meet the needs of SEND students (page 28).
- 6 Some 82% of young Europeans say they stay informed about political events mainly via the internet (page 32).
- 7 According to UK Music, 29 million people attended live music events in the UK in 2017, up from 23 million in 2015 (page 35).
- 8 Homeownership in the UK in 2015/16 was at its lowest level since 1985 (page 40).
- 9 YouGov polling found two in three Britons think people are too easily offended, with little difference between age cohorts who believe this. Where are the so-called 'snowflakes'? (Page 46.)
- 10 In 2016, Islington Council created a 'county lines' map to show how young people from the borough are affected by drug networks (page 49).

## Policy



## GOVERNMENT RESPONDS TO TAYLOR REVIEW

The government has taken on board many of the report's recommendations, showing its commitment to safeguarding workers' rights

In December, the government responded to the *Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices*, led by the RSA's Chief Executive, Matthew Taylor. Billed by the government as the “largest upgrade in a generation to workplace rights”, the response – the *Good Work Plan* – includes wide-reaching changes to employment law. Among these are: a day one

statement of rights setting out leave entitlements and pay; the creation of a new labour market enforcement body; and an end to the ‘Swedish derogation’, a legal loophole that allows certain firms to pay agency workers less than permanent staff.

The Taylor Review was originally commissioned by Theresa May and published

in July 2017. It made 53 recommendations, 51 of which will be enacted. Business secretary Greg Clark has called the proposed changes “a key part of building a labour market that continues to reward people for hard work, that celebrates good employers and is boosting productivity and earning potential across the UK”.

■ To find out more about the RSA's Future Work Centre, contact Asheem Singh on [asheem.singh@rsa.org.uk](mailto:asheem.singh@rsa.org.uk)

## Design

### RDI AWARDS

Es Devlin, Marion Deuchars and Ben Terrett were the latest recipients of the RSA's prestigious annual Royal Designers for Industry (RDI) awards this November. The awards honour outstanding work of designers across all disciplines, and only 200 designers can hold the title. Morag Myerscough, who was appointed as part of the 2017 intake, gave the 2018 RDI address, 'We Make Belonging'. Her work focuses on building identity in urban environments, and in creating a sense of belonging for various audiences.

Es Devlin is known for her striking stage sets and large-scale sculptures; as part of the 2018 London Design Festival, she added a fifth lion to Trafalgar Square. Marion Deuchars is a renowned illustrator and author, celebrated for her 'Let's Make Great Art' graphic work, which aims to inspire children's creativity and imagination, while Ben Terrett is recognised for his expertise in service design, implementing innovative digital capabilities to improve the end-user experience. Architects Shigeru Ban and Glenn Murcutt, and cuisine expert Ferran Adrià were all welcomed as Honorary RDIs (the accolade for non-UK designers).

■ To find out more about the annual RDI awards, visit [thersa.org/about-us/royal-designers-for-industry](https://www.thersa.org/about-us/royal-designers-for-industry)

## RSA insights

### ARTSDEPOT



Almost a fifth of young people aged 16–24 spend over seven hours a day online, according to data from Ofcom. artsdepot, a project run by Tracy Cooper FRSA, has secured three-year funding from the Mayor of London for an arts access programme that bridges the gap between bedroom gaming/social media and physical interactions in a lively arts venue. In March 2019, Vancouver's Theatre Replacement will premiere its new show MINE, a live inter-generational gaming experience set in the world of Minecraft.

■ For more information, visit [www.artsdepot.co.uk/canada-season-theatre/mine](http://www.artsdepot.co.uk/canada-season-theatre/mine)

# 84%

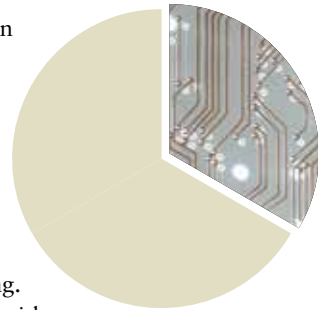
The RSA's recent polling shows that 84% of young people want to help others, but only 52% believe they can actually make a positive difference in their communities. Adults polled at the same time most often described young people as 'selfish', 'lazy' and 'anti-social', reinforcing young people's negative self-image and the belief that they cannot effect change.

■ Find out more at [www.thersa.org/teenagency](http://www.thersa.org/teenagency)

According to an RSA/YouGov survey, only a third of the public are aware that AI is being used for decision-making.

In partnership with DeepMind, the RSA convened a citizens' jury to explore the use of AI for decision-making in healthcare, recruitment and the criminal justice system. The upcoming final report of the Forum for Ethical AI will set out how businesses and policymakers can address the public's concerns about AI.

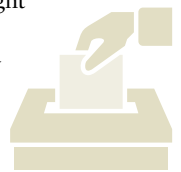
■ To find out more, visit <https://bit.ly/2AYjtdQ>



### PSC POLLING

Are traditional left-right politics being flipped on their head? A new RSA/Populus poll suggests so. Despite overwhelmingly voting for Labour in the last election, under-45s back lower taxes and a smaller state; Conservative-leaning voters over 65 support higher taxes and spending. The Action and Research Centre has launched a programme on people, power and place, and is calling for a national debate on how to fund public services.

■ To find out more, visit [thersa.org/action-and-research/public-services-and-communities](https://www.thersa.org/action-and-research/public-services-and-communities)



## Agenda

### DESIGN SUBMISSION DEADLINE



Transforming emergency healthcare and addressing the loneliness crisis are just two of the 10 important social challenges covered by the RSA Student Design Awards 2018/19, which remain open for submissions until 13 March 2019. The RSA's partners include NHS England and Twitter. Winners – to be announced in May before the awards ceremony at the RSA in June – will receive over £30,000 in cash prizes, paid placements and practical RSA network support.

University students and recent graduates anywhere in the world can enter the awards. To find out how to get involved, visit [www.thersa.org/sda](http://www.thersa.org/sda) or contact the RSA Student Design Awards team at [sdaenquiries@rsa.org.uk](mailto:sdaenquiries@rsa.org.uk)

### CHANGE STORIES

This spring, the RSA will launch Change Stories, a series of short stories that shine a light on how Fellows are making change happen, whether in their communities or across the country. Look out for them in the journal, online and in Rawthmells. The collection will grow over time and we hope will be a source of inspiration for all Fellows.

Email [networks@rsa.org.uk](mailto:networks@rsa.org.uk) to find out more

## Fellowship

### New Fellows

**Omar Salha** is the founder and CEO of the Ramadan Tent Project, a youth social enterprise that focuses on dialogue and empowerment. Omar holds a PhD Nohoudh Scholarship on integration, soft power and sport. He was a key member of the Grenfell Muslim Response Unit (GMRU) during the Grenfell Tower fire. The GMRU was awarded a Pride of Britain Special Recognition Award for its actions.

**Kika Sroka-Miller** is the co-owner and director of ZED Books, an independent non-fiction publisher that includes writers such as Assata Shakur, Nawal El Saadawi, Yanis Varoufakis and Maggie Nelson among its list. ZED has a flat structure and explicitly aims to make publishing a more inclusive industry. Kika is interested in giving a platform to marginalised ideas and voices from across the globe.

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**Meet other Fellows in person** at Fellowship events and network meetings, which take place all over the world and are publicised on our website [www.thersa.org/events](http://www.thersa.org/events).

**Grow your idea** through RSA Catalyst, which offers grants and crowdfunding for Fellow-led and new or early-stage projects with a social goal.

Find out more at our online Project Support page [www.thersa.org/fellowship/project-support](http://www.thersa.org/fellowship/project-support)



## Events

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 [facebook.com/rsaeventsofficial](https://facebook.com/rsaeventsofficial)



In her Bicentenary Medal lecture, design director and co-founder of Designing Justice+Designing Spaces **Deanna Van Buren** explores the societal inequities that manifest in traditional architecture such as courthouses and prisons, and reveals how her company is redefining the infrastructure of justice.

Watch now: [youtu.be/kc6\\_L4qcZ\\_A](https://youtu.be/kc6_L4qcZ_A)  
**#RSAJustice**



What do you say to someone who blames benefits 'scroungers', the EU, Muslims, feminists and immigrants for everything wrong in our society? Forget agreeing to disagree. LBC media star **James O'Brien** joins political commentator and comedian **Ayesha Hazarika** to untangle and rebut some common populist misconceptions.

Watch now: [youtu.be/NFVxVeujxIQ](https://youtu.be/NFVxVeujxIQ)  
**#RSARight**



'Politics as usual' is no longer sufficient for our troubled times. Can the progressive parties reconcile the concerns of the disenfranchised and angry without succumbing to xenophobia and anti-outsider sentiment? Renowned political philosopher **Michael Sandel** delivers an exclusive address on the future of democracy and our place within it.

Watch now: [youtu.be/LCZhA-\\_1n4E](https://youtu.be/LCZhA-_1n4E)  
**#RSAPolitics**



Why do we make the choices we do? Where do anxiety and creativity come from? Award-winning comedian and broadcaster **Robin Ince** explores the exquisite, perplexing, terrifying and hilarious experiences that make us human.

Watch now: [youtu.be/8cy\\_UTYNILO](https://youtu.be/8cy_UTYNILO)  
**#RSAHuman**



# ECO-ANXIETY

We are in unprecedented territory when it comes to climate change. How young people choose to tackle this problem will be a major factor that sets the world on its future path

by Maria Ojala

🐦 @iaojala

In the autumn of 2018, Greta Thunberg, a 15-year-old Swedish girl, had had enough of the adult world's ignorance. The general election was coming up, and in order to bring attention to climate change and put pressure on political parties to take the issue seriously, Greta started a one-girl school strike, sitting in front of the Swedish parliament. A couple of months later, media across the world reported on her climate activism. By then, similar protests had spread to Finland, the Netherlands and Australia, among other countries. At the same time, university students (for example, in France) started campaigns demanding that employers run their organisations in a climate-friendly way.

These examples seem to support a popular story about young people and climate change: that this age group is more interested and engaged regarding this issue than older generations. But is it true? Are young people more enlightened and active regarding climate change? Are they the ones the world should turn to in search of hope? The answers to these questions are complex.

Surveys conducted in different countries show that many young people are worried about climate change and rank the problem as the most important societal issue. However, young people's lifestyles

are often no more sustainable than those of older age groups. The gap between concern, on the one hand, and engagement on the other seems to be particularly wide among the young. One factor that could explain this gap is that many young people have a rather pessimistic view of climate change and the future on a global scale. Consequently, many lack a sense of empowerment and agency regarding this threat. This seems to affirm another widespread story about young people and climate change: that the younger generation, and especially children, are more vulnerable to having their personal wellbeing negatively impacted because of this problem.

While the younger generations may have a lot in common, they are not a homogeneous group. This applies to their thoughts about and approaches to climate change. Just like adults, young people relate to this issue in diverse ways. My research concentrates on young people living in Sweden, a country that, like many other European nations, is both spatially and temporally remote from the worst consequences of climate change. At the same time, young Swedish people are part of a western lifestyle that is often seen as responsible for this problem. What is new about the climate threat, compared to other existential societal threats such as nuclear war,

Maria Ojala is an associate professor in psychology at Örebro University in Sweden. Her work focuses on young people and the ways they react to and communicate about climate change





**“Collective engagement on environmental issues is related to hope and wellbeing, perhaps because feelings of efficacy increase when a community is involved”**

is that ‘everyone’ is said to be part of the problem. How people, including young people, behave in their everyday life, how often they fly and what foods they consume will, at an aggregated level, have an impact on the situation. Subsequently, the climate threat is not foremost related to self-focused worry but rather to concern about the wellbeing of others (for example, future generations, people living in economically deprived countries and the natural world). It is a worry mixed up with guilt. In this context I have investigated how children, adolescents and young adults cope with climate change.

### **Coping strategies**

Some young people, including those as young as 11, de-emphasise the seriousness of climate change. They deny the existence of the problem or use a kind of ‘here and now’ thinking; not saying that the problem does not exist, but perceiving it as one that does not concern them, instead viewing it as an issue that only affects people in faraway countries and future generations. This response – *de-emphasising* – could be due to the fact that they do not value environmental issues that highly, and therefore do not consider climate change to

be a serious threat. It could be because some embrace worldviews, values and lifestyles that are threatened by the societal changes that adapting to the reality of climate change would imply. Or they may have parents who are climate change sceptics. Others may have a hard time dealing with negative emotions, and in order to avoid feeling worried they cope by, in different ways, de-emphasising the threat. The youngest age groups may not have the cognitive maturity to truly understand the problem. These strategies are mostly used by boys and are related to a sense of not being able to influence the climate change problem.

*Emotion-focused* strategies are a second key way of coping. These are where the young are worried but try to get rid of or alleviate these emotions. They distance themselves from negative emotions through distraction, busying themselves with other activities, or through avoidance, evading hearing about climate change by, for instance, not listening when teachers talk about the topic. Less common is to seek social support; for example, talking with parents and friends about their worries. This is in line with tendencies among adults, where many worry about the climate but few talk about their emotions.

This attitude could lead to a spiral of silence, with people thinking that nobody cares because so few give voice to their worries, which makes people even more reluctant to talk about their own emotions.

Young people who use *problem-focused* strategies search for information about what they can do. They talk to others, make plans and take concrete steps. For example, they may stop eating meat, or encourage others to care about climate issues. These strategies are more common among girls and are linked to a feeling that the individual can have a positive influence on the problem. However, in two studies, these ways of coping were associated with low wellbeing. This is perhaps because these strategies are first and foremost about what the individual can do, not about collective engagement, and thus put a heavy burden on a young person's shoulders. Problem-focused strategies are often adaptive ways of coping with stress, but when stressors are relatively uncontrollable, as societal problems often are for the individual, problem-focused coping can create more distress.

### **An alternative response?**

Is there any other way to cope with climate change that promotes both engagement and wellbeing? I believe that there is, but a shift from focusing on how young people regulate climate worry to how they promote hope is needed. First, it is necessary to acknowledge that, although not common, hope can sometimes be based on denying the seriousness of climate change. Some young people who de-emphasise the climate threat say that they feel hopeful because (according to them) the problem is not that serious. However, the most common sources of climate hope are not related to denial, but based on *meaning-focused* coping strategies. Susan Folkman, an American professor who has undertaken influential studies on coping, found that when a person confronted a problem that could not be solved immediately (or perhaps not at all), but that still demanded active involvement (such as dealing with a chronic disease), problem-focused coping was not enough but needed to be complemented by something else: meaning-focused coping.

Folkman's research focused on the micro-level, not on coping with societal problems. There are, however, some similarities here with climate change. Even if a person is very active, climate change cannot be solved at once, only in the distant future and after collective global action. Therefore, people also need strategies that promote constructive hope. Hope can help them confront the problem and bear the burden of taking on climate change without becoming overwhelmed.

In empirical studies I have found that young people use two main meaning-focused strategies when confronting climate change. One is positive re-appraisal, which is about being able to acknowledge the seriousness of the climate problem, but also being able to switch perspective and see positive trends, no matter how small. These could be that knowledge about climate change has increased in society, or that when the negative consequences become more visible in the west we will finally take this problem seriously. Another common complementary meaning-focused strategy is trust. While young people's trust in many institutions may have declined, some still trust particular societal actors, such as scientists and environmental organisations, and sometimes even politicians. To have faith that other, more powerful, actors will also do their part can help young people to feel that their own engagement matters. Research shows that, more broadly, meaning-focused coping is associated with engagement and wellbeing.

Meaning-focused coping therefore seems to be a constructive way to deal with climate change, but it is also a demanding and abstract strategy. A more concrete way to find climate hope would be to look at prefigurative politics. In prefigurative politics, people and movements bypass the status quo to bring about societal change by creating alternative social relations and practices locally instead of confronting power structures directly. In this approach, individuals try to disrupt unsustainable norms and routines by finding cracks in the system. An individual or movement invokes hope within themselves but can also be a role model for others, thereby slowly eroding the current, unsustainable order. In this way, they are trying to *prefigure* a more sustainable future.

