

# ***Implementing Social Inclusion: Seven Transferable Lessons***

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## **Abstract**

By nature, 'wicked' or intractable social problems are multi-dimensional, compounded, with multiple causes and long-term consequences. Examples of such problems include neighbourhood regeneration, financial exclusion and child poverty.

The concept of social exclusion provides a unifying framework for analysing these various problems. Although 'social exclusion' derives from a diverse range of intellectual and political traditions, it can nevertheless bring coherence to what might otherwise appear separate issues. In particular, thinking in terms of social exclusion and inclusion encourages identification of shared features and transferable lessons between what have often been treated as the distinct responsibilities of different divisions of government and other social policy makers.

This paper reflects on what different dimensions of social exclusion have in common in terms of experiences of implementing policy responses to enhance inclusion. It identifies seven lessons from analyses and evaluations of these policy responses which may be shared to improve the future effectiveness of social inclusion measures.

While some of these lessons appear obvious and well-established, the implications of others are less apparent. In each case, questions can be asked about how far policy design and delivery have absorbed the accumulated lessons of previous practice.

## Introduction

Social exclusion has been an established term in UK social policy analysis for over a decade (Room, 1995). This paper is based on reflections about the value of the concept of 'social exclusion' in social policy analysis. Like many people, I have researched various social problems and policy areas over the years. For example, in recent years I have analysed different aspects of: poverty and deprivation, digital exclusion, transport exclusion, financial exclusion, neighbourhood regeneration environmental justice and 'liveability' issues. Considering this range of issues, it occurred to me that, if nothing else, the term social exclusion was convenient for bringing the appearance of some coherence to what otherwise might seem a diverse and unrelated set of issues. Each of these issues and problems has been represented as different forms of social exclusion. However, if that is the case, what is it that they all have in common?

One obvious shared feature is that many of the same groups suffer the consequences of deprivation in these different areas. A trawl of UK government policy documents dealing with different aspects of social exclusion sees references the same social groups recur: lone parents, older people, disabled people (in short those outside the labour market), certain minority ethnic groups, and larger families, in particular. These different forms of exclusion are therefore connected in the experience and conditions of marginalised groups, and associated with the basic material deprivation which usually underpins this. Therefore, social exclusion is, among other things, a potential summary term useful for encompassing a range of more specific deprivations.

Unlike many previous governments, New Labour explicitly set out to tackle social exclusion. In the early days of the New Labour government, Peter Mandelson declared that 'Our vision is to end social exclusion.' (1997: 8). The UK government created the Social Exclusion Unit in the Cabinet Office in December 1997 to co-ordinate policy in this area. Tony Blair once described the Social Exclusion Unit as 'the defining difference between new Labour and the Conservatives' (Houghton, 2007)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>. It is perhaps symbolically unfortunate therefore that the SEU was wound up in June 2006 and replaced by a Social Exclusion Taskforce.

Several commentators have noted limitations to existing uses of the concepts of social exclusion and inclusion, and expressed justified criticisms of these (Ferguson 2004). It has been pointed out that what would count as a condition of social inclusion is not always specified, merely posited as the opposite of exclusion. It has also been argued that inclusion has been narrowly defined and equated with *economic* inclusion, to be accomplished through labour market participation, not least by a government eager to justify a conditional 'work-first' approach to welfare reform which promotes 'active' benefits for those not in employment (Levitas, 1996; Smith, 2000).

I do not dispute the criticisms that the concept has been used in a restrictive sense. Nor do I intend to analyse definitions nor measures of social exclusion. This paper is concerned with what might be learned from policy analyses and evaluations of how to reduce social exclusion among marginalised and deprived groups in the UK. These lessons are inferred from the findings and recommendations which recur across analyses of the various forms of social exclusion which I have researched in recent years. I do not claim that these lessons are original - on the contrary, they have been recognised and articulated by several others; indeed, several have been expressed in government policy statements. My aim is simply to make explicit those recurring findings which apply across what is often thought of as distinct areas of social exclusion.

