

Boris Johnson Warned Of 'Appalling' Record On Social Mobility - Even Before COVID-19 Crisis

There are 600,000 more children living in relative poverty than in 2012.

Boris Johnson has been warned to make social mobility a central plank of his response to the coronavirus crisis, as the scale of government failure even before the pandemic was laid bare in a new report.

The Social Mobility Commission (SMC) has underlined that coronavirus threatens to have a devastating impact on the poorest groups and that ministers have not acted on a third of its key recommendations over the past seven years.

Its audit of 52 proposals - on a range of policy early years, education, employment, housing, health, and transport - made by the SMC between 2013 and 2020 showed "disappointing" progress.

The report showed there are 600,000 more children living in relative poverty than in 2012 and that Black and minority ethnic groups are more likely to be living in poverty.

It also found that half of all adults from the poorest backgrounds are receiving no training at all after leaving school - something it feared will worsen after lockdown disruption to young people's lives.

Overall, on a third of recommendations (31%), the SMC said there was no or very little action. On almost half (46%) there was some but insufficient progress and on only a quarter (23%) had there been good progress.

While the SMC found some evidence of improvement for disadvantaged groups, it identified several areas of "major concern"

Poverty - there are 600,000 more children are now living in relative poverty than in 2012, with this figure likely to increase further due to coronavirus and

benefit changes. The report also found children from black and minority ethnic groups were more likely to be in poverty: 45% compared with 26% of children in white British families.

Early years - *45% of the early years workforce are on tax credits or benefits. The SMC says the government should expand eligibility for the 30-hour childcare offer.*

Schools - *At 16, only 24.7% of disadvantaged students get a good pass in English and Maths GCSE, compared with 49.9% of all other pupils.*

Post-16 education - *The SMC says the government should offer extra help to disadvantaged pupils aged 16 -19 through a student premium.*

Employment - *Half of all adults from the poorest backgrounds receive no training at all after leaving school.*

Health - *Life expectancy is falling for women in the most deprived 10% of areas. The report also highlights how BAME people are disproportionately hit by Covid-19.*

Place and Regions - *The SMC said devolution to regions and metro mayors has so far failed to adequately tackle long-standing regional inequality.*



JOHN SIBLEY / REUTERS

Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson

Martina Milburn, who is preparing to stand down as chair of the SMC, has called for a dedicated social mobility unit in Whitehall to help the prime minister realize his "leveling up" agenda as the country recovers from the pandemic.

"Social mobility has never been more important. It is the poor and the young who will suffer most from the economic downturn," said Milburn. "To succeed, action will need to be driven from the heart of government.

"At present, there is no meaningful coordination between departments on the social mobility agenda, and no single force championing social mobility across the government."

Sarah Atkinson, chief executive of the Social Mobility Foundation, said the report "paints a stark picture of the UK's failure".

She said: "This report shows that the British promise to young people - work hard and you will be rewarded - is still being broken, and in fact, it is where you are born and your family background that determines your life chances.

"Levelling up is at risk of becoming a cruel joke."

Kate Green, shadow work and pensions minister, said the report “exposes a government with no interest in leveling up Britain”.

She added: “After a decade of Tory rule half of all adults from the poorest backgrounds receive no training at all after leaving school, life expectancy is falling for women in the most deprived areas and 600,000 more children are now living in relative poverty than in 2012.

“This report exposes a government with no interest in levelling up Britain. Kate Green, shadow work and pensions minister

“It’s an appalling record of mismanagement and indifference to the life chances working-class families and their children.”

Setting out an eight-point “recovery plan to meet the needs of the most vulnerable”, Milburn said ministers should: have a cross-government strategy with a single unit, make the socio-economic background a factor in all policy, install a better welfare system to tackle poverty, enforce decent wages for childminders and an early years strategy to “help the helpers”, ensure greater diversity in schools in terms of academic ability and socio-economic background.

She also called for further education to be better resourced and targeted at those aged 16 to 19 from disadvantaged backgrounds, and said that apprenticeship and adult education should also be a priority.

Regions should also be handed more powers and funding, she added.

A government spokesperson said the SMC report recognizes progress in areas such as improving life chances for poorer groups, boosting mental health support for young people, and keeping disadvantaged pupils in education for longer.

They added: “We remain committed to leveling up opportunity across the country, and continue to do all we can to make sure no-one is left behind as a result of coronavirus.

“From the start of the outbreak, all vulnerable children have been able to attend school and we have provided over £100 million to support children to learn at home.

“We also continue to invest significantly in schools and early years, alongside raising wages and increasing work incentives for the lowest paid families.”

Source:

https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/boris-johnson-failing-social-mobility_uk_5edfc65bc5b6d4bfcd57f297

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