### **Working together**

Research shows that collective engagement on environmental issues is related to hope and wellbeing, perhaps because feelings of efficacy increase when a community is involved and people can support one another. In their recent study of youth activism on climate change, O'Brien, Selboe and Hayward present three ways that young people are collectively engaged. The first, *dutiful dissent*, is characterised by young people's involvement in established practices, institutions and decision-making processes to express their dissatisfaction and to promote climate-friendly alternatives. The second, *disruptive dissent*, is about challenging existing norms, rules and institutions, drawing attention to the underlying structural, cultural and economic drivers of climate change. The third, *dangerous dissent*, a form of engagement ▶



similar to prefigurative politics, goes one step further. It challenges the current order by initiating, developing and actualising alternatives that inspire transformation. For O'Brien et al, this is the most 'dangerous' form of engagement, since it not only disrupts but also gives alternatives to the current societal order and thereby challenges power relations and the status quo in a way that is "off the radar from those threatened by alternatives".

Whether collective action in relation to climate change has become more common among young people recently remains unclear. Studies conducted just a couple of years ago, such as a Swedish study by Ballantyne, Wibeck and Neset from 2016 and a British study by Hibberd and Nguyen from 2013, indicate that, although many young people express worry about climate change in surveys, in everyday life they are rather indifferent and disengaged regarding the issue. Seen from this perspective, the call for a broader collective engagement seems somewhat idealistic.

Over 10 years ago, Richard Eckersley, an independent sustainability researcher, warned that the complexity and seriousness of global threats like climate change could lead to two less optimal reactions. The first he called *apocalyptic nihilism*, which is where feelings of powerlessness take over and the individual ceases to care, instead living for the day. The second is *apocalyptic fundamentalism*, where people try to return to more certain times, politics is framed as a contest between good and bad, and extremism rules. Could there be a risk that some kinds of climate activism among young people will lead to extremism and political polarisation? Some political scientists and sociologists have warned about the risk of 'eco-dictatorship'. And of course, collective engagement in the form of disruptive dissent can also be aimed at climate-friendly policies, as the recent protests by the *gilets jaunes* in France show. Eckersley instead put forth the argument for *apocalyptic activism*, which is about the desire to create something new by facing difficulties and uncertainties in a determined but non-extremist way. Here, constructive hope is in focus.

### **Intergenerational support**

How then can the adult world support young people in order to promote constructive hope and empowerment? More research is needed to give evidence-based suggestions. Studies, however, show that young people who use more constructive coping strategies and are more active feel that the adult world takes their emotions regarding societal issues seriously and talk about climate change in a more solution-oriented and hopeful manner. Conversely,

young people who deny the seriousness of climate change and who feel that they cannot influence the future believe that teachers and parents do not take their emotions about such issues seriously, and would not listen if they wanted to give voice to them. They also think that adults mainly talk about the future in a 'gloom and doom' way. These results, together with studies about general worry, indicate that adults need to listen to young people, to not be afraid of young people's worries and to help them express their emotions articulately. Talking about climate change in a supportive and solution-oriented way is vital. The importance of trust implies that a good way to support young people is to let them come into contact, for instance in school, with adults who work in different ways with climate change, such as scientists, politicians and businesspeople. In this way, the common cynical view of the adult world can be challenged.

It is also important to help young people find ways to influence the climate dilemma both as consumers and citizens, and in everyday life and collective political engagement. In recent years, researchers in psychology and economy have focused on behaviour change through nudging; policies that seek to influence our behaviour in positive ways. Some researchers have, however, started to argue that this is not enough and that there is a need to support people so that they are able to face more profound change. A form of transformative learning that focuses on developing competences to deal with complexity, uncertainty and ambivalence, and strong emotions of worry, sadness and anger, is a major new area of research.

It is not children, but young adults and late adolescents, who feel most disempowered and pessimistic regarding climate change. This is perhaps because they are more likely than children to understand the complexity and seriousness of the problem. At the same time, they are also starting to take responsibility for their own lives and households and are realising the difficulty of living up to their ideals in everyday life. This is a critical age period.

American developmental psychologist Anne Colby, in a book about education for democracy, argues that there is a tendency to overestimate young adults' ability to deal with uncertainty and complexity in relation to societal problems, meaning that there is a risk of feelings of helplessness and hopelessness increasing. Senior high school and higher education can play an important role in supporting the young. It is important to help them develop a more nuanced understanding of the complexity and dilemmas that adulthood brings, and to face ambivalence without



**“We need to create more spaces where together, young and old, we can deliberate about the kinds of lives we want to live”**

giving in to inaction. Educators can, for instance, challenge tendencies towards black-and-white thinking by presenting alternative, more constructive, ways of dealing with ambivalence. Here, teachers need to be supportive.

To take one example, there is no need to argue that just because not everyone in the world is environmentally engaged, individual action is meaningless, as many do. Some young people believe that someone needs to take the first step, at least so there is somebody to serve as a role model for others, or that it is a moral duty to behave in a certain way regardless of what others do. Different ways of thinking around ambivalence can be compared and discussed critically. Positive reappraisal as part of a meaning-focused coping strategy can also be encouraged by looking at the situation from different points of view. As the Swedish physician and scholar Hans Rosling pointed out, it is surprisingly hard even for adults to realise that things can be gravely

serious while also containing the possibility of progress. But for those who are able to manage this complexity, it can become a dialectical process that drives climate engagement.

Although action is important, without thinking and critical discussion it can, in the worst case, lead to extremism and polarisation. It is, therefore, important to give room to facing up to and talking about the existential and justice-related dimensions of climate change; for example, the disparity of impacts already occurring across the globe. We need to create more spaces where together, young and old, we can deliberate about the kinds of lives we want to live and what kind of global future we are envisioning. How do we work towards this future while taking into account the implications of unequal impact and the ability to adapt? It is only then that we can go beyond piecemeal behaviour change and prepare in a more profound way for the societal transformation that climate change will bring. ■

# GAME CHANGER

Progressives should harness the untapped potential of the sporting arena to positively influence and encourage political engagement among young men

by Joseph Holland

🐦 @jmttholland

In America, 2018 has been hailed as the second coming of the ‘Year of the Woman’. With a record number of women running for election across the country and an all-time high of 256 winning House and Senate primaries, the past year belonged, at least in part, to a group of women whose political action has changed the make-up of politics in the US.

Many political analysts and commentators posit this upsurge in female representation as a direct response to some of the rhetoric and actions of the current administration, which have confirmed to many that the extant culture of American masculinity lacks – if nothing else – self-awareness. The hope is that increasing representation of women in politics will have a positive impact on the younger generation; in particular by providing role models for young women. Millennials and iGens face many challenges. They need to tackle climate change, eradicate misogyny and racism, and pursue ethical and sustainable economic policy. In order for these aims to be successfully achieved, the active involvement of young American men – who, according to a 2018 poll by the Public Religion Research Institute, are half as likely as young women to engage in civic and political life – is necessary.

There are many ways that the difficulties inherent in American masculinity can be tackled from within. And there is one particular arena that could be a force to be reckoned with, but currently remains largely untapped in terms of its potential to reshape the culture of

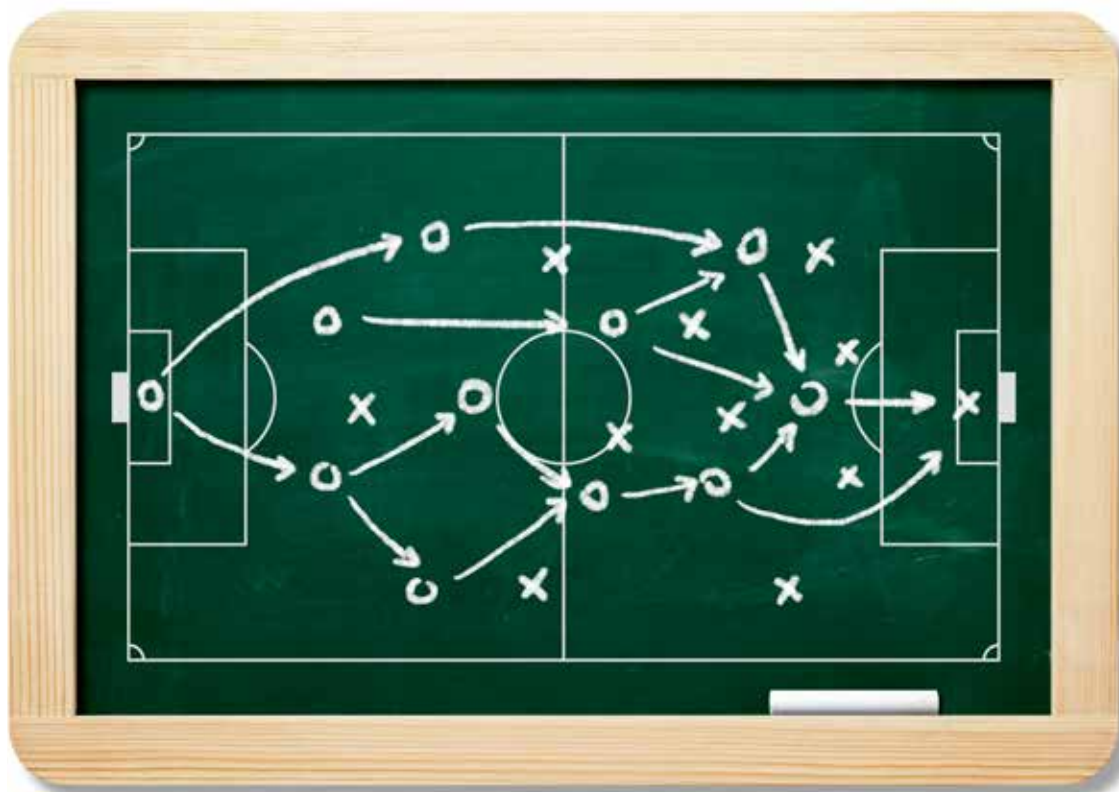
masculinity and drastically increase political and social agency. That arena is sport.

“In his life a man can change wives, political parties or religions, but he cannot change his favourite football team.” This quote, from soccer’s 20th century pre-eminent intellectual, the Uruguayan journalist Eduardo Galeano, although antiquated in its nuance, intimates a truth. It hints at a fact that should (but often fails to) demand a level of self-effacement when discussed in public: that sport can – as the Scottish football manager Bill Shankly famously joked – seem more important than matters of life and death.

## Cultivating a progressive sporting culture

In a world of clickbait, 24/7 news and big data, sport is increasingly a fulcrum around which large swaths of men organise their lives, pursue their relationships and even predicate their identity. This, of course, was true before Sky Sports Super Sunday, the NFL RedZone, or the 24/7 Golf Channel. But for a younger, tech-savvy generation of men, sports culture is both increasingly accessible and eclectic. Follow ESPN on Twitter, or ‘House of Highlights’ on Instagram, and find yourself inundated with high-definition moments of athletic and physical brilliance. Share these moments instantly with your friends at any hour of the day and sport can facilitate never-ending conversation that can seem uninterested in and separated from the increasingly divisive aspects of our civic and social lives.

Joseph Holland plays for Birmingham Legion FC in the USL Championship in the US



For many men, sport has acted as a place to express frustrations and purge tensions in a juvenile, and sometimes callous, manner; it can feel like a toxic realm, where noxious sensibilities flourish, whether among players or fans. Historically, sport's exclusive and exclusionary character has acted as a breeding ground for pernicious male perspectives. But this exclusivity need not be predicated on anything less pure than a fascination with physical endeavour and technical excellence. It is a problem of substance, not of structure, that has created a negative dynamic of self-reinforcing apathies and pathologies.

The transcendent and communal embrace that sport provides can be imbued with progressive philosophies and values. Its inimitable ability to go beyond boundaries of ethnic culture, race, religion and politics is already touted by American athletes, sports organisations and fans themselves as evidence of its positive effects on intra- and inter-community relationships. With the advent of constantly accessible, immersive coverage, and a younger generation of sports fans for whom this technology is everything, there is a unique opportunity for the cultivation of a broader national – and international – sporting culture inspired by the progressive values of a new generation. The question of how millennials can facilitate positive cultural growth within sport, while ensuring that it retains its essence as a form of recourse and entertainment, should be a challenge taken on in both the UK and the US.

American sports culture can be defined – much like the country itself – by its multiplicity. Attempting to reshape such an eclectic and diverse arena is daunting. The kinds of tactics necessary to engage football fans in Mississippi differ drastically from those that could be employed for basketball fans on the east coast. But look closer and successful examples of cross-sport, cross-state, cross-culture progress abound. In California, Steve Kerr, the Golden State Warriors' head coach, is rarely afraid to comment on the political issue du jour, and has garnered increasing respect as a consequence. LeBron James and Stephen Curry, both basketball and global superstars, have not shied away from commenting on the most striking of the President's words or actions. And, of course, the decision made by a number of American football players (and coaches) across the nation to kneel during the pre-match rendition of the national anthem in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement proved to be one of the most arresting talking points of 2018.

These examples lend themselves to an anti-Trump agenda, but for once the main point is not what this says about the US President. The far more powerful message is that apathy is taking a back seat. Athletes, while encouraged to speak and act on uncontroversial matters of local community outreach, have been advised to suppress opinions on national issues. While it is true that education in nuanced issues of social progress is by no means a prerequisite to be a ▶

professional athlete, sports stars do have – now more than ever – an ability to help guide social and political conversation. Aided by increasingly connected national and global social networks – where the Pew Research Center tells us 68% of Americans get at least a portion of their news (which rises as the sample population age drops) – athletes have the ability to push important issues into the mainstream of discussion and debate. This capability is directly and fatally curtailed by a tendency toward political and social apathy.

We need only glance toward women's soccer for proof of the potential progressive power of sport. The global LGBTQ Pride movement (exemplified by the National Women's Soccer League's Pride Month in the US) has succeeded in presenting women's soccer as a competitive, high-level, welcoming team sport, diverse in terms of both sexual orientation and race – two issues men's sport has struggled with. On pitches across the US, young girls see professional athletes of different backgrounds playing, all with shirts emblazoned in the rainbow colours of the Pride movement, creating a space to engage with issues that were often taboo at the beginning of their idols' lifetimes.

## RSA Fellowship in action

### 5-STAZ

Sue Fairburn FRSA applied for a Catalyst grant to support the 5-STAZ educational board game developed by Joel Baraka, with whom she was linked through the Queen's Young Leaders programme. The game is aimed at children who live in refugee camps and is a way of making learning more accessible and fun. 5-STAZ involves answering questions from subject-related cards to move around a board, with the winner being the person who makes it to the star at the centre of the game first. Joel wanted to create something that encouraged enthusiasm for education in children and inspired them to continue with their schooling. The project was awarded a £2,000 Catalyst Seed Grant, which was used to produce 170 extra boards and 10,000 cards, massively extending the reach of the game. A competition has been set up to encourage more children to get involved, and there will be a training session later this year so that more teachers can learn how to use 5-STAZ.

"I felt I was able to access the Fellowship in a practical and deep way," says Sue. "It's incredible the impact the grant is making." The game is currently played in Uganda, but the aim is to roll it out through other countries in the region where there are large numbers of children in refugee camps.

■ For more information on 5-STAZ, email [sue.fairburn@kpu.ca](mailto:sue.fairburn@kpu.ca) or [jbaraka583@gmail.com](mailto:jbaraka583@gmail.com)

Despite this, sport's dominant consumer base remains male. A relationship, played out in the virtual town square of social media, between cognisant public sports figures and young American men, can usurp apathy and lack of engagement, politically and socially engaging a cohort for whom the world seems to be turning upside down. For young men disillusioned with their parents' politics and immersed in the climate of #MeToo, apathy or reactionary contention can seem like the only two options. A body of sporting role models and idols encouraging involvement and agency provides a third option: engagement.

### Motivating youth engagement

Engendering a new culture of progressive agency among a young generation opens the door for business to tap into a different kind of market. A new set of relationships between consumers, influential sporting figures and entertainment organisations could powerfully reconfigure economic dynamics to favour firms that pursue ethical and sustainable practices. Imagine the success of social media campaigns, driven by athletes and sports organisations and supported and shared by fans and followers, encouraging businesses and sports institutions to cultivate relationships that embody the values of our generation. Sport is big business. With a younger fan base given permission by their idols to care about issues from climate change to civic involvement, a new conscious consumer could emerge in the most unlikely of markets. For this to be possible, large swaths of disengaged civic actors must feel motivated to engage and feel that this is both socially acceptable and consequential. A feedback loop of progressive dialogue between athletes and fans enabled by social media would help create a culture where engagement is encouraged.