Seven such lessons recur across the various policy analyses and evaluations of social exclusion:

- It is necessary to think beyond organisational boundaries
- Measure what actually matters
- Be clear about the purpose and limits of evaluation
- Devolve decision-making to the local level, and involve service users
- Recognise that personalities and local conditions matter
- Accept that improvements can take a long time
- Be aware that it is easier to help the least deprived or resolve single issues than help the most needy or tackle compounded problems

These lessons are not presented here in any particular order. Nor is this list regarded as definitive nor exhaustive: there are no doubt other lessons for effective implementation. However, these appear to be the most frequently identified and evident lessons. There are interesting and complex interactions between them, some of which are discussed below; e.g.

the imperative of joined-up policy (#1) relates to the baleful effects of performance targets (#2), how to measure 'success' (#3), and the need to involve users and local people in effective inclusion strategies (#4).

### ***The Possibility Of Policy Transfer***

There are some obvious objections to this endeavour. Firstly, it could be argued that the continued existence of deprivation and social exclusion implies that what we should learn is the futility of existing policies and approaches. If these lessons *are* so frequently repeated, why are they merely being articulated rather than acted upon? For example, it might appear that years of regeneration policy in Britain failed to make much impact on urban deprivation and disadvantage (Gripaios, 2002). In part mitigation of this, longitudinal analysis of deprived housing estates shows that it is possible to effect some improvements, although narrowing the gap to less deprived areas takes many years of sustained capital and revenue funding and policy commitment (Tunstall and Coulter, 2006). The evident persistence of long-standing social problems certainly demonstrates the limitations of particular approaches, some of which are perhaps inherent (Alcock, 2005). However, such limitations do not imply that improvements are impossible, even within the narrow scope set by the boundaries of conventional policy. There is such a thing as progress in social welfare, and therefore the possibility of learning from this.

A second objection is that there are limits to the transferability of effective practice from one setting to another. There is an extensive literature on the technicalities of policy transfer (e.g. Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000). This is not directly contradicted but is qualified by an interesting literature examining the feasibility of extracting policy recommendations from evidence at all (Baumberg, 2008) and the transferability of these across different areas of policy (Spicker, 2008). These discussions raise major questions about the viability of social policy reform, although I do not intend to examine this literature here. Whatever philosophical qualifications may be required, this paper is based on the principle that some policy initiatives and projects have objectives which they intend to attain; that some ways of pursuing these objectives have been demonstrably more effective than others, and therefore that lessons can be learned from the relatively more and less successful examples. If this is not the case, there seems little point in studying social policy.

## **Lesson #1: Get The Act Together**

The first lesson from the literature on social exclusion is that it is necessary to think beyond organisational or agency boundaries to deal effectively with most problems of exclusion. For example, tackling transport exclusion requires more than providing additional vehicles or even reducing travel costs. It requires considering the nature of the built environment and accessible public spaces (e.g. the location of housing in relation to services, provision of pedestrian routes, etc); service quality, design and provision (e.g. co-ordination between transport modes and routes, vehicle accessibility, training of transport staff, etc.); and the public safety concerns for some passengers (e.g. adequacy of street lighting, CCTV provision, police or community warden presence, etc.), among other factors (Hine and Mitchell, 2001).

Similar lessons are evident from efforts to reduce digital exclusion. It has been shown that public internet access points (PIAPs) are not used by the most excluded groups, but by those who were already online (Hall Aitken, 2004). The 'institutional and perceptual barriers' that prevent some from using public information and communications technology (ICT) facilities do not disappear merely because free internet access has been provided in a library or community centre (Selwyn et al, 2003). Additional obstacles make such ostensibly public provision effectively inaccessible to many. For example, one audit of PIAPs in deprived areas in Scotland found that only 3% were open at weekends; only 47% provided specialist ICT kit for disabled users; 68% had no childcare provision, and 23% had no formal technical support available (Digital Inclusion Champions, 2004).

The acceptance of this lesson is testified to by the importance attached by government to 'joined-up' policy making and partnership working (Davies, 2009). The Social Exclusion Unit (2004: 21) has argued that the most effective way to reach disadvantaged groups is through multi-agency working and 'buy in' from key agencies. Numerous examples of attempts to enact this principle exist in contemporary social policy, such as the New Deal for Communities partnerships in England, the Communities First programme in Wales, and City Strategy pathfinders throughout Britain.

Despite this, fragmented policy and governance arrangements remain obstacles to effective partnership working (Taylor, 2008). Some of the difficulties involved in developing effective

inter-agency partnerships to deliver policy are considered later, but one inhibiting factor worth mentioning here is another aspect of reform which also emerged from the New Public Management approach to redesigning public services. The audit and performance management systems which were introduced to monitor service delivery and enforce quality standard have led to well documented dysfunctions and unintended consequences. Criticisms from service providers about 'endless performance targets and indicators' which absorb time better devoted to serving clients are familiar (Bartley, 2006: 23). But some policy control and monitoring systems have also inhibited partnership working. Centrally set performance systems encourage service providers to respond to targets rather than deliver the services which users require. Trying to develop effective working relationships across organisational boundaries may detract from short term performance and certainly limits autonomy, which is a risk those accountable for meeting targets often prefer to avoid. This issue of the distortions caused by mis-measurement relates to the second lesson.

## **Lesson #2: Measure What Matters**

The second lesson from the social exclusion literature is that not everything that matters can be measured - at least not easily, if we wish to do it justice. It is reasonable that policy-makers want to account for public spending and see if policy interventions produce worthwhile results. However, this has often lead to a focus on so-called 'hard' or quantifiable indicators, which are readily measured, rather than less tangible features or 'softer' outcomes. Progress towards inclusion could involve improvements in intangible factors, such as more positive feelings about one's-self or neighbourhood, or a service received. These qualitative outcomes may be necessary first steps in achieving longer-term changes. While surveys may detect some of these effects, others are more subtle. For example, a member of staff at a care centre for excluded young people noted that,

If someone arrives refusing to talk or look anyone in the eye, a positive outcome for that person would be if they can develop a close relationship with a worker and talk about their feelings and smile and laugh. That's a positive outcome for that young person (quoted in Aitkenhead, 2009)

Some such signs of progress cannot be easily rendered in simple performance measures, and many policy makers and public sector professions are uneasy about seemingly nebulous

factors which one described as 'that horrible touchy-feely thing that you don't want to go near' (Davies, 2009: 86).

Failure to acknowledge the value of such outcomes can lead to another perverse effect: performance may become assessed by that which can be measured rather than that which actually matters; i.e. the experience of excluded groups. A more serious problem is that that activity can become distorted to satisfy unreasonable and invalid indicators. This leads to games playing, as agencies oblige the demands of their funders. As the director of a different youth service in London remarked:

When I've got to write a report for these white people who give us money, what am I supposed to tell them? The people who support us want to know that this has led to this, and that has led to the other. Fuck that. But that suits them - "oh really, here's a cheque". I can't describe the nuances that happen [here], can I? [it's] not so much a programme as a process. It's relational (quoted in Aitkenhead, 2009)

Social policy analysis have an important role contributing to the development of more sensitive indicators of these non-quantifiable results. However, we must also educate policy makers and some providers that 'soft' measures are genuine and meaningful, rather than provide them with pseudo-exact counts of meaningless measures.

### **Lesson #3: Be Realistic About Evaluation**

The third lesson follows closely from this: evaluation is not always a good thing, at least not as much of it is currently practiced. It is evident from the policy literature that many evaluations are technically compromised to the point of being of questionable value (Leicester, 1999). There are some well known reasons for this. The first is that policy makers feel under pressure to demonstrate changes in indicators as proof of impact. This demand often leads to indicators being selected opportunistically rather than following any consideration of their validity - the statutory performance indicators required of Scottish local authorities are a case in point<sup>2</sup>. A related factor is that indicators of performance are often based on dubious

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<sup>2</sup>. <http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/performance/>

assumptions about the connections between inputs, outputs and eventual outcomes (Taylor, 2008).

A more immediate problem is that political timetables do not match policy cycles<sup>3</sup>. Many policies have been 'evaluated' shortly after implementation and before they are likely to have any demonstrable effect (Griggs, 2008). This disjuncture between the ability to measure policy impact and political demands leads to some 'evaluations' being undertaken when they have nothing worth saying. I have been involved in several evaluations - both as research commissioner in government and a research contractor - which were of little value; i.e. in some cases there was no clear baseline from which to compare performance, no counterfactual, and appropriate data on outcomes would not be available in the necessary time frame.