While considering legislative possibilities such as lowering the voting age, this should not be at the expense of encouraging wider cultural change and exploiting social media and sport in positive ways. Despite the bad press social media receives, these platforms are going nowhere. While they continue to have greater prominence in our lives, sport is not being drastically disrupted in the way that music and film have been. More political engagement is rarely a bad thing. In fact, with an ageing generation making decisions that seem to run directly counter to the environmental and ethical mission of those of us raised in the age of the internet, motivating youth engagement seems like one of few answers to our current global political quagmire. ■



# DO WE NEED TO REINVENT THE INTERNET?

The web's potential for good has been undermined by the wrong incentives; maybe it is time for a reset

by Paul Duan

🐦 @pyduan

**B**orn in 1992 – three years after Sir Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web – I was a child of my time. The internet was and remains a central part of my life; I appreciate it as a formidable engine for lowering barriers and empowering individuals.

But 30 years on from its birth, the internet has become a very different place to that intended by its inventor. It is becoming increasingly centralised, with a few global tech companies controlling ever-larger parts of this public platform. Silicon Valley is now driven by massive growth-at-all-costs fundraising rounds aimed at global market domination. Market incentives – and the necessity of driving ever-higher returns for investors – have led to a perversion of some of the internet's greatest strengths.

But for all the recent scandals, we must not forget that the internet could be a force for good. Our challenge today is to reinvent it. One approach to achieving this is regulation; for example, through measures that seek to protect our data, and various versions of an Internet Bill of Rights, such as that passed in Italy in 2015, and that proposed by US Democrats. Another approach is technical, developing a better set of technologies and protocols that help with decentralisation. These moves are welcome, but the most important challenge lies in changing the incentives that govern the internet.

Competing services have to bring substantive propositions to the table if they want to appeal to the everyday person. And for these services to be delivered in a manner that respects ethics, privacy and democracy, we need to create a level playing field for technologists who want to put social impact first so that they can compete with those simply maximising financial returns.

Unfortunately, despite the energy coming from social innovators, many never get beyond the prototype stage.

All too often they have to make compromises; in their attempts to align their work with public interest values, they are often limited by their economic model. Regulating tech giants to reduce their power is one thing, but another thing entirely would be to produce a positive vision of how we can empower technology for the common good.

Wikipedia is a good example of what innovation initiated by a group of citizens can look like on a massive scale. It brings together the strengths of millions to create content collaboratively, while upholding its editorial independence and neutrality by refusing to monetise its content through advertising. We need a hundred Wikipedias, rather than a hundred Cambridge Analyticas.

For that to happen, powerful entities such as governments, companies and philanthropic organisations must empower citizens to create the social models they want to see. Attempts to reinvent the internet focus overly on regulation that would rein in commercial monopolies, and not enough on making the internet easier to use for the common good. Citizens need incentives like funding, access to data and distribution networks, and public recognition to actively encourage entrepreneurial projects that uphold public service values.

Having begun my career in Silicon Valley as a data scientist, I quit my job in 2014 to found a non-profit. I wanted to contribute to the emergence of a new generation of citizen-led public services, a vision made possible by the internet and unthinkable just a few years ago. We now need incentives that put the common good first. After all, this is how the internet was originally meant to be. ■



Paul Duan is the founder of Bayes Impact, a non-profit that aims to use algorithms to empower people at scale

“Being young enables me to engage with a younger audience. If they see somebody like themselves who’s honest, they feel they can relate to that”

Magid Magid talks to Matthew Taylor about leadership, influence, and the power of traditions and breaking them

 @MagicMagid

**Matthew Taylor:** You’ve already had such a fascinating life. Can we kick off with a bit about this?

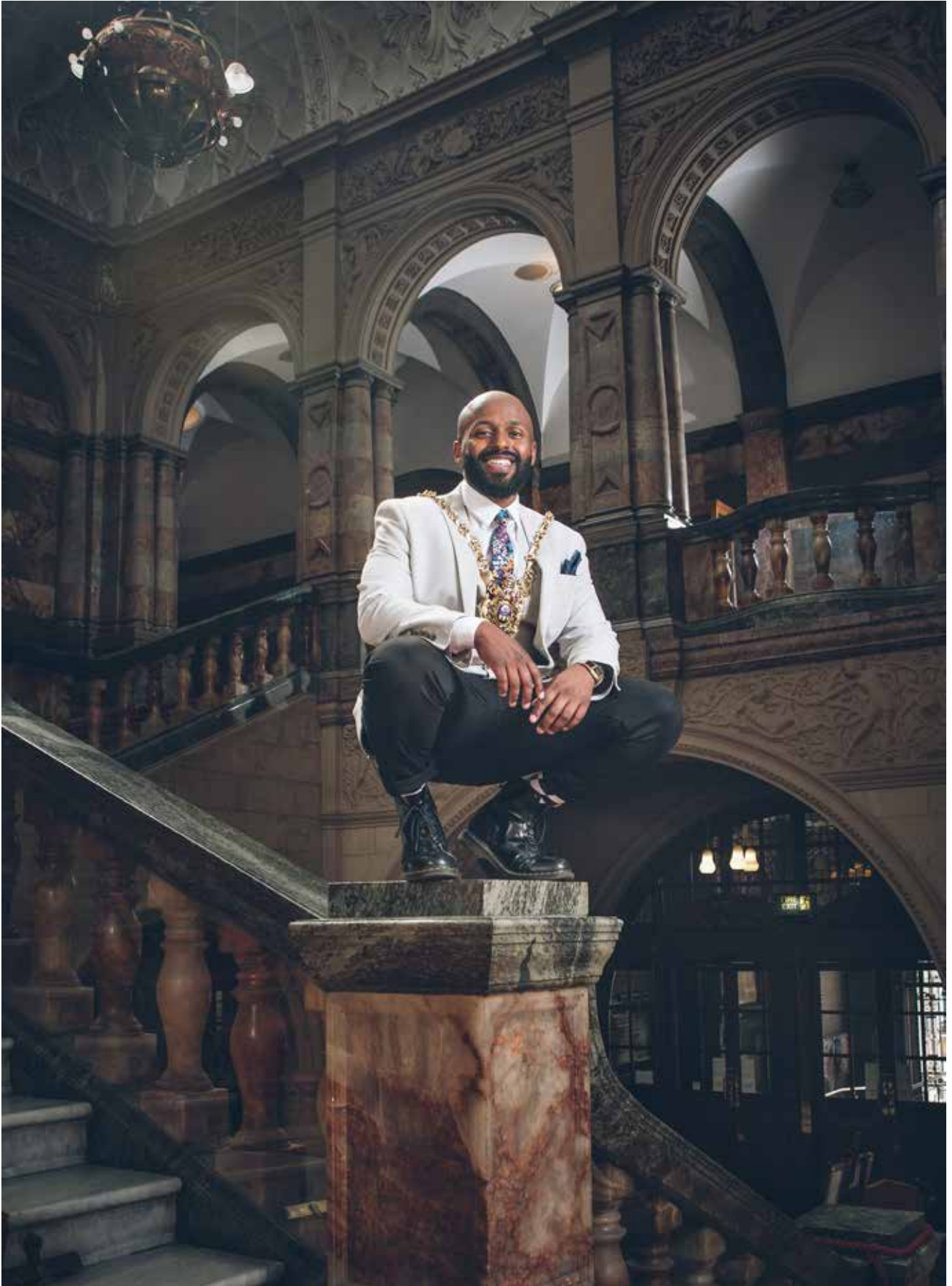
**Magid Magid:** I was born in Somalia, in a town called Burao. We ended up having to leave due to conflict. From there we came to Sheffield, and made it our home. I went to university in Hull to study aquatic zoology. From there I set up a digital marketing company with two friends, then got a job with the housing charity Shelter, and then got elected to the Green Party council. I put myself forward to become Lord Mayor and here we are today.

**Taylor:** You went to school in quite a disadvantaged area of Sheffield. Presumably there were quite a lot of people in your friendship circle and peer group growing up who didn’t go on to university? What is it that enabled you to take that step?

**Magid:** I had a lot of friends that went to prison. When it came down to aspirations it was always a case of the girls had more aspirations than guys. The girls would go off to university, and some of the guys did as well, but it just wasn’t the thing to do. My saviour was the internet. I would be online learning about different things. I used to read a lot, and spend a lot of time with computers, speaking to people from different parts of the world. I used to download music, sell music and make friends with other people. The internet opened the whole world to me. It showed me there was so much more to the world than how my friends saw it. Before, I had felt that the world was basically my community and the people I knew.

**Taylor:** When we talk about young people and the internet it’s mainly a negative story. But for you it was transformative. Do you buy into the worries

Magid Magid, aged 29, is the Lord Mayor of Sheffield



about the impact of technology, the internet and social media on young people?

**Magid:** I used to go on the internet to escape reality, whereas now I think we're trying to do the opposite, where people are trying to come offline just to have a bit of an escape. You can say it's gone from one extreme to the other. I completely understand people's concerns. There's a lot of online bullying and grooming, a lot of radicalism. Young people can become so influenced online. A mobile phone can be the most dangerous tool they have. Who are they speaking to, what are they accessing? But at the same time it's an amazing tool. You can learn how to play an instrument from the same device, you can learn new languages. It's how you use it that determines the outcome.

**Taylor:** You're a young politician, and now Lord Mayor of Sheffield. What kind of insights do you think you bring to the role because of your youth?

**Magid:** First and foremost, being young enables me to engage with a younger audience. Normally when it comes to politics there's a certain characteristic, a stereotype that people see, and therefore apply that to all politicians. So people think that politics isn't built for them, or isn't something that they should get involved in. But if they see somebody like themselves who's honest and says it is what it is, they feel they can relate to that. I try to make politics more accessible for young people. Young people are curious and come up to me and ask how they can get involved. This is maybe within their own small community groups, or looking to find out how the council works. People are generally intrigued; I guess you need to see it to be it. People see me and think they can do it as well. It's empowering them.

**Taylor:** The RSA did some research recently that found that older people's attitudes towards young people were pretty negative, and didn't align at all with what young people said about themselves and what they cared about. Do you see that kind of inter-generational misunderstanding, and also in relation to the way people respond to your quite flamboyant style?

**Magid:** Young people today have got it a lot harder than the older generation did. It is ridiculously hard to get on the property ladder, and the job market

and careers are vastly different these days to how they used to be. Some old people look at millennials having different jobs and say they're not taking life seriously. In terms of my personal experience, the majority of people who don't agree with the way I do things tend to be people of the older generation. They value certain aspects of life, you might call it tradition, they hold it a lot more dearly, whereas I would always question everything and try to figure out why we do what we do. What is the benefit of doing this? If there's no benefit I won't do it, or if there's a benefit to doing it differently I will innovate. I'm willing to take the risk. Whereas I feel the older generation don't like taking risks because they like stability and security. I get it, but that's not how I do things.

**Taylor:** Being Lord Mayor is different from being a directly elected mayor; it's more of an honorary role. Nevertheless, it is an opportunity to get issues into the public domain. What have you chosen to prioritise in Sheffield?

**Magid:** I've made what is traditionally a ceremonial role into one that's got a lot of influence. I can put a certain message out and, using my social media networks, I can engage with more people than all of the councillors put together. I've noticed this has automatically made me a threat to some people because I have leverage and can put certain key messages out and people will listen. If I put a message out in a certain way then the media will pick it up and that message can spread. A recent vox pop I did showed that more people in Sheffield can name the Lord Mayor than their local MP, or even the Sheffield City Region Mayor. One thing I've learned about leadership is there needs to be a face to it, and I think because I'm constantly putting myself on social media, people come to me and demand answers. Even though an issue may be out of my remit people grasp to who they see and who they know.

Every month I focus on and champion a campaign. In June, it was 'Immigrants Make Britain Great', saying that immigrants are more of a gain than a drain on society. In July, it was about Donald Trump coming to the UK and saying he's not welcome in Sheffield because it is a City of Sanctuary. Trump doesn't represent our values, and if we roll the red carpet out we're practically legitimising all that he stands for. In August, I did a very Yorkshire campaign, the Orgreave



Truth and Justice Campaign. In September, I launched a suicide prevention charter with the university and over 100 different organisations signed up. November was a 'Never Again' campaign in line with the end of the First World War commemorations. In December, it was a campaign on climate change. I like to challenge people. One thing I've learned is that people don't remember what you say but they remember how you make them feel, so I always try to draw on people's emotions.

**Taylor:** A lot of the RSA's work has focused on devolution. This is based on the strong belief that it is a lot easier to bring communities together, to innovate at city level rather than national level. If we want to renew people's faith in democracy and to close the gap between politicians and people, do we need to devolve more power to cities?

**Magid:** I'm 100% in favour of devolving power. But we need to do this locally also. If you look at our council structure in Sheffield we've got something called a 'strong leader model', where the leader of the council makes all the decisions. A lot of us are saying we need to change to a committee style where people feel like their voices are actually being heard. A lot of councillors feel disengaged with the decision-making process of Sheffield. At the same time, it's how we engage with people. A lot of the time councils are reactive, but we need to be proactive and actually start campaigns and go out into the community. It should all just come from a grassroots level.

**Taylor:** Where do you see yourself in 10 years? Do you think you'll become more conventional as you get older, or are you determined to carry on being a bit of a maverick until you're 95?

**Magid:** One thing about me, that runs through everything I do, is that I never sit on the fence. I genuinely don't see the point. If I'm trying to please everyone I'm not pleasing anybody at all. In terms of that maverick side of me, there's a purpose. I always weigh up the cost; I never do things for the sake of it. For example, when I wrote a letter to Sajid Javid I specifically wrote it in a Yorkshire dialect, purely because had I written it in a normal professional way nobody would have read it. I even went to the point of hand writing the letter because I knew people would



laugh at how bad my handwriting was. My whole aim was to get as many people to read it as possible and hope that the media would pick up on it, and that's exactly what they did. When it's necessary I'm serious, but then other times people will say Magid you're attention-seeking. Well, of course! I'm peacocking. I'm trying to bring as much awareness as possible to certain causes and campaigns I'm championing. Of course I'm trying to leverage whatever I can to bring awareness to certain things.

**Taylor:** On a lighter note, I'm sure that you often get asked to do things that are very traditional. Do you have another kind of mode? Are you flexible in the way that you will be the traditional Lord Mayor when people want that of you?

**Magid:** I definitely do the more traditional things because they're valuable and important for the city. I can't ignore an entire community of people and organisations that make up Sheffield. I wear my robes for certain events, such as graduation ceremonies and Remembrance Sunday. I respect people and dress codes, but I might put my own style on, my own stamp. ■



# PINBALL KIDS

Tackling the recent rise in formal school exclusions needs to be accompanied by measures to address in-school and hidden exclusion

by Laura Partridge

🐦 @LauraJPartridge

On average, 41 pupils are permanently excluded from English state schools every day. The rise in school exclusions has dominated the education headlines over the past year. Government data shows a 15% increase – from 6,685 to 7,720 between 2015/16 and 2016/17 – in the number of young people expelled from their school with no hope of return. Students eligible for free school meals, those with special educational needs and those from certain ethnic minority groups are significantly more likely to be excluded than their peers. In 2017, the Children’s Commissioner estimated that more than 50,000 children were “missing from education” at some point in the academic year.

England’s record of expelling children is more than a blot on the educational landscape. But we need to dig deeper; there is more to school exclusions than meets the eye. Many children ‘fall out’ of education; they leave school, never to return, but do not appear in the official statistics. There are broadly three main reasons for this ‘hidden’ exclusion.

First, as the RSA’s *Between the Cracks* research, published in 2013, found, 300,000 children move schools during each school year, with around 20,000 disappearing from the system for at least a term. Sometimes this can be explained by families choosing private education or moving home.

Second, moves can be the result of a mutual agreement between a headteacher and a family that things are not working out well in this school, but that the child could do better elsewhere. A school just down the road will welcome them with open arms, offering the fresh start, opportunities or support that is needed.

Educators and policymakers generally call these ‘managed’ moves, with the implication that they

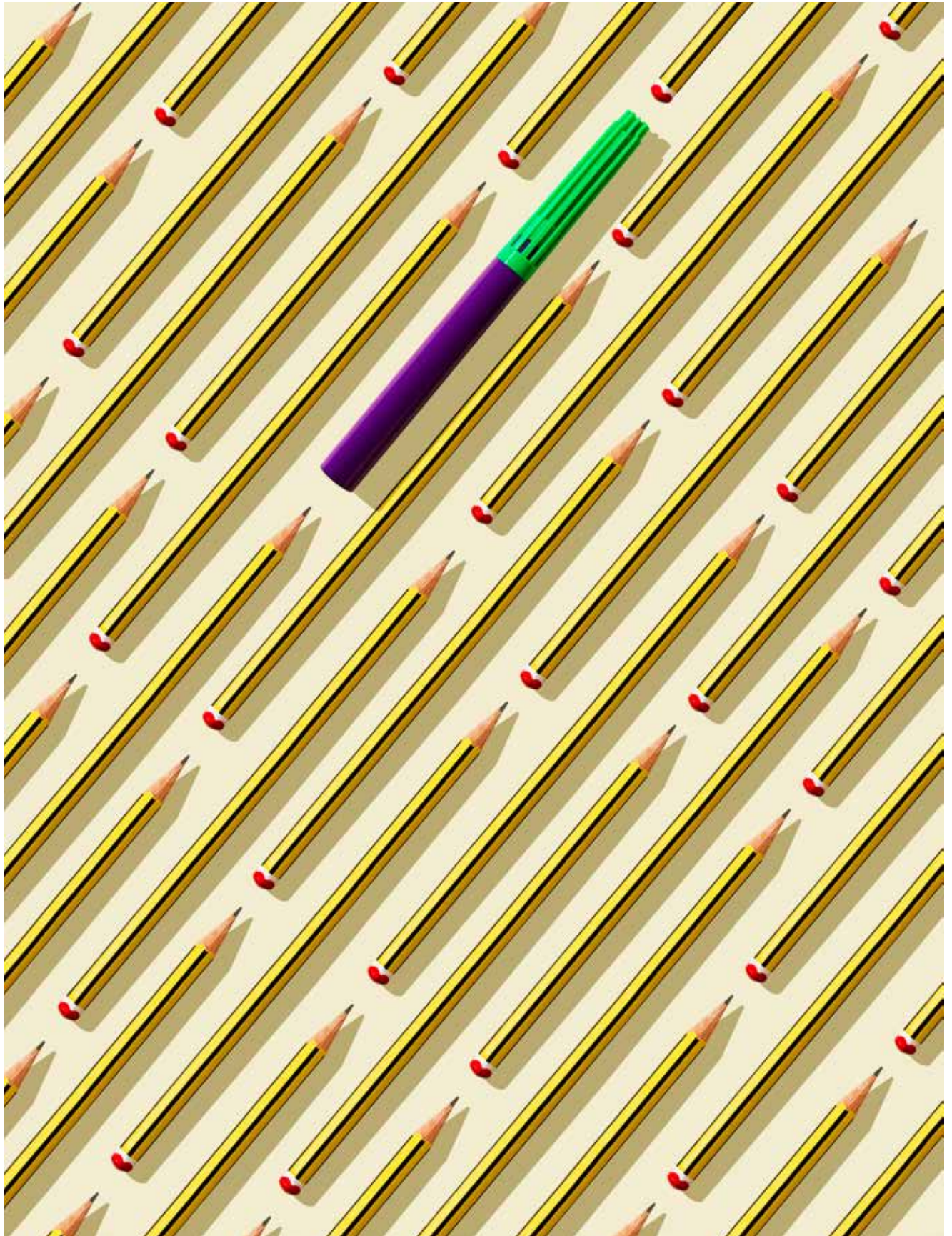
are the result of consent being given by all parties: school, parent and child. These moves are based on an unspoken promise of future reciprocity to the receiving school: should there be a time when one of their pupils needs a fresh start, the sending school would be open to welcoming them. Crucial to the success and fairness of these arrangements is the full involvement of the family and child in the decision-making process. Properly managed, they are not contentious but a sign of a well-functioning system, with schools and families working together to offer every child the best possible education.

The third category of hidden moves is the most worrying. In these cases, children leave school by the ‘back door’ as their parents are asked, or advised, not to bring their child to school tomorrow. Or, as the Association of Directors of Children’s Services revealed in a recent survey of its members, parents feel threatened with attendance penalty notices or exclusion if their child continues to attend. Schools that do not accurately record the temporary or permanent exclusion of a child by these means are breaking the law. In 2017, a report by the Children’s Commissioner noted that without records, it can be impossible to trace whether these children move within the education system or end up outside of it. Here, the fundamental right of the child to an education is at risk.

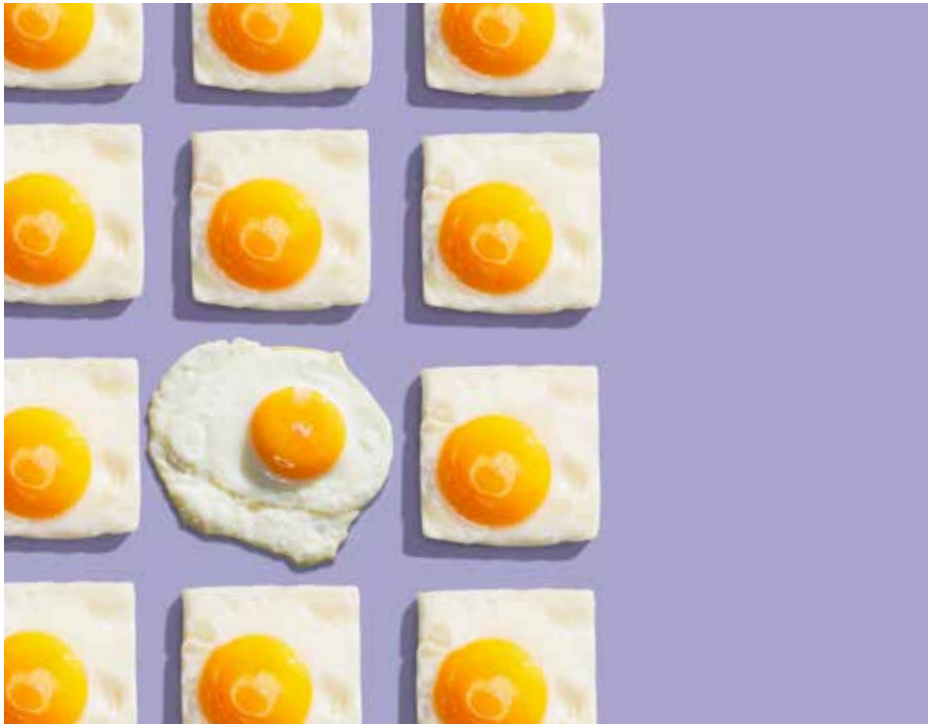
## The imbalance of parental power

All local authorities are required to operate Fair Access Protocols aimed at ensuring that children without a school place – especially the most vulnerable – spend the minimum amount of time out of school. Where there is no record of moves, this process is not automatically triggered. For the

Laura Partridge is a Senior Researcher in the RSA’s education team and a school governor, and leads on a new project on school exclusions







**“We need to dig deeper; there is more to school exclusions than meets the eye”**

parents of these children, the quest to secure their child’s continuing education can seem a solitary one.

As the Sutton Trust *Parent Power 2018* report argues, the path to a new school place is significantly more navigable for a middle-class parent with the networks and know-how that university degrees and professional careers afford them. The study shows that working-class parents are more likely to access fewer sources of information in their search for a school place. This puts them at a significant disadvantage in the increasingly atomised English school system, in which local authorities no longer have a legal duty to coordinate in-year admissions and cannot compel academies and free schools, who manage their own admissions, to provide a place for every child.

In theory, parents can find information about schools’ admissions processes through their local authority but, in practice, many must apply directly to a school to secure a place for their child. For those parents with limited time, networks, understanding of the school system and confidence to negotiate it, finding a suitable place can be very difficult.

This scenario goes some way to explaining the rising numbers of children out of the school system, in ‘elective home education’. Although some of these families will have actively chosen home education for their child, the degree of parental choice might not always be as great as the term would suggest.

The RSA’s Pinball Kids project, which began work at the end of 2018, aims to limit avoidable exclusion by understanding the systemic causes of it. Parents interviewed for the project spoke of the difficulties in finding an appropriate place for their child even after a formal exclusion had triggered the local authority’s Fair Access Protocol. In some areas, parents reported that local Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) – schools designed to educate students excluded from mainstream school – are full to bursting, unable to meet growing demand.

Early findings from the RSA’s research indicate that some local authorities are more able to meet demand than others; children face a postcode lottery. For example, the mother of a child permanently excluded from school in Greater Manchester found that the lack of available places at local PRUs meant that her 12-year-old had to make do with no more than a few hours a day of online English and Maths material. This child was robbed of their right to a full curriculum, the opportunity to socialise with peers and the support of professional educators. For this working mother, in addition to the stress caused by the uncertainty of her child’s educational future, there was the added dilemma of whether it was appropriate to leave her child unsupervised, with little to do for the greater part of the day. For parents in this situation, giving up work or cutting back on hours may seem like the

only option, even if it risks financial instability for the whole family. The frequency with which parents face these stark choices is highlighted by the fact that children eligible for free school meals are around four times more likely to be excluded than their peers.

Parents can, of course, choose to appeal against a school's decision to exclude their child. However, the amount of information and support available to them as they embark on an appeal can vary greatly from case to case. Inevitably, the experience of an exclusion appeal is far more likely to be a new one for a parent or carer than for the school. The headteacher, although in an unenviable position, can usually count on allies in the form of governors, whose understanding of the school is often mediated through the head and a small number of senior staff. The governors may receive little training and may have no experience of the exclusion process. Called to arbitrate in a dispute, some may understandably take their cue from those in the room they already know and trust.

### **Competing rights and interests**

This is not to put the blame on headteachers and governors, although they have a role to play in reducing the exclusion rate. The RSA's education work is underpinned by an appreciation of the complex web of rules, norms and incentives governing the school system. The number of school leaders who enter the profession to game the system at the expense of the children they teach is vanishingly small; the many committed citizens signing up to be governors at their local schools rarely do so with anything less than the best of intentions. Any serious attempt to understand what lies behind the increase in exclusions – formal and informal – must begin by analysing the systemic causes.

The rise in school exclusions results from a mix of factors. These include funding and resource constraints faced by schools and agencies that support vulnerable children, perverse incentives caused by the accountability regime, and curriculum reform making learning less accessible for some pupils.

Together, these factors create the perfect storm for the country's most vulnerable children. They leave headteachers facing a headwind of difficult decisions, having to carefully weigh competing rights and interests. This includes the disruptive student who may require additional support, the rest of the class that deserves to learn, and the teacher who needs to be able to pass on their passion and knowledge free from excessive hindrance or threats to their safety. Teachers and heads face the pressure of the parent body, each of whom wants the very best for

their child. Inevitably, when it comes to managing classroom disruption, the outcomes some parents seek in pursuing the best for their child will be at odds with those of others, although their goal is the same.

### **Exhausting every option**

In balancing these competing rights and interests, most school leaders will look to exhaust all available options before making the difficult decision to exclude a child. Unfortunately, the list of possibilities is shrinking before headteachers' eyes.

Government figures show that the number of staff in secondary schools fell by around 15,000 between 2014/15 and 2016/17. Headteachers and former headteachers interviewed by the RSA in 2018 reported that to balance budgets, they often begin by making teaching assistants and other support staff – who would have supported students with additional needs to learn alongside their peers – redundant. This leaves teachers trying to meet the needs of these children, although nearly a third of those who responded to the Department for Education Teacher Omnibus Survey in March 2018 had not received appropriate training to do so.

Headteachers might turn to other agencies that support children. Yet school leaders' hands are tied here too, by their own budgetary constraints and those of the services they wish to call on. A 2018 ▶

### **RSA Fellowship in action**

#### **Lab\_13**

Headed by Rick Hall FRSA, Lab\_13 is a space in schools where pupils are encouraged to lead their own scientific investigations, driven by their curiosity. They receive guidance from a resident scientist, who teaches them about research methodologies and scientific investigations. "Our idea is that it's never too early to foster and nurture those kinds of skills," says Rick. "I'm keen to encourage a proactive, curiosity-led approach to learning." The project started in a primary school in Nottingham 10 years ago, and since then has expanded across the UK as well as internationally.

Lab\_13 most recently won a £10,000 Catalyst Scaling Grant to support the digital phase of development, and has previously benefited from an RSA-led crowdfunding programme. The scaling plans will focus on creating an interactive digital platform for collaboration on science experiments in real-time and the Lab\_13 Cookbook, an online compendium of experiments and investigations.

■ *For more information on Lab\_13, email [rick@ignitefutures.org.uk](mailto:rick@ignitefutures.org.uk)*

survey by the National Association of Head Teachers found that only 2% of its members said that they had sufficient top-up funding to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Meanwhile, research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies anticipates a 4% decrease in spending per head on children's services by 2019/20, on top of cuts already made to services that support children. At the same time, demand for support is rising in line with increases in SEND diagnoses and the number of children affected by poverty.

Schools may arrange for the child to spend a set number of days per week at a local PRU receiving basic English lessons, applied or vocational learning and/or therapeutic support. This works most effectively when it has a preventative aim; leveraging the expertise of the alternative provision sector to help the student flourish in a mainstream school. However, this set-up comes at a cost to the referring school and, given the current demand, the option may not be available to every mainstream school looking to do the right thing by their pupils.

#### **Exclusion by any other name?**

Disengagement from learning and an increase in disruptive behaviour are likely consequences when schools cannot source appropriate support. Those children whose behaviour consistently bounces up against the boundaries of the school's rules, norms and expectations – the children that former headteacher Tom Sherrington refers to as “pinball kids” – need to have a classroom teacher with the option of sending them from the classroom to get time out or additional support.

Units within schools, variously described as internal inclusion or exclusion units, behaviour support units and learning hubs, are commonplace. Their use has been lent more profile recently, as lawyers representing one pupil questioned the legality of an Outwood Grange Academies Trust school confining their client to one of its ‘consequence rooms’ for a third of the academic year. They argue that the use of these rooms should be limited along the same lines as fixed-term exclusions, where a child cannot spend more than 45 days of an academic year suspended from school. The case raises important questions about what it means

to be included in a school community, with lawyers contending that a student does not have to be missing from education to be missing education.

The extent to which a child is missing education depends not only on the time spent out of the classroom, but also on the outcome the space is designed to achieve and the provision that is offered to this end. On the one hand, such spaces can be used punitively, with students asked to sit in silence and reflect on what they have done. Some argue that the set-up of the room can contribute to the punishing effect of isolation. The ‘Ban the Booth’ campaign was launched in response to the use of high-sided booths within isolation rooms, which it claims are often used in custodial settings and are in breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

On the other hand, isolation can be used to offer a type of learning or emotional support to students that is not possible in the classroom. This could include small-group learning, or tuition that helps children to catch up on foundational knowledge, without which they were struggling to learn in class, or an opportunity to deliver a part of the curriculum in a way that is more appropriate to the student's needs. Some units provide mentoring or therapy sessions designed to help children to regulate their emotions or tackle underlying issues that impede their success in school.

Effective learning or therapeutic support of this nature relies on the availability of highly-skilled staff and a suitable environment. In choosing to provide this intensive support, headteachers will face trade-offs with other items in their budgets. However, schools that do this effectively come to attribute their success, by both their own criteria and those of the system in which they operate, to this choice. For schools looking to pursue such a model, there is a lot to be learned from the work of the most accomplished staff in PRUs and other schools for excluded students, many of which offer this support.

#### **Towards a solution?**

At the time of writing, we eagerly await the results of the government-commissioned Timpson review of school exclusions. At the same time, many local authorities are conducting scrutiny reviews to understand which schools in their area contribute significantly to exclusion rates and how these could be limited.

In 2018, the Department for Education committed to adjusting the Progress 8 scores of around 1% of the school population whose low attainment may disproportionately affect their schools' outcomes

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RSA Fellows with expertise on this issue are already involved in the project as advisers or interviewees. If you would like to know more and get engaged in our work, please contact us on [RSA.Pinballkids@rsa.org.uk](mailto:RSA.Pinballkids@rsa.org.uk). Please be aware that the project team is very busy so may take a little time to get back to you





and, thus, incentivise exclusion. While these changes may contribute to reducing the number of avoidable exclusions appearing in government statistics, they risk failing to address the issue of young people whose departure from school does not appear in these figures, and who end up on a parallel track to their peers without ever leaving the school roll.