Once again, the demand to demonstrate 'impact' focuses attention on what can be measured, rather than what actually matters, and policy can become dictated by what can be shown rather than what is important but difficult to see. This is significant for reasons other than intellectual integrity: in many cases the distribution of public funds is based on dubious measures of performance and inadequate indicators. Before recent methodological improvements, various indices of deprivation were a questionable basis on which to allocate resources<sup>4</sup>. Similarly, assessing the performance and future funding of employment assistance projects on the basis of job outcomes leads service providers to concentrate on those who are closest to the labour market at the expense of more disadvantaged groups, a point discussed further below (Meadows, 2008).

#### **Lesson #4: Consider Who Policy Is For**

The fourth lesson from the literature on social exclusion is that devolved and local policy making are more effective than centralised control. This devolution takes two forms: firstly,

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<sup>3</sup>. Polly Toynbee noted this in her plenary address to the 2005 SPA conference (see *Policy World*, Summer 2005, p. 16).

<sup>4</sup>. The adequacy of the *Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation* to account for deprivation in rural areas remains a contentious issue: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/finance/inquiries/deprivation/40-sbc.htm>

from central government to local delivery agents; and secondly from professionals and service deliverers to communities and service users

A hard won lesson in social exclusion is that successful initiatives are based on a firm knowledge of the circumstances of the localities and service users where they are delivered. Inevitably, policy makers at the centre can know little about conditions on the ground. For example, employment training and regeneration strategies must take account of local labour markets and the conditions of regional economies to have any realistic prospect of providing useful assistance to service users (Cadell et al, 2008). Many of the most effective proposals for service improvements come not from central departments nor formal research, but from feedback from customers or front-line service providers (Bartley, 2006).

Local service providers should therefore be granted the responsibility to be flexible and adapt policy in the light of their experience to meet the particular needs of individual customers and local conditions. The decision-making powers devolved to front-line staff must be genuine and effective; token devolution 'can be demoralising rather than empowering' (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007: 10). In the case of employment assistance programmes, the 'evidence suggests that the greater the flexibility given to PAs [personal advisers], the better they are able to fulfil their role and to meet the specific needs of the individual customer' (Hasluck and Green. 2007: 8).

Local delivery autonomy is not sufficient in itself to make inroads to social exclusion: those who deliver services must also involve local people or service users in identifying what the barriers to inclusion are and how to respond to them. This involves more than 'meaningless or thin ways of engaging' with people or 'tokenistic surveys' (Grewal, 2007). Consulting with service users and gathering data must be taken seriously, sometimes despite resistance from policy makers in a hurry. Time pressures often compel agencies to launch initiatives based on little more than generic published data or a quick survey. Policy makers 'often view research as the opposite of action rather than the opposite of ignorance' (Court, 2004: 16), but action without knowledge is likely to miss the mark. As one critic of neighbourhood regeneration projects observed, planners 'spend most of their time talking to other planners. They get stuck in a particular way of thinking... The result is schemes which follow a standard set of conventions' (quoted in Calvert, 2007). As a result, policy makers and regeneration professionals have previously underestimated the importance of social issues to

residents in deprived neighbourhood and focus disproportionately on physical regeneration. Social policies are not technological fixes of simple mechanisms, but interventions into complex social interactions. Expertise does not reside exclusively (nor even mainly) in trained professionals, and diagnoses of what 'a problem' actually *is* cannot be accomplished without involving those who suffer its consequences.

Devolution of responsibility to local deliverers is likely to work well only where staff are properly trained and responsive to services users' needs (Griggs et al, 2008). This includes ensuring that they recognise that the manner in which services are delivered is as important as what is provided. Quality public services that show respect for users can encourage and empower enable deprived people to improve their conditions, but badly provided ones can exacerbate their exclusion. There is little evidence that the nature of the services provider (i.e. public, private or third sector) has much independent effect on its impact or benefit to users. However, 'What does appear to be important is the quality, enthusiasm, motivation and commitment of the staff providing the service' (Hasluck and Green, 2007: 22). A body of research shows that staff who listened to service users, were able to devote appropriate time to their needs, and who acted as friendly advocates for their clients were able to contribute to improving the well-being of disadvantaged citizens (Bartley, 2006). Unfortunately, this is not the standard which many groups and communities experiencing deprivation and exclusion can usually expect to receive.