There is a promising development on this front from Ofsted. The school inspection body is starting to identify schools with unusually high levels of in-year pupil moves. Inspectors will visit schools equipped with this data, and accompanying guidance and training, to investigate the underlying causes. This should decrease the illegal ‘off-rolling’ of pupils and the potential consequences this has for their right to education.

We must get ahead of the exclusions curve; to understand what can be done before a child is excluded from school, formally or informally, to ensure they have every opportunity to thrive in a mainstream setting. The RSA’s current research is

predicated on the belief that it is possible to exclude fewer children and young people. This requires every school to take an approach where students and their families receive social, emotional and behavioural support as well as educational instruction. We need national and local policies that support such an approach and value its outcomes.

It is this question – of how children most at risk of being suspended or expelled from school can be better supported to thrive in education – that the RSA’s Pinball Kids project seeks to address. The project, supported by the Betty Messenger Charitable Foundation, will investigate this issue in partnership with exemplary mainstream and alternative provision schools, forward-thinking local authorities, representatives of health and social care, and other agencies that support vulnerable children. Together, we will provide recommendations to policymakers and practitioners to ensure that all children thrive in education. ■

# TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT

According to received wisdom, young people are going off democracy. So what is happening, and can this trend be reversed?

by Marie Le Conte

🐦 @youngvulgarian

Over the past few years there have been a number of negative or, at best, divisive events in European politics. The EU struggled to respond as a bloc to the migrant crisis that started in 2015; Euroscepticism rose in prominence while populism and the far-right gained support across the continent. Another concerning dynamic – not unique to Europe – has been young people’s growing lack of faith in democracy. According to a 2016 *Journal of Democracy* paper, just under 45% of Europeans born in the 1980s think it is ‘essential’ to live in a country that is governed democratically, as opposed to nearly 60% for those born in the 1950s.

Conventional wisdom has it that people tend to become more conservative as they age, thus presumably embracing the status quo. Yet it seems that, this time, the problem has deeper roots. According to the same paper, 8% of Europeans aged 16–24 believed that democracy was a ‘bad’ political system for their country in the mid-90s; by 2011, that figure had risen to 13%. These numbers point to an issue with a specific generation, as opposed to an age. So what is going on?

One obvious answer is that democratic institutions are not seen to be tackling the issues young people care about today, which in turns erodes younger

generations’ faith in those institutions. For example, a TUI Foundation study conducted last year showed that just over a third of people aged 16–26 think that tackling climate change should be a priority for the EU; the figure rises to 43% for young Germans.

Although there have been climate change initiatives that seem positive, such as the Paris Climate Change Agreement and the COP24 meeting in Poland last year, it can seem that the topic is not enough of a priority for many governments. According to that same TUI survey, young Europeans place the most trust in ‘science and scientists’ (71%), with government coming in at 18% and political parties at just 9%. On the one hand, we need national and global policymakers – as well as individuals – to respond to major contemporary challenges. On the other, it is unclear whether we trust our politicians to deal with the climate threat effectively.

## An age of extremes?

Is the problem democratic institutions rather than democracy itself? Within this, it seems the most established institutions are taking a knock.

We often discuss young people’s apathy when it comes to voting, but it is worth noting that over the

Marie Le Conte is a political journalist. Her first book, which will take an in-depth look at politics in Westminster, is out later this year





**“We need an explicit and conscious drive to make democratic institutions less opaque, with a particular emphasis on engaging tomorrow’s electorate”**

past few years, those who do vote have strayed from traditional centre-left, centre and centre-right parties. In the 2017 French presidential election, neither of the historical main parties made it to the second round, and in the first round young voters were more likely to vote for the far-left Jean-Luc Mélenchon or the far-right Marine Le Pen over any other options. These two might not have a lot in common politically, but they did both promise to radically shake up the establishment if elected. In Austria’s presidential election in 2016, 42% of under-30s voted for far-right candidate Norbert Hofer. Elsewhere, parties that were once viewed as the radical fringes are now gaining parliamentary seats, such as the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

Older generations also vote for populist parties, but are less likely to have little or no faith in democracy in general. What is the difference?

One answer could be alienation. While anyone can feel out of touch with their country’s political class if their interests are different, there are specific factors contributing to the disconnect young people today feel when it comes to politics. This includes technological development. Europeans under the age of 30 probably cannot remember a time before the internet; by the time they became adults and entered the workforce it was an essential part of life. This

means young people have a different approach to reading the news, forming opinions, creating social networks and establishing their sense of identity.

Asked by the TUI how they stayed informed about current political events, 82% of young people named the internet; by comparison, only 30% picked daily newspapers. It is not only a question of format; when narrowed down to websites, 44% of respondents said they got their information about politics from Facebook, and only 34% did so via news websites.

#### **Mistrusting the message**

We can draw two conclusions from this. The first is that there remains a chasm between young people’s consumption preferences and the relatively old-fashioned way in which politics and political media go about their business. The second is that we are faced with a matryoshka doll of mistrust. Just because young people read news on Facebook does not mean that they unquestioningly swallow it up; only 17% said they trusted the platform. Things are not rosy for traditional media either; only 21% of respondents said they trusted public broadcasters, and just 16% said that they trusted private media.

This again raises the possibility that young people do not have an inherent dislike of democracy itself, but that they lack confidence not only in the traditional

democratic institutions that govern us but also in the information they receive and the ability of the media to hold our leaders to account. These two challenges share at least one potential solution.

Mainstream media organisations have been famously slow to get on the online bandwagon and take their internet presence seriously. Plus, there remains the conundrum of consumers' expectation that online content should be free versus media organisations' need to earn money and invest in good journalism. The good news is that there are online-only outlets gaining in prominence, which are finally proving that they are capable of not only retaining the attention of young readers, but also delivering high-quality, original reporting.

If serious news outlets were to gain in trust and popularity, it would not be surprising to see the younger generations regain some faith in their countries' institutions. Most signs point to a generation that is alienated, but not apathetic; it is not a question of convincing them to get interested in politics in general, but rather in making the usual channels of political involvement more attractive.

### **Active, but less dutiful**

In the same TUI survey, young people were asked if they had expressed political opinions in the past year, and if so, how. Almost 45% of young Europeans said they had signed an online petition. The figures for the UK and Spain were 59% and 58% respectively.

These numbers are high, and do not come as a surprise. In the past few years, a number of online campaigns, most of which count younger activists as prominent voices, have been set up. Dozens of countries have seen young people use various social media platforms to give voice to their views on issues including women's rights, working conditions, quality of life and repressive laws, to name just a few topics.

Something many of these campaigns have in common is that they started organically and spread quickly through these new platforms, bringing together people who would not otherwise have connected, and who are often not attached to an established political party. Young people might not have much faith in democratic institutions or the mainstream press, but they have faith in themselves and are not apathetic about the world they live in.

According to Stephen Coleman, a professor of political communication at Leeds University, young people are becoming more aware that politics encompasses all aspects of daily life. "Capital-P Politics is coming to be seen as less about what

happens in elite institutions and more about the norms that we choose to live by. Each of these changes feed into one another, creating a generation that is both more politically active and less politically dutiful than previous generations were."

Young people do not see politics as something that only happens in the House of Commons, the Bundestag or Matignon, but as a process that can happen at a personal, non-party political level. This is not inherently problematic and greater participation in public discourse can only be a positive thing. However, if we are to close the gap between being able to voice our opinions and feeling that these are being heard, we need to find new and better ways for citizens to participate with democratic institutions. An interesting example was the use of a citizens' assembly in shaping the Irish referendum on abortion.

### **So, what now?**

Anyone can campaign, but if there are no lawmakers to implement changes nothing will come of protests. Political leaders and organisations – as well as the civil service charged with delivering policy on a day-to-day basis – need to start engaging with younger citizens properly. At its most basic, this means taking what young people have to say and what they care about more seriously at local, national and European level. There is no point in trying to get people interested in something if the overwhelming message they receive is that what they are interested in does not matter.

This may also mean developing online platforms to make politics as easily accessible as most other parts of life, and having a social media presence that is appealing without being patronising. But, as the Irish example suggests, this will need to be combined with the hard work of deliberative engagement and more traditional approaches to civic education and citizenship. If you teach children and young people how their country is run in a way that is appealing and accessible, they will be more likely to appreciate the legitimate trade-offs decision-makers need to make when priorities compete, and be less likely to lose interest. Once more, those citizens who aspire to get involved and make themselves heard are more likely to feel empowered in effecting real change.

We need an explicit and conscious drive to make democratic institutions less opaque and more transparent, with a particular emphasis on engaging tomorrow's electorate. Although politics and policymaking will always remain complex, giving people the tools to grasp the way the political process functions in their country would be a massive step toward reinvigorating politics. ■



# DIGITAL STRAINS

Music has long been a source of inspiration and a way to find a community. But how are digital developments changing this experience?

by Katie Harkin

🐦 @harkathon

At 32, I have been a self-employed musician within the literal gig economy for a decade. Should I wish to retrace the considerable ground I have covered, I could use a list of the tech companies trading in any year to jog my fuzzy touring memory. I joined my first band aged 15 via a posting on an online music forum. At 18, I formed my own band and later recruited a bass player over MSN Messenger. Before we had officially released any music, a Swedish promoter contacted us on Myspace and booked us to play our first gig outside of the UK. Skype has given me a vehicle to rehearse with remote band members. I met the friend who will be my next musical collaborator on Instagram.

Music is porous. It places us outside of our own time and space and allows us to access emotions we may not have directly experienced. Each of these platforms served as a portal: a mechanised extension of the connective potential of music, a symbiotic relationship that is constantly changing.

Before broadband, there were CDs. If I indulge in nostalgia, I am transported to the back of my parents' car, opening just-purchased CD cases that had perhaps already shattered, shaking the detached teeth from the case's centre wheel, searching the booklet for details of far-off lives that had reverberated into mine. Music has long been intertwined with youth culture and identity, and I certainly used it as cultural scaffolding for my still-forming sense of self. Anyone seeking that scaffolding now will find that it has become predominantly digital. When it comes

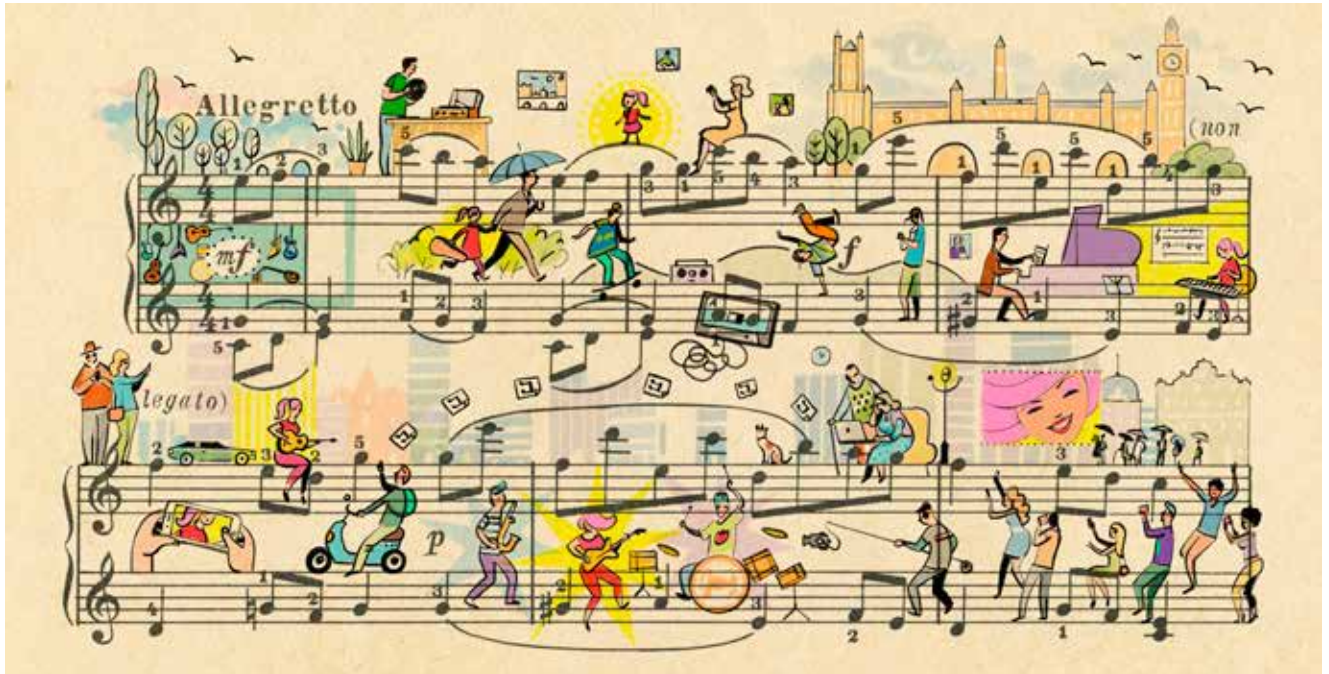
to physical formats, the lightning is out of the jar, no matter how many vinyl box-sets and branded USB sticks the industry attempts to plug the breach with. Our connections to music can now be at once deeply personal, fully public and entirely immaterial.

I grew up in the safe suburbs of West Yorkshire, craving female and queer representation in popular culture. Even now, though, of all the songwriters registered with the Performing Right Society for Music in the UK in 2017, only 17% identified as female, with just 2% female-identifying songwriters in the north of England. The good news is that 40% of new members under the age of 20 identify as female. However, the glossy promise of our digital age remains something of a fallacy. Inequalities still exist when it comes to access to the internet and to the kind of creative education that helps develop the extraneous skills (such as copywriting and photography) that musicians now need to master to survive. Online content production is just the visible tip of the creative iceberg.

## Building stronger connections?

The pallid monoculture of limited broadcasting is dead. The price we have paid for that is a lack of anonymity online. This environment creates new challenges for artistic development and the nurturing of creativity. Penny Andrews, a scholar and postdoctoral researcher, identifies the often-toxic online environment as a culture of "dissensus". This may not be a dead-end for music's connective

Katie Harkin is a musician and songwriter. Previously frontwoman of indie band Sky Larkin, she is now a touring member of various bands and a solo artist



possibilities, though. Andrews expects more campaigns to build a fanbase by using new platforms and serving micro niches for a track or two at a time, picking up the advertising around the tracks and other streams of income. As they said: “If fast fashion can turn out new looks in two weeks and get people to buy from their phone for next-day delivery and one-night wear, music can do that for a mood or a moment in your life. It doesn’t need to gain airplay and consensus to do that.”

Prospecting such digital seams has been rewarding for New York-based musician Mackenzie Scott, 27, who performs and releases music as Torres. “It’s important to me that I know how far my reach can extend, because the industry glitter comes and goes,” she said. “Asking fans to support me via Patreon and announcing house shows on Instagram have cleared some interesting channels of vulnerability between us that are downright heartening.”

As reception to this hyper-targeted approach to touring demonstrates, music has a unique and enduring ability to compel us to congregate. While religion and commerce struggle to physically unite us, with church attendances dwindling and megamalls emptying worldwide, audiences for live music events continue to soar. According to UK Music, the total audience for live music events in the UK in 2017 was 29 million, up from 23 million in 2015.

While the way we consume music continues to evolve, the recorded music industry has failed to keep up with fans, leaving all but the most chartbusting

musicians with no systems in place to support their work and sustain their careers. Streaming services have been criticised for low artist payments, male-dominated playlists and, by the music writer Liz Pelly, for their “ambition to turn all music into emotional wallpaper”. With the material challenges of music production in overcrowded cities ever escalating, artists are actively seeking online portals that challenge the discrimination and cultural biases of the built environment. The live music industry relies on the fact that we like to gather, but if it does not keep up with the cultural consensus for what this actually means in an evolving digital age, it will face the same challenges as recorded music. This is a mass migration.

Where do the portals lead us now? Knowing the alphabet allows me to navigate record stores, but the classes I sat through on the Dewey Decimal System do not help me on the internet. Now we can all be tour guides. In each generation, there are people who embrace an emblematic technological cut-off point; a bizarre badge of almost puritanical pride, dismissing as distraction that which provides solace to those seeking connection. Perhaps, rather than becoming like those who refused to learn how to program their VCR, or own a TV, or embrace social media, musicians and listeners should be swearing an oath of digital diligence. Maybe all we can hope to do is leave signposts as best we can, to be found by the next scrolling traveller in search of the sublime; the perfect song. ■

# BEYOND A JOKE

Comedians do not necessarily just make us laugh; they can also break down barriers and bring us closer together

by Robin Ince

🐦 @robinince

I have been a stand-up comic for my whole adult life. As I reached 30, I was doing what I thought I needed to do to get to where I thought I wanted to be. Slots on late-night TV, writing links and gags for clip shows, sketch shows and chat shows, coming up with ideas that I thought fitted the bill of what mass media wanted. My passion was almost spent. Fortunately, like others before me, I got the boost I needed by experiencing an agonising public failure.

I had put off doing a solo show at the Edinburgh Fringe for way too long. I was 35 before my first: ‘The Award-Winning Robin Ince, Star of The Office, Series One, Episode Five (First Bit)’. Night after night, audiences would leave the venue confused and fearful. They did not know what to make of the man they had just seen punching a melon and then breaking into *Mustang Sally*.

The sting of perpetual rejection meant that I was unable to talk socially. I could only communicate if I was on stage, so I found as many odd cellars as possible where I could do that. I would go to late-night shows and melodramatically read out Mills & Boon romances such as *Rash Intruder* and *Stormy Vigil*, or lurid horror novels of sex, slime and evisceration involving vengeful crustaceans, while the music of Philip Glass played in the background. I would then silently walk through the streets swigging from a bottle like an arthouse hobo. Perpetually on the verge of confused tears, it was the making of me. While others boasted of five-star reviews and tentatively waited to be weighed down by love and awards, the melon pulp caked under my fingernails was a constant reminder of my nightly failures.

In the midst of this bracing experience, what I had not realised was that although many people did not get it or want to get it, those who did really liked it. It was this failure that led to the transition from doing what I thought I was meant to do, to doing what I wanted to do, however stupid. Had I not spent one August

punching a melon, I do not think I would have set off on an arena tour with Professor Brian Cox or written any books.

Fifteen years ago, without any deliberate design or intention, I started to discover whatever it is that means your jokes and escapades mean more to the audience than just a laugh before a late-night pizza and home.

## You’re not alone

The great US comedian George Carlin talked of the difference between a comic and a comedian. A comic, he said, was someone like Bob Hope, who made you laugh for an hour but when he left the stage you knew nothing more about him than when he walked on. A comedian means what they say. This does not mean they are funnier, but that your relationship with them is different. It can be unnerving. If someone hates your act, they do not just hate your act, they hate who you are. But the reward is when someone is affected by your act, when it has been useful as well as funny.

The most recent lauded example of this is Hannah Gadsby’s show *Nanette*, an intense and disturbing (but often funny) hour that is about the danger of turning everything into a joke. As part of her set, Gadsby talks about the verbal and physical brutality she has experienced and the difference between the joke anecdote version and the reality of her experience. The show has become a worldwide hit. Richard Gadd won the Edinburgh Comedy Award for a show that he performed while running on a treadmill. At first seemingly silly, it turns out to be about how he dealt with the aftermath of being drugged and abused.

Like Bowie singing “oh no, love, you’re not alone”, both these shows, although very personal, let people see they are not as alone as they may have thought. In a culture so full of shame and shaming, ▶

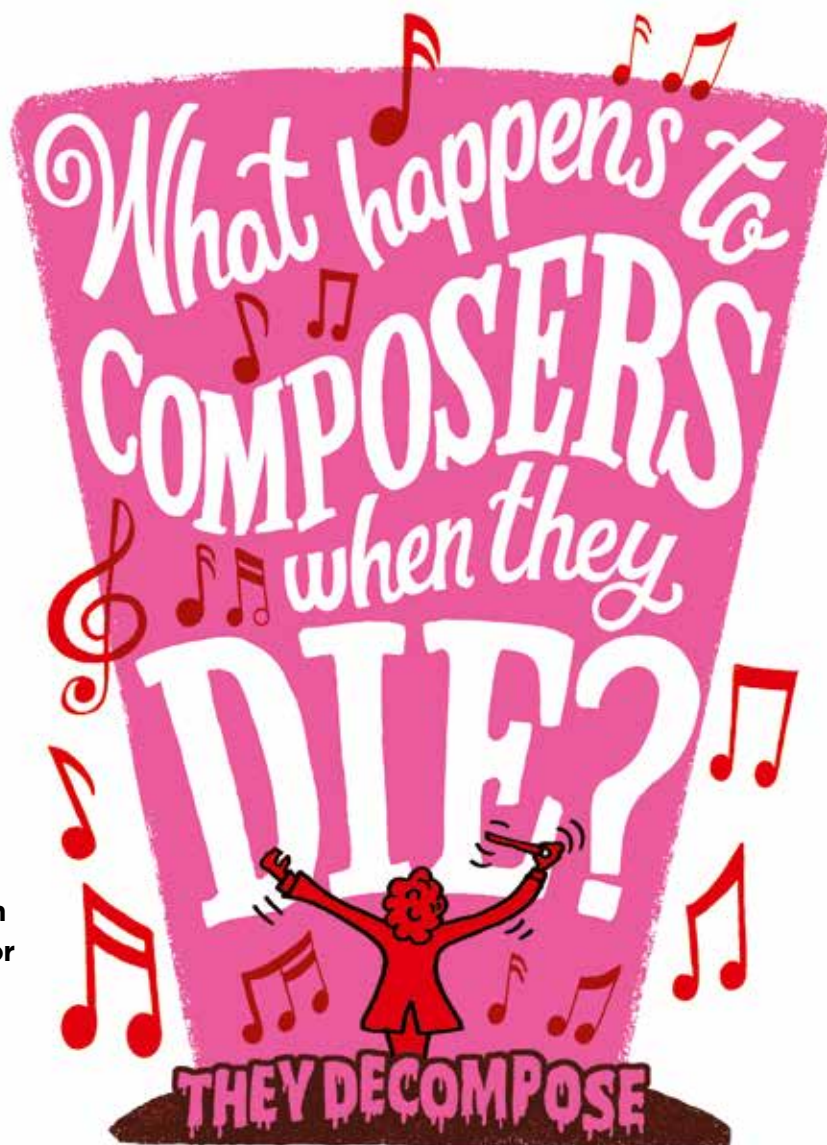
Robin Ince is a stand-up comedian and writer. His latest book, *I’m a Joke And So Are You*, looks at what comedy can tell us about being human



**“DOCTOR, DOCTOR!  
I think I’m  
SHRINKING”**

**“HANG ON A SEC!  
You’ll just  
have to be a  
Little Patient”**

**“Had I had not spent one August punching a melon, I do not think I would have set off on an arena tour with Professor Brian Cox”**



many of us are so worried about the wrong reaction that we may keep something within, however much it is festering and eating away at us.

Some comedians and online warriors have criticised shows like these for not being funny enough, but they are entralling. Sometimes it is worth sacrificing the laughs per second rate if you are hitting a nerve instead. The comedy is the way in; once this honey trap has been set, you can risk fewer punchlines.

#### **Joking to cope, or to hide?**

Cariad Lloyd's comedy career has grown out of combining improvisation with the works of Jane Austen, but she has gone on to win even more plaudits with her podcast *Griefcast*. In each episode, she discusses bereavement with a guest, who is usually from the comedy world. It is a much-needed show. It is not always packed with levity, but the

comedian's fear of being po-faced for too long means that there are always jokes interspersed with the more serious topics.

I talked about death, melancholy and humour (three of my favourite conversational topics, which is why I stay in the kitchen at parties) with therapist Philippa Perry. Her view is that if you are still making a joke about something, then you have not come to terms with it. Philippa once found herself in the front row of a revered show in which a comedian talked about their relationship with their deceased parent. She sat stony-faced, not because the comic was not funny, but because she believed that behind the bravado, they had not come to terms with any of the issues they were making light of. If she laughed, she believed she would be breaking her code as a therapist. She would be encouraging the comic to continue on their dissatisfied path. Noticing that



they had a front-row audience member who did not seem to be appreciating their set, the comic mocked Philippa's solemnity. She remained silent as to the real reason, not wishing to force them onto the therapist's couch in front of all their fans.

A Freudian of my acquaintance, Josh Cohen, disagrees with Philippa's diagnosis. He does not feel that comedy is always a displacement activity, a laugh to hide your pain. Since our first conversation, I have found out that Philippa does not think all humour must be rejected. There are jokes that conceal, but also jokes that reveal. The very minor gag I made at my first gig after my mother's death was acceptable, as it did not run from reality. I merely opened by commenting that there were pluses and minuses to losing your mother. On the minus side, your mum's dead. On the plus side, you can now have your hair cut any way you want and she cannot express her disappointment (trust me, it's in the delivery and the situation).

### **Creating connections**

I first came to really notice the use of stand-up beyond laughter when performing in Belfast, one of my favourite places to play. Like other once industrial cities, such as Glasgow and Liverpool, Belfast does not take well to the whiff of fakery. After a show where I had spoken about explaining the concept of death to my five-year-old son, a woman of about my age came up to me wanting to talk about the recent loss of her dad. It had been her first night out since his funeral and, fortunately, my set had touched her. I often stay around after gigs, not merely to ruthlessly sell my merchandise (books are available in the foyer after you have finished this article), but because sometimes people have something they want to share with you. Sometimes, a seemingly avuncular stranger can be more approachable than a partner or friend. If I have been attempting any tricky subjects, it also allows me to take it on the chin if someone was upset or appalled, or just disappointed, or to listen to personal stories that have been brought to the surface by a poem or punchline.

While touring Australia alone, I would often end up in hotel bars being regaled with stories. One night, a woman who had been my tour guide and chauffeur for my few nights in Adelaide told me that I should do material on suicide. Her daughter had killed herself and she believed that if the subject was out in the open, not just in the official and hygienic environments of hospitals, documentaries and institutions, but in grubbier places like comedy clubs, it would help to show people that suicidal thoughts and urges may

be more common than they imagined, and might encourage conversations. It might even save lives. This conversation occurred just before I retired from stand-up for a while so that I could write, parent and, most importantly, interrupt Professor Brian Cox with silly voices on his arena tours when his equations were beginning to hurt the heads of the audience. But after a year, I knew I was going back to stand-up, and I had made a promise.

It was not easy. My approach to performance is not very structured. I do not write a show, I build it from going on stage and talking nonsense until the nonsense seems to have life in it. I made it public that I was attempting to write something useful, but also funny, about suicide and suicidal thoughts. Some told me to stop immediately, but more people, including therapists, people who had attempted suicide and people who had lost friends or family to suicide encouraged me to give it a go. It was the most worrying part of each performance. When I brought the subject up, the audience tightened a little. There was enough trust to allow me about a minute without a punchline. A friend who had attempted suicide told me a story that was funny and pertinent about this harrowing experience. It was his story, his punchline, and the relief from that point was palpable.

The set concluded with the story of my attempt to kill myself. I was nine years old and had been so savagely petrified by the public information films warning us that rabies was on the way and we would all have to have very painful injections in our belly buttons if we patted a beagle that I decided I could not go on. I went to our local church, sat in a pew, and attempted to end it all by holding my breath. It appears that humans have evolved to a point where such an easy get out is not available.

Hopefully, no one was offended or upset by the 10-minute piece. If they were, I was never informed. Instead, quite a few people came up to me to tell their stories. Tackling what are seen as taboo subjects using humour seems to make those topics more approachable, and to remove some of the fear around them.

Stand-up can actually be useful. It can exist for longer than the length of the laugh after the punchline. It can, if you want it to, have very little artifice. It creates a very immediate, intimate relationship between artist and audience. If I am ever helpful, it is not a selfless act, as it gives me purpose; and is that not what we are all after? Anyway, that is enough of that. If I take myself too seriously for too long, I may forget how absurd I am. I better depart this article immediately and walk directly into a lamp-post. ■

# UNTAPPED ASSETS

Why fairness between the generations requires a new approach to wealth

by Asheem Singh

🐦 @RobinAsheem

**W**e live in divisive times. Nowhere is this more evident than in the distribution of our wealth. In the UK, according to the Office for National Statistics, those whose income puts them within the top 10% of earners own more wealth than the bottom 50% combined. For young people, this divide runs even deeper. The total stock of UK wealth has increased from 2.5 times national income in the 1970s to almost seven times today. Most of this will be passed on to already wealthy young people, who are set to inherit more than four times as much as those with no property.

We tax wealth and inheritance in various ways, but, increasingly, such taxes are not keeping pace with these shifts. Plot a graph of yield versus share of GDP and you will see that the line representing money raised from these measures has for some time stayed flat. And this is without taking into account the rise in inheritance tax thresholds scheduled for 2020. In short, this means that wealth taxes are working less well each year, yielding proportionately less money for the exchequer to spend on essential public goods, while wealth is working harder for those who already have it. Incentives to recirculate assets are diminished. Hold on to what you have is the mantra of this generation, and will continue to be so for generations to come.

The effects of a life without wealth for the growing bulk of our young are grave and getting graver. The absence of pension planning, savings and future provision undermines individual economic security and impacts negatively on wellbeing.

There is a myth that in the 1980s the UK shifted to become a shareholder economy. Yet around 10% of shares in this country are today owned by individuals, compared with 54% in 1963. The dominant model of shareholder ownership has had many effects, and has played at least some part in the corporation becoming

the pre-eminent force for social and environmental degradation, riding roughshod and rampant at the behest of fewer people.

Homeownership, the great prize of the opportunity economy, is – according to the English Housing Survey of 2015/16 – now at its lowest level since 1985. Schemes like Margaret Thatcher’s Right to Buy tended to benefit a small group of the fortunate in fits and starts. Taken in sum: the property-owning democracy of which the political class once dreamed never came to be.

## Assets ignored

Is this really so surprising? One of the great failures of the social democratic consensus that emerged after the Second World War was that it chose to all but ignore levels of asset ownership – of wealth – among the very poor. Instead, we focused on levels of income. The telos of the Beveridge-inspired welfare settlement, located as it was in the idea of a universal personal ‘insurance’, was ‘relief in times of hardship’. Welfare and work were inextricably linked; welfare and citizenship less so.

Thus, when in the 1980s Thatcher’s government, and in the 1990s and 2000s, Blair’s administration, decided to embrace wealth or asset-based welfare, they did so through a narrow lens. They recognised that existing policy was inimical to asset building and saving. This, together with the rapid growth in public spend on middle-class tax reliefs on wealth-building, drove the appetite for new approaches.

“Assets”, said American academic Michael Sherraden, “are hope in concrete form”. He spent two decades observing the effects of asset ownership on low-income American families, the high point of which was his seminal 1991 text *Assets and the Poor: A New American Welfare Policy*. The idea that asset ownership builds self-reliance among the poor, encourages positive behaviour and helps foster a more egalitarian market





**“We should say to our politicians:  
show me your policy on wealth and  
I will tell you what you think of our  
children’s futures”**

economy was given succour by his work. This view was much admired by the Blair government, for whom asset ownership was essentially a personal lifestyle intervention that could be encouraged from Whitehall.

This narrative was largely accepted across the political spectrum. Conservative politicians such as David Willetts and Iain Duncan Smith produced papers on the primacy of assets in the fights for popular capitalism and social justice. The Blair government, in the run up to the 2001 election, presented asset-based welfare as a new ‘fourth pillar’ of the welfare state, after work, income and public services.

Out of this came practical interventions – the Child Trust Fund and the Saving Gateway – that are worth spending a little time on. The former was considerable. The Child Trust Fund would provide all children born from September 2001 onwards with a sum of money to be invested at birth, topped up at age seven and then accessed at 18, with poor children receiving more support than the rest. The Saving Gateway was open to low-income households in receipt of benefits and tax credits. Government would match up to 50p in every £1 saved.

The Child Trust Fund spread quickly. By 2010, more than six million of these ‘baby bonds’ had been opened. The Saving Gateway was trialled between 2002 and 2007, with promising results. The plan was to roll it out nationwide in the event of a Gordon Brown victory in 2010, which never came to be.