Local officials therefore need to listen to and cede power to service users, who should not feel they are having 'solutions' imposed upon them (Kearns, 2006). Lines of accountability should point 'down' to local people and service users rather than 'up' to funders and central government. Sceptics might argue that this is unrealistic, and that unreasonable expectations for service user or local participation in policy making should be discouraged, in case it leads to disappointment. This criticism was levelled against the Community Development Programme, and the American area regeneration initiatives which influenced this (Alcock, 2005). However, this warning is based on the view that 'bottom-up' policy should not be attempted at all, and that service user involvement should be limited and centrally controlled by experts. This is not necessarily a reactionary position - there is the inherent danger in local initiatives and service user programmes that those who need and receive services become held responsible for resolving problems which are ultimately beyond their individual control. However, this confuses the site of a problem with its cause. In the end, the problems

experienced by deprived neighbourhoods and socially excluded individuals require responses that address the structural conditions which generate them, and these forces lie beyond the circumstances of disadvantaged groups in particular neighbourhoods (Lupton, 2003).

Democratising the problem defining and policy making processes raises questions of who decides what matters, what a policy should do, and what should counts as 'success'? A related question is whether policy-makers really want to hear the views of those at the sharp end, or whether they would rather change the people who experience deprivation. In a broad sense, we can distinguish between policy *for* people and policy aimed *at* people. This involves classifying policies by the extent to which they want to change individual or group behaviour, or alternatively to reform the circumstances and opportunities available to them. The distinction between changing people or circumstances is obviously not absolute - behaviour and circumstances interact, and policies can attempt to reform both, but it is possible to distinguish the relative emphasis of a policy, and identify the underlying ideas of causality which motivate it. These alternative approaches reflect beliefs about of the relative significance of agency and structure in causing social problems (Deacon, 2004). Examples of these contrasting emphases are the alternative forms of 'active labour market' policies. What have described as 'thick' employment activation approaches common in EU countries prioritise developing human capital, helping people to stay in employment and improving their pay and conditions over time. In contrast, 'thin' models of workfare, common in English-speaking countries, focus on labour force attachment and reducing the direct costs of out-of-work benefits by making claimants work as a condition of receiving welfare benefits (Levy, 2004).

## **Lesson #5: Value Leadership And Fellowship**

The fifth lesson is somewhat less well recognised in the literature - personalities and local conditions matter to policy success. Some projects are successful primarily because of the particular individuals who are working on them: their skills, dedication and experience literally make the policy a practical effective change (Scottish Parliament Audit Committee, 2007: para 27). The very best school teachers and Heads, and community workers and public sector staff often have an inimitable style, 'natural' ability, and charisma. There are numerous examples of dynamic activists and professionals, such as this example of a volunteer in Drumchapel in Glasgow, described by a local resident,

Terry was doing something very simple but it was producing amazing results, [but]. . . . This success story has taken 20 years of sustained work. It's not about ticking boxes. It's about guys like Terry McLernon toiling away for years. What he has done here is utterly remarkable. . . . Terry is one of the most motivated, passionate and energetic guys I've ever met. He's a natural teacher and motivator (quoted in Martin, 2009).

Some of these characteristics apply to the most effective leaders of local public agencies. Analyses of multi-agency partnerships find that they are most successful when those at the top of the main organisations make it clear that they are committed to joint working and mobilise their staff to implement this (North et al, 2007).

If it is the case that effective provision is inseparable from personality, then there are significant implications for whether effective local practice is genuinely transferable. It appears that only part of what makes some policies and projects successful can be learned and copied to other contexts, as the qualities of most charismatic moral entrepreneurs are difficult to teach. As one director of a much admired youth service put it,

We get people come along and visit us, and they say, 'Oh right, he does this and it will lead to that'. So that's what I tell them... I'm not being dishonest, because I do do those things. But there's a difference between the facts and the truth (quoted in Aitkenhead, 2009)

If the aim is to understand the conditions and causes of relative success and failure, then one of these lessons is that there are limitations to what can be transferred from the centre. However, it is also not enough simply to admire these inspirational examples; it is possible to consider whether there are ways to cultivate conditions which enable moral entrepreneurs to develop, flourish and come forward. This would not be the moral exhortation of 'active citizenship' briefly popular with some Conservative Party figures in the 1980s and '90s (Hurd, 1988), but changes to material conditions, such as removing barriers which currently inhibit voluntary and community work (e.g. restrictive benefit regulations). A more immediate lessons is that it might be better not to promote the most effective practitioners away from what they do best, but reward them for their excellence in their vocation (i.e. keep the best teachers in the classroom rather than require them to become administrators).

## **Lesson #6: Be Patient And Persistent**

The sixth lesson is perhaps somewhat disheartening: it can take a long time for efforts to reduce social exclusion to show significant signs of progress. As Jonathan France of Ecotec observed, 'The problems of poverty and dereliction often arise over a long period, and tackling them demands a similar sustained effort' (in Grewal, 2009). The UK government has allowed itself 20 years to 'eradicate' child poverty (i.e. reduce it to below 10% of all children). Similarly, closing the gap between the most and least deprived neighbourhoods has been estimated to take up to 20 years (Tunstall and Coulter, 2006).

Even quite successful (or promising) initiatives take time to get started and show results. This is the case for employability and active labour market measures, and even more so for educational reforms (McQuaid et al, 2009). However, the pressures of the political cycle mean that policy environment is marked by 'initiativitis' - intellectual vogues which are rarely given sufficient time to demonstrate a sustained impact (Grewal, 2009). This leads to the familiar problem of short-term funding for projects and especially for some of the third sector organisations which run some of them. This uncertainty inhibits the freedom of project managers and staff to plan for the long-term, develop relationships with service users and establish sustained impact.

The apparently slow progress and long-term nature of impact risks a backlash if efforts and resources devoted to reform do not appear to be effective. This happened in the 1970s and '80s in America, as a concerted effort was made by neo-Conservative critics to attack the expansion of social policies in the 1960s 'War on Poverty' (Magnet, 1998). This might be the fate of the partial social policy successes of the current Labour government (such as the reduction in poverty among older people, and - until recently - children):

The historic danger is that a bad ending will distort the record of the best Labour did. The past decade risks being re-written as a time when huge spending delivered nothing much; when social programmes failed - never to be tried again. As the Tories inherit ever better results, they will mad-mouth and cut the programmes that delivered these results.' (Toynbee, 2008)

A further educational role for Social Policy analysts might therefore be to contribute to more informed and realistic expectations of what is achievable from policies in particular time periods.

### **Lesson #7: Creaming And Parking Make Things Worse**

The final lesson is that experience shows that it is easier to help those least deprived or with a discrete problem than significantly improve the situation of the most severely and multiply deprived groups. This is apparent across social inclusion policy but most directly observable in relation to employment. Successive evaluations of various New Deals, Employment Zones and Action Teams for Jobs have found that they are least effective in helping those facing the greatest disadvantage and most severe barriers to employment (Hasluck and Green, 2007). Inevitably, the initial beneficiaries of such policies are those who are most work-ready; that is, those with recent employment experience, marketable skills and qualifications and fewer care commitments or other perceived employment disadvantages. The success rate of such schemes tails off as those furthest from the labour market require more personalised and intensive support to overcome the obstacles to employment they encounter. This pattern is likely to be repeated as the Flexible New Deal reforms are implemented in a contracting labour market. As caseloads increase and vacancies decline, the resources of service providers will be stretched and they will face increasing strain to match clients to jobs. Providers will therefore have a further incentive to focus their energies on those easiest to get into jobs while those most in need of the personalised support which is supposed to be provided will be sidelined (Hayman, 2008).

A more fundamental lesson from this recurring pattern is that active redistribution and direction of policy benefits towards the most disadvantaged are required. Generic, 'one-size-fits-all' policies are not sufficient to meet the needs of those with additional and specific problems. This applies also to economic development and regeneration policy. The assumption that the benefits of economic and employment growth in the wider economy trickle down to provide opportunities for those living in more deprived areas has been shown to be mistaken: if that were the case, there would be no poor neighbourhoods in London (North et al, 2007; Houghton, 2007). If anything could be described as 'passive' rather than 'active' welfare provision, it is this approach.