Indeed, neither policy survived the axe of austerity. In an act of remarkable political butchery, George Osborne and David Laws ended the Child Trust Fund and kyboshed the Saving Gateway as one of the first and defining acts of the 2010 coalition. They would later be brought back in much abbreviated forms, which only reinforced the idea that, for all its importance, asset-based welfare was expendable. The opposition’s lack of sustained advocacy against the cuts compounded the sense that neither their heart nor their head was in this fight. If we are to take asset-based welfare seriously, we need a different approach.

### **Collective wealth**

There is a venerable strand of political and historical thought that identifies asset ownership as an essential component, not only of individual economic security or of an egalitarian society, but also as an expression of our collective identity. Through owning we belong, and through owning we become.

These philosophical, political and even religious ideas are found in texts as diverse as the *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII and the *Carta de Foresta* of common rights established in Britain in the 13th century. They stretch through the agrarian experiments in universal basic income (UBI) supported by the new American republic’s Thomas Paine, and even find voice in the work of development economists like Hernando de Soto, whose work from 2000, *The Mystery of Capital*,

discerned remarkable changes in communities from the formalisation of individual and collective property rights and ownership. Whether enabling individuals to survive, groups to thrive, or communities to take control of the things that matter to them, a continuum of individual and collective wealth-building is at the heart of our flourishing.

In the past decade these movements have made their way into public discourse and opened up a new front in the assault on wealth inequality. Not before time. An RSA survey from 2018 revealed that people under 45 are least likely to back increases in taxes to support higher public spending, and are also more likely to want to see cuts in taxes and spending. This is despite the same generation – in relatively high numbers – voting for the tax and spend policies of the Labour Party in the 2017 general election. The RSA's Anthony Painter has argued that young people are losing faith in the ability of the current dispensation and its actors to deliver; new thinking is required.

To this end, the RSA has supported the development of UBI models. Everyone should have a claim on a discrete sum of money that gives them a base from which to build. Placing UBI alongside the kinds of individual savings-building experiments trialled by organisations like Prosperity Now in the US – of which the Saving Gateway was a government-driven instance – has the potential to put money directly and sustainably in the savings accounts of all citizens. These ideas, although contested, are gathering momentum.

UBI is a fascinating idea; its dividend is a form of individual wealth-building, but the capital that undergirds the dividend is a contribution to the wealth of all. Whether you support UBI or not, building that collective capital lies at the heart of the wealth inequality challenge.

Activists have recently found that local development policy can also yield fruit. Here, community wealth, as it is known, is taken seriously and built incrementally. Local institutions build local skills bases and encourage community ownership of services and assets. The work of the Democracy Collaborative in Cleveland in the USA and Preston City Council in the UK show the way. Both engage citizens in that process of enlarging collective assets.

Crucially, these ideas can also put money in the pockets of individual citizens. Consider, for example, the work of Dag Detter, whose scheme to create local funds with individual dividends by better managing municipal assets was conceived in Sweden and trialled in Pittsburgh. Local and national wealth funds, such as the Alaskan Opportunity Fund, can leverage natural resources to create what I refer to as a *citizen bounty*.

A minimum inheritance, such as that proposed by the RSA in our 2018 report *Pathways to Universal Basic Income*, of £10,000 for every citizen under the age of 55, can draw on this capital and be increased thereby.

What is more, the bits and bytes that embody citizens' digital footprints should support citizens' flourishing. Open assets are a new, evanescent form of ownership, at once individual and collective, apparently unrooted in time and space yet no less real, that could be worth so much to us. The data pertaining to localities is used for local good. In Barcelona, one of the most data-driven modern cities, new civic leaders with a background in grassroots activism are working hard to turn this data to society's ends. We should follow their lead.

### **Belonging**

We have the potential here to create a new story that is about owning and being, of personal flourishing and collective identity, that is summarised in one word: belonging. The desire to own and to be part of something unites both old and young. In our divided times we must work harder at understanding belonging, not just in its spiritual but also in its material form. We must be hungry to understand the personal, local and national dimensions in ever greater detail, for it is through giving primacy to belonging that our deepest divisions may be overcome.

That is our task: the RSA will play its part in moving the individual, community and open wealth agendas forward. If ever-more hoarded wealth is indeed to be an ever-greater determinant of life chances in our time, let us resolve to spread that wealth, through new ideas and better taxes, but also through the most innovative and evidenced practical interventions imaginable.

Thatcher will forever live on in some voters' hearts as the spreader of homeownership and the purveyor of Right to Buy. Blair's Child Trust Fund was an example of New Labour at its most socially just. Neither of these policies were wealth-spreading panaceas, but they did capture the imagination. The prize here is to do much, much better and thus define the economics of a generation. We should say to our politicians: show me your policy on wealth and I will tell you what you think of our children's futures. We should demand of them: show me an agenda that takes seriously the economics of belonging. ■

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■ The RSA Economy team is organising an event with Fellows to discuss taking our work on wealth and the economics of belonging forward. If you would like to get involved, please get in touch with Asheem at [asheem.singh@thersa.org](mailto:asheem.singh@thersa.org)



# GENERATION SNOWFLAKE?

Young people today are often denigrated for being overly sensitive and humourless. But how true, or fair, is this characterisation?

by Andrew Hunter Murray

🐦 @andrewhunterm

To anyone over the age of 35 reading this: grave news. There is a group of people who are out to get you. They like trigger warnings, safe spaces and campus bans, and they have no sense of humour at all. They dislike cultural appropriation, linguistic violence (whatever that is) and if you say anything ‘problematic’, they will call you out, shut you down and have you cancelled. They are snowflakes.

That is the bad news. The good news is: almost none of them are real.

The two most important things to know about the snowflakes of popular journalism are that they are a) easily offended and b) young. They are po-faced undergraduates at Sussex and SOAS, the new Red Guards who live to tear down statues of the Good Chaps of the last century and replace them with Brutalist Menstrual Art or similar nonsense. They are the spiritual descendants of the Loony Left, the Wimmin of Greenham Common and the soft-headed teachers who banned “Baa Baa Black Sheep” for fear it was racist.

The metastasis of ‘snowflake’ – from a synonym for fragility to an age-based mark of prudery – took place around 2015 in the UK, and it has prompted a journalistic bonanza. These snowflake kids cannot cope with watching *Friends* on Netflix because it contains jokes about fat people and cross-dressing. They do not like Bond movies because the suited spy comes across as a bit of a sex pest. They want to get rid of statues of Cecil Rhodes, murals of First World War heroes and Kipling’s verse. Some students receive ‘trigger warnings’

that the Shakespeare they are studying contains spicy themes. At Cambridge, students demanded that a college hosting an ‘Africa-themed’ dinner should cancel the meal. Where will it stop? In 2018, *The Sun* even appointed a short-lived comedy correspondent, ‘Jon Snowflake’, to cover the wacky things young people find offensive these days. (And he was sort of funny, to the really determined reader.)

The denunciation of these revolting youths is not just a journalistic talking point. It reaches the heights of government. Last year, in a strong contender for the least intellectually coherent government policy of the past decade, the then Minister for Higher Education, Sam Gyimah, announced that, to protect free speech, universities that try to prohibit controversial speakers from visiting will face government intervention. (I am eagerly waiting to see precisely how this will be policed.)

The conditions of this new cultural Cold War have even prompted a new political movement, the charming-sounding Turning Point USA, which exists to teach students about the free market and to challenge ‘safe space culture’. In December, its representatives arrived in the UK. The group’s communications director, Candace Owens (herself a millennial), told *Telegraph* readers unsmilingly that, “Students have gone soft.” Worse still, the snowflakes were even coming for the famous British Sense of Humour. “The Left has killed comedy,” she darkly warned. The group’s founder, Charlie Kirk (aged 25), agreed: “Monty Python would not be allowed in this politically correct culture.” ▶

Andrew Hunter Murray is a journalist and comedian. He writes for *Private Eye* and is a QI Elf





### The origins of snowflakes

How did we even get here? Most dissections of the modern snowflake start with *Fight Club*, Chuck Palahniuk's 1996 novel, in which we are told: "You are not a beautiful and unique snowflake. You are the same decaying organic matter as everyone, and we are all part of the same compost pile." Perhaps. But Mr Palahniuk's iteration had nothing to do with age, nor with offence. I personally date the modern usage of 'snowflake' to 2008, to a brilliant cartoon from the xkcd website. A man (I'm presuming here) sits alone, looking at a computer screen. A voice from offstage calls: "Are you coming to bed?" "I can't," he replies. "This is important. Someone is *wrong* on the internet." Right there – in our inability to share a civil space, albeit online, with a perfect stranger whose opinion differs from our own – was a vivid harbinger of the red-raw state of current discourse.

And when the age-based angle took root a few years ago – soon after the publication of a book called *I Find That Offensive!*, which suggested young people had been cosseted until they turned into hyper-ventilating, hyper-sensitive, censorious types – snowflakes metamorphosed into journalistic catnip.

And yet, and yet. Most of these protests are just that: protests. The statue of Cecil Rhodes that Oxford students campaigned against? It is still there. The mural of white men at Southampton University, the removal of which was demanded by the student union president herself? That is still there as well. When it was pointed out that the mural actually commemorated the First World War, she issued a grovelling apology. The Africa-themed dinner at Cambridge? It went ahead,

after a minor kerfuffle over the admittedly doltish reduction of the cuisines of several dozen countries to a single three-course meal.

In part, there are journalistic economics at work here. Stories like the *Friends* one can be based on a handful of tweets, and most newsrooms are so desperate for copy these days that a small story like that can go round the world. That is even before the columnists and pundits get their teeth into it. (I will not make the obvious point that the middle-aged hacks spending thousands of words and earning thousands of pounds being extremely offended by thin-skinned students do not exactly come across as terribly resilient themselves. Some fish should be left swimming around the barrel.)

As for 'no-platforming', it does happen, but only up to a point. There are precisely six organisations on the official 'no-platform' list of the National Union of Students (NUS), including such unlovely chancers as the English Defence League and the pro-caliphate Islamic group Hizb ut-Tahrir. In 2016, ChangeSU, which provides resources for student union managers, asked 50 student unions whether they had banned a speaker in the past 12 months. None had. The NUS points out that student unions are private bodies with the right to invite whomever they like to speak. Not being invited to speak is not the same as being banned.

### Statistically speaking

Enough anecdotal data, what about the stats? They, too, are a sad letdown to the Candace Owens of this world. Polling by YouGov found that two out of three Britons agreed with the statement: "Too many people are easily offended these days over the language that others use." Specifically, they agreed with that statement over the rival statement: "People need to be more careful about the language they use to avoid offending people with different backgrounds." Not only that, there was very little variation between age groups. The youngest group surveyed, those aged 18–24, actually showed slightly less sensitivity on this matter than other cohorts. Score one to the anti-snowflakes. In the US, YouGov asked a broad range of Americans, broken down by age, whether it was offensive for someone to dress as a geisha, or a Native American, or in a Mexican sombrero, if the wearer was not part of that culture. The youngest group were likeliest to think it offensive – 34% of those aged 18–34 said it was – but even in this group, 37% said it was not.

Finally, in June 2018 a British YouGov survey examined whether students were likelier than the general public to think someone with views they found offensive should be banned from speaking at a university. They found it rather depended on the opinion. Students were

more likely to want to ‘ban’ a speaker who claimed vaccinations caused autism; non-students were more likely to want to ban a speaker who believed in the abolition of the monarchy. But the overall non-trend was pretty plain; as YouGov put it: “The results do not find any evidence that students are more hostile to free speech than the general population.”

### **The ‘right’ to be offended**

So the anecdotes are not true. The statistics do not bear it out. What, then, are we saying when we call someone a snowflake? In effect, the term says only this: the causes you think important are unimportant, and you have no idea what really matters. Offended by something cultural, or social? Grow up. There are wars on. Just as in the old gag that anyone driving slower than you is an idiot and anyone driving faster than you is a maniac, today anyone more socially aware or sensitive than you is a snowflake, and anyone less aware is a bigot.

Ah, but, the thing is, kids today are offended by the wrong things. The 1968-ers and their successors were protesting about Vietnam and apartheid. These were real social ills. Today the message to students who kick up a fuss is that there are people dying in Syria while they are worrying about Halloween costumes. It is easy to pretend people can only care about one thing at a time, but it is manifestly untrue. In the absence of a pan-global calculator of suffering that measures exactly which evils we should be most outraged about, people make their own messy lists, generally prioritising matters closer to home.

The core conflict is over what ‘should’ matter to people in their own societies. But, the aforementioned blockheaded policy idea put forth by the UK government aside, there is no state intervention here. This is the exercise of free thought and dispute over language – and, yes, statues and murals – and how they make different members of society feel welcome or excluded. Rules on what is ‘offensive’ can only apply universally in relatively constrained, uniform societies. It is part of the remit of modern western society – which accommodates an extraordinary range of opinions – to contain these debates without violence. In the absence of violence, or threats of violence, what is going on here is society.

Arguments over the language we use – or the make-up of our universities and civil spaces, whether we name buildings after slave-owners or decide not to honour those memories any more – are not worthless. The real, subliminal concern of so many journalists is that the rules are changing. It can be disconcerting. I myself am frequently disconcerted. But outside a

small core of the terminally outraged, the flurries listed above are mostly well-meaning attempts to ensure other people are comfortable and happy. On an individual level, this sounds rather closer to old-fashioned ‘good manners’ than anything else.

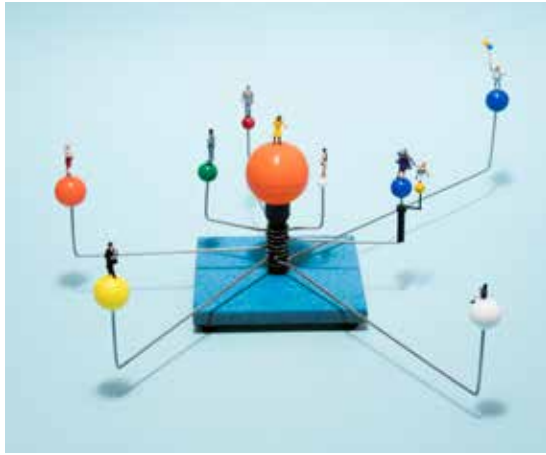
Where these protests do exist, they are frequently about more than the pretexts the newspapers seize on. The irritation over a Cambridge ‘African dinner’ or a large statue of Cecil Rhodes at Oxford may be more to do with a prevailing feeling that BAME students are not made welcome at Oxbridge. This matters, even if you think that the existence of a hunk of stone does not. It would be a civilised society that tried to understand these debates and the underlying causes, rather than simply laughing at what is perceived to be students’ hang-ups.

### **A history of snowflakery**

To anyone still worried, here is one last crumb of comfort: snowflakery has been around a long time. But, just as today, there was generally a reason for it. Consider Nahum Tate, a 17th-century poet laureate and playwright now remembered chiefly for rewriting *King Lear* with a happy ending. Tate is mocked today, but a bit of context reveals his motive: in 1681, with Charles II on the throne of an England torn apart by civil war in living memory, society was understandably a little prickly about plays in which kings are deposed and killed. Context matters, just as it did to the Reverend Thomas Bowdler, who re-wrote Shakespeare without the rude bits. Was Bowdler just another Victorian dog-collared god-botherer who could not stand the crudity of England’s finest playwright? Well, up to a point: but he explicitly made clear that his edition, *The Family Shakespeare*, was one in which “those words and expressions are omitted which cannot with propriety be read aloud in a family”. Content warnings in Shakespeare, all the way back in 1807! It is easy to laugh, but this was explicitly Shakespeare to be read *en famille*. Is this really snowflakery? If you genuinely take the position that all Shakespeare is appropriate for all ages, I have some *Titus Andronicus* tickets to sell to your six-year-olds.

Where does this leave us? Young people today are not more likely to want to ban speakers, or worry about offensive language. Those protests that do happen frequently have substantive underlying causes, even if this is often lost in news coverage. Patches of snowflakery undoubtedly exist but, for the most part, this is an enjoyable element of the ongoing debate that runs through modern society. Take a seat and enjoy the scrap. ■





# BODY TALK

Is the body becoming redundant when it comes to communication?

by Tania Coke

In Japan, the emphasis in mainstream education is on learning by rote. Across society, the pressure to succeed academically has lionised the intellectual over the creative and the brain over the body. For many younger people – who have grown up in the age of digital technology – a lot of communication is done online, through channels that bypass the human body. Emojis and Instagram posts are gaining ground over physical expression. Does this matter?