There is a growing recognition - in principle if not always in practice - that those with complex individual needs require tailored and integrated support from a range of public service providers to benefit from social inclusion programmes. This points to the need for a holistic rather than a one-dimensional approach to assistance. For example, employment assistance projects which provide tailored and client-focused support to address the range of barriers people face in the transition to employment are more effective than those which focus only on direct employment issues (Meadows, 2008). Clients need advice and assistance with the transport costs and possible clothing requirements that arise when taking some jobs, they need help ensuring that there is no interruption of income due to changing benefit entitlements; their childcare needs and any health issues they have must be dealt with, as well as any additional training they may require. The Working for Families initiative in Scotland has achieved some success by providing clients with help to deal with the inter-related factors that make it difficult for some of them to take up employment (McQuaid et al, 2009). This support has included personal development courses to boost confidence and self-esteem and extending support beyond employment to ensure it is sustained through disrupted changes in circumstances or crises (such as the breakdown of childcare arrangements).

The distinguishing characteristics of the most successful such interventions include: small case loads for providers so that personalised services are sustainable, long-term support for clients (and corresponding project funding), and an emphasis on encouraging and supporting clients rather than regulating and coercing them (Perkins, 2008). Proactive outreach to potential service users is also required so that services are genuinely accessible. The move towards this more flexible and individually tailored approach to providing social services corresponds to the 'Choice agenda' favoured by the New Labour government (Clarke et al, 2008). However, so far, this emphasis on choice and consumer power has been promoted more in some services than others (e.g. health, education). Services directed at (rather than for) deprived and excluded groups have not been marked by the same emphasis on consumer choice and customisation. It is no coincidence that the social division of welfare quality persists, with services reserved for the poor conspicuously worse (Titmuss, 1958; Deacon and Bradshaw, 1983).

## Discussion And Conclusions

It is evident from the policy literature on social inclusion that effective interventions to reduce social exclusion need to be intensive, personalised, flexible and responsive and funded over the long term. They must *not* be standardised, centrally controlled, predetermined and rule-driven, nor insensitive to local circumstances and the demands of service users. It was acknowledged at the outset that most of these lessons are known by analysts and policy makers (Social Exclusion Unit, 2004). It is neither ignorance nor indolence which prevents action being taken to implement them: the frequency of social policy reform dispels the latter possibility. There are several reasons why these lessons have not all been implemented in full.

For example, there are considerable difficulties in implementing partnership working and joined-up government (Davies, 2009). Overcoming institutional inertia takes time and commitment, and co-ordinating the activities of several different organisations (let alone implementing effective service user and community engagement processes) can slow down the delivery of services, which conflicts with the imperative to demonstrate impact. Getting already complex organisations to work together effectively is not a mechanical process, but involves the time-consuming task of building trust and relationships. This lesson accounts for the increasing interest in Complexity Theory in the analysis of organisational interactions (e.g. Byrne, 1998; Sanderson, 2006). This process is not helped when there are genuine restrictions on pooling budgets and conflicts over accountabilities between partnership members. For example, elected councillors and their council officials are often reluctant to cede decision-making authority within Local Strategic Partnerships and Community Planning Partnerships while they remain publicly responsible if things go wrong (Sinclair and Lindsay, 2008).

A successful response to 'wicked' and complex problems must act on several issues at the same time to achieve what may appear to be only one positive outcome. For example, the previous Scottish Executive's social inclusion strategy (Closing the Opportunity Gap) included the target to improve the educational attainments and qualifications of the lowest achieving 20% of pupils in the fourth year of secondary education<sup>5</sup>. Achieving this single outcome

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<sup>5</sup>. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Social-Inclusion/poverty/17415-1>

requires interventions to effect improvements across a wide range of areas, and focusing on discrete aspects of this issue (e.g. reducing class sizes) will not cover the range of changes required to get the desired result. Similarly, the lack of any apparent positive change in such a target may not be due to the 'failure' of the corresponding policy, but reflect difficulties in wider circumstances or deficiencies in a much broader range of policy areas.

There is a risk that if the lessons of effective policy design and implementation are not only recorded but learned, internalised and but acted upon, then the public will become disenchanted with policies to reduce social exclusion and dismiss this task as unachievable. Social Policy is right to highlight failures and inefficiencies in policy; but it is also important to insist that success *is* possible, and identify measures which increase its likelihood.

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