It seems it does. In Japan, as elsewhere, business is increasingly global. But in many of the firms that I work with, people struggle to communicate across cultural boundaries. What is lacking is not just vocabulary and grammar – it is the ability to build a rapport through body, gesture and action.

Of course, highlighting the importance of non-verbal communication is not new. In the 1970s, Albert Mehrabian developed the 7-38-55 model. This claimed to show that only 7% of what we communicate directly consists of the literal content, 38% was through things like tone of voice, intonation and volume, and that as much as 55% consists of body language. While Mehrabian's studies have been both confirmed and contested, most people intuitively sense that physical expression aids understanding. As an actor specialising in Corporeal Mime, I know this to be true. When I gave up management consultancy and began studying the expressive possibilities of the body, I felt a surge of new purpose and connectedness. It was also therapeutic. It was as if part of me that had been dead for many years was creaking back to life.

I have been thrilled to have the opportunity to use my skills and insights through my involvement with the RSA. The mission of the RSA Japan Fellows' Network is 'to champion new ways to think, act and be, in response to the challenges of our times'. And so it was that in 2016, after the huge earthquake that hit southern Japan, we teamed up with the British Embassy in Tokyo and the RSA's Whitley Academy in Coventry to run workshops with schoolchildren in the worst affected areas. We wanted to do something that would connect the students with a global audience and that would be creative and fun.

Last summer, as part of a UK tour supported by RSA Kickstarter, my theatre company ran workshops at RSA Academies in the West Midlands, helping children to express themselves more creatively through their bodies using the technique of Corporeal Mime. The principal of Holyhead School in Birmingham – who dropped in to observe the workshops – told me that many of his pupils found it difficult to express themselves physically and with confidence. He saw how this kind of training could give them greater control over the way they project themselves to the world.

By learning to reacquaint ourselves with our bodies and developing our ability to communicate physically, we can improve our connections with others so that they transcend cultural differences. ■

■ To find out more, visit [www.thersajapan.org](http://www.thersajapan.org)

Tania Coke lives in Tokyo and runs the RSA Japan Fellows' Network. You can find out more about her work at [www.tarinainanika.com](http://www.tarinainanika.com)



# The experience and expertise of Fellows has been invaluable

The RSA's Catalyst programme helps Fellows to create real societal change  
by Joe Caluori [@Croslandite](#)

'County lines' is a term used by the police to describe a growing practice among criminal gangs: when demand for drugs fails to meet the supply in major cities, gangs travel to remote rural areas, market towns or coastal locations in search of new customers. As a local councillor in Islington, London, I became aware of the county lines drug networks through our local Safeguarding Children Board. I wanted to understand how many children from Islington were being exploited in such a way. In 2016, the council had produced the first map of county lines operating out of a local authority; this gave me a good starting point and insights, but I wasn't sure how, as a councillor, I could make a difference.

I came to realise that we would not be able to truly understand the factors that enable this form of exploitation without knowing more about the situation in the seaside and market towns where urban gangs are extending their drug networks. Police forces and local authorities are traditionally not very good at working across borders, and with cuts to funding there is little extra capacity for the exploratory and analytical work necessary to get to the bottom of county lines exploitation.

I applied for an RSA Catalyst Seed Grant to form a partnership between a local authority that is affected by county lines networks and my own council, in order to jointly research the issue and produce a tool kit that could be rolled out for local authorities across the country. I had an incredibly useful conversation with the Catalyst team, which helped me to clarify my thinking and encouraged me to consider the potential wider reach of the project. Winning the £2,000 grant was transformative. The RSA's endorsement opened up the project to a far larger audience, and many people got in touch to say they would be interested in collaborating.

The experience and expertise of these Fellows has been invaluable. I learned about other parts of the

country that are experiencing the same issues; I also learned a huge amount about cuts and changes to addiction and harm reduction services since 2013, and how these may have enabled the rising demand for heroin and crack cocaine in seaside and market towns.

The nature of the project means that I need to work around the availability of others, who are all incredibly busy. This has meant it has been difficult to keep to the timeline. However, having people on board who really believe in the project, and are motivated to make it work as well as possible, reassures me that the final report and tool kit – which will be published in 2019 at the RSA's Rawthmells – will be of real value.

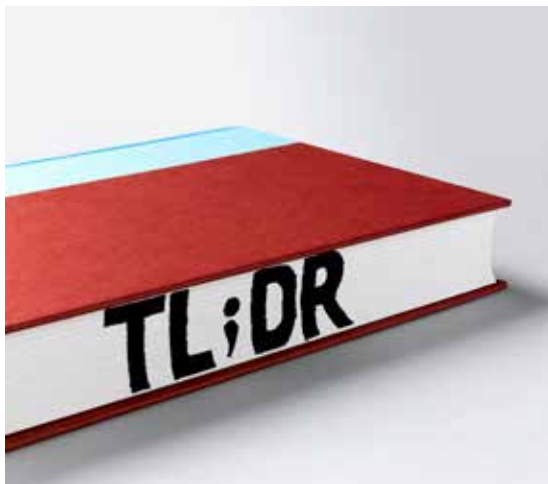
There is still a lot to do on this project and I am looking forward to taking the next steps. Ultimately, I want to scale the project up and take our findings to other parts of the country to help shape their local responses. I also want to build awareness in professional groups of the links between the different factors that have enabled the growth of county lines: exclusion from education; looked-after children (those who have been in the care of their local authority for more than 24 hours) and care leavers placed out of area; reduction of addiction services; cuts to local police; and an inadequate first response when children are found hundreds of miles from home, caught up in these networks.

Joe Caluori is a councillor for Mildmay Ward in Islington. He is the executive member for children, young people and families



## Top tips

- Be clear: set out where you will be by the end of the project and what success looks like.
- Plan realistically: create a clear timeline, assuming that engagement will take longer than you think.
- Involve others: access the experience and expertise of people, including Fellows, who bring know-how and ideas, but manage these relationships carefully.
- Be flexible: be open to adapting and developing your idea within your overall plan.



Too long; didn't read? Maybe it is not the younger generations' supposed inability to focus that is to blame for falling page views

by Marcus Webb

If you are under 35, you will not make it to the last line of this article. Even before this sentence ends, your minuscule attention span will have been dragged off elsewhere, probably to the very smartphone that has so addled your poor brain. The young, apparently, are little more than a flock of magpies in a fork shop, eternally hopping from one shiny thing to the next.

This is, of course, rubbish. There is no concrete evidence that millennials have shorter attention spans. This is a generation that has embraced longform storytelling on television; you try telling somebody who has binge-watched *Making a Murderer* in one sitting that their attention has no staying power.

However, when it comes to longform articles online, all too often people reach for those four dreaded letters: 'tl;dr' (too long; didn't read). The blame lies with the publishers, not the readers – and certainly not the readers' age. Whereas HBO and Netflix ushered in TV's golden age by getting people to pay for quality, the written word online has gone in the other direction.

In the early days of the internet, most publishers gave everything away for free and banked on advertising to generate revenue. This prompted a furious competition for our eyeballs and a race to the bottom. One in-depth piece of reporting from Syria would generate roughly a tenth as much revenue as a ten-page slideshow of Z-listers who may have gained some weight. Savvy publishers swiftly realised it was cheaper, more efficient and far less stressful to monitor celebrities' weight gain than to send reporters to warzones.

As sales of physical newspapers fell, this desperation for page views escalated to the point at which seemingly every article online was topped with a provocative, clickbait headline and surrounded by

other links and images screaming for your attention. Reading something online felt like attending a gig at which 20 bands start playing their latest hits all at once and then complain when you walk out after five minutes.

Television and podcasts have demonstrated the demand for depth and detail, and shown that young people love complex, intelligent stories that require hours to tell rather than minutes. If people have no time for words online, maybe that is because swiftly and cheaply produced online content is not good enough to hold their attention.

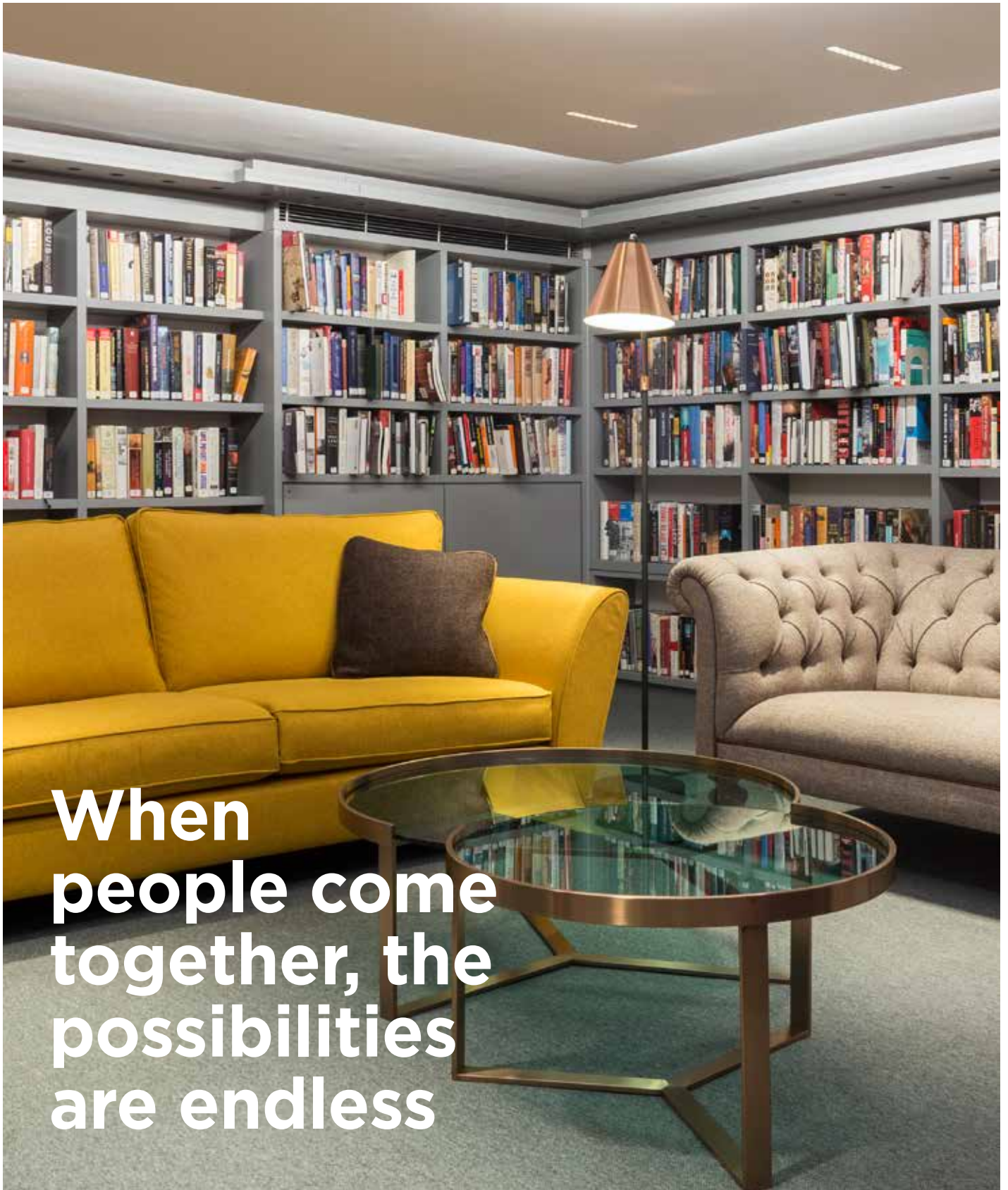
There are signs that things are changing. Online subscription models such as that of *The New York Times* and reader membership models such as that of *The Guardian* show people will pay for longform journalism. At *Delayed Gratification*, the slow journalism magazine I edit, we have always had faith in people's attention spans. In 2010, we launched a print magazine on the principle that people will pay for news with quality and depth, and I am happy to say we have been proved right.

Our younger readers have no problem with immersing themselves in our longform articles. They tell us that they appreciate taking a screen break to curl up with the magazine. They love reading stories that would never have been served up to them by the dreary algorithms that drive our online experience.

So we do not believe the mantra of under-35s was ever 'too long; didn't read'. Too dull, perhaps, too poorly constructed, too nakedly commercial, too bad, frankly, to be worth their time. But not too long. And if we are wrong, what does it matter? Nobody has made it this far anyway. Oh look, a fork... ■

Marcus Webb is a co-founder of The Slow Journalism Company and the editor of its flagship title *Delayed Gratification*

Typography by Nick Doyle. Photography by Pixeleyes



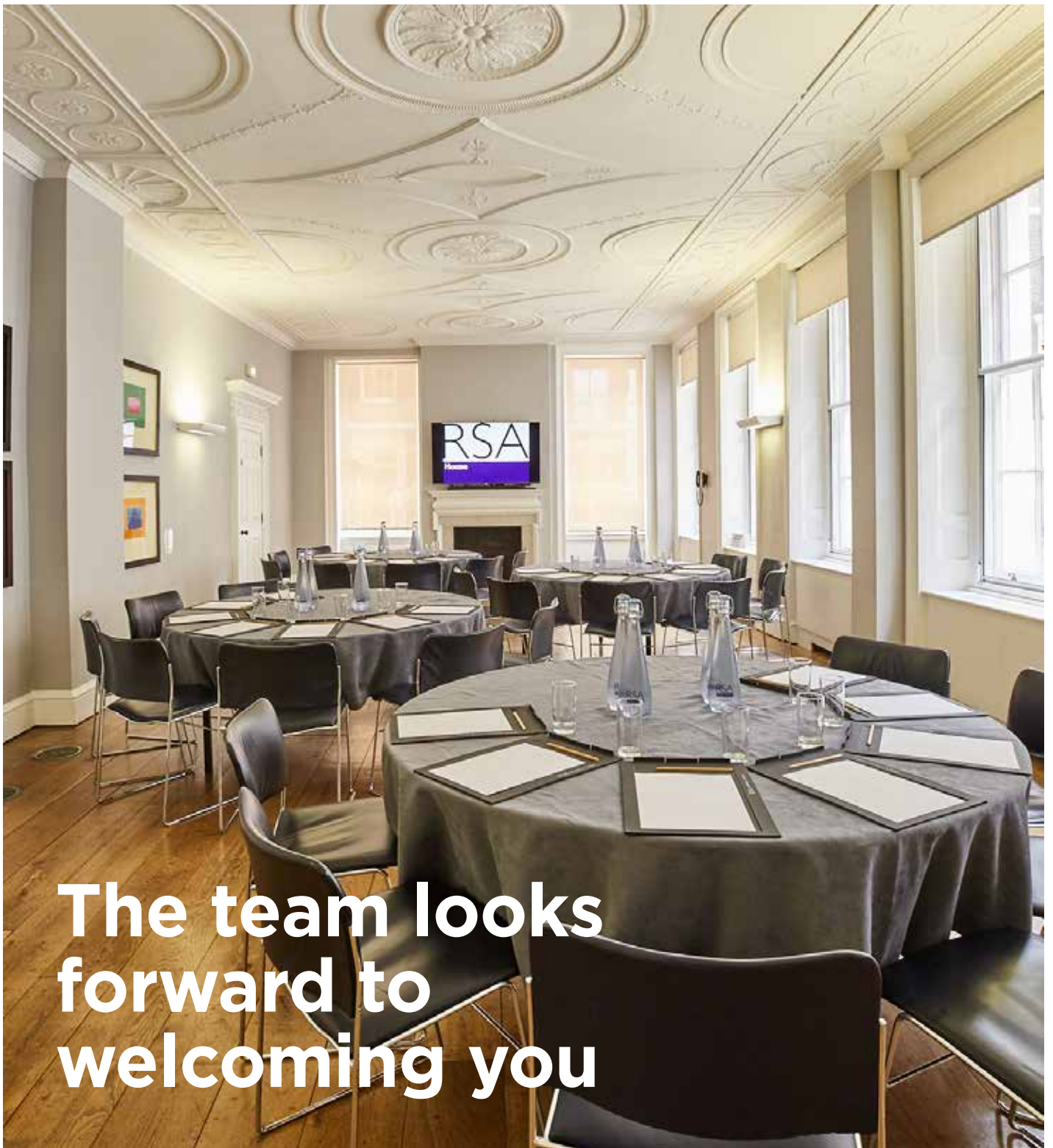
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