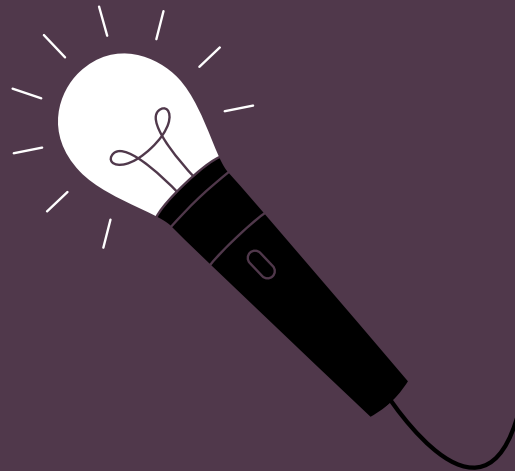


Issues and ideas

# For an incoming government

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A collection of ideas from the  
Policy Idol 2015 finalists  
May 2015



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# Preface

*Issues and ideas for an incoming government* is the culmination of the Policy Idol competition designed and run by the Policy Institute at King's College London.

This innovative policy pitching competition was run for the first time in 2015, with the financial support of the Economic and Social Research Council, and asked current students and staff at King's for their ideas to change the world.

To select the best ideas, heats were run across King's campuses, with standout pitches selected for the final. Before the final, everyone was offered bespoke training in policy analysis and communications, and a chance to improve their pitch. On the night, they had 3 minutes to convince an elite panel of leading figures from politics, academia and industry, as well as a live audience. Judges assessed each pitch on both style (advocacy) and substance (analysis).

Every essay in this publication was written by the finalists based on their pitches and express their views alone. Although congratulations go to all 60 entrants, the efforts of those who made the final should be particularly praised. Chief amongst these is Vageesh Jain, who was crowned Policy Idol 2015 for his pitch entitled 'From Smallpox to Ebola: the rise and fall of the World Health Organization'; Bakht Baryar who was awarded the runner-up prize for his advocacy in 'An anchor in Africa: the value of the state of Somaliland'; Ifesinachi Okafor-Yarwood who received a runner-up prize for the evidence and analysis that underpinned her pitch on 'How can we stop the 'cutting and stitching' of the girl child'; and lastly, to Rich Morris and Rupert Evetts, who were chosen as the audience favourite on the night, for their joint pitch, 'The population time bomb: two ways to defuse the bomb'.

The Policy Institute at King's, *Issues and ideas for an incoming government*, London, King's College London, May 2015.

Throughout the heats stage of the Policy Idol 2015 competition there were a number of individuals who gave up their time to help us select the finalists you see published in this report. My thanks go to:

-  Professor Becky Francis, Professor of Education and Social Justice, King's College London
-  Daniel Glaser, Director, Science Gallery, King's College London
-  John Hilary, Executive Director, War on Want
-  Susan Hitch, Manager of Lord Sainsbury of Turville's pro bono programme
-  Professor Jeremy Jennings, Head of the Department of Political Economy and Professor of Political Theory, King's College London
-  John Rentoul, Chief Political Commentator, The Independent on Sunday
-  Lynne Saylor, Associate Director of Communications and Corporate Affairs, RAND Europe
-  Hetan Shah, Executive Director, Royal Statistical Society
-  Sally Taylor, Executive Director, Culture Capital Exchange
-  Sir Kevin Tebbit, former Director of GCHQ and Permanent Under Secretary of State at the Ministry of Defence
-  Chris Tyler, Director, Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology

In addition, I would also like to extend my thanks to Mark Easton, who hosted the final, to Ross Pow for his advice and for leading the training sessions and to Emma Fox and Dr Benedict Wilkinson for organising the competition. I am also grateful to Dr Sarah Rawlings and Dr Benedict Wilkinson for editing this publication.

Finally, I would also like to extend my warmest thanks to David Willetts, Baroness Jay, Professor Denise Lievesley and Dr Jennifer Rubin, who formed the final judging panel.

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# Contents

Introduction	1	7  Demanding a better education: what we can do to improve education for 16 year olds Nikul Depala	38
1  From Smallpox to Ebola: the rise and fall of the World Health Organization Vageesh Jain	4	8  Unlocking Persia's potential: towards a working relationship with Iran Rohan Khanna and Raza Nazar	44
2  An anchor in Africa: the value of the state of Somaliland Bakht Baryar	10	9  Combating disengagement: getting young people to vote Erin Montague and Anne Lieke Vonk	50
3  How can we stop the 'cutting and stitching' of the girl child? Ifesinachi Okafor-Yarwood	16		
4  Population time bomb: two ways to defuse the bomb Rupert Evetts and Rich Morris	22		
5  Why we should teach black history Precious Alabi	28		
6  The Universal Basic Income: revitalising the welfare state Roy Blokvoort	32		

# Introduction

It was a great pleasure to be asked to host Policy Idol 2015. The competition was not only enjoyable and fun, but more importantly, also full of interesting and compelling policy ideas. Better still, these were devised and expressed with great passion by students.



Of course, it was not simply about fun. There was a serious purpose beneath this: how to communicate academic research and evidence to policymakers. This can be a daunting prospect, even for experienced civil servants, but it was a challenge that all the finalists met with real skill and passion, and they should all be proud of their efforts.

*Issues and ideas for an incoming government* is the product of a competition that rewarded both style and substance, analysis and advocacy. It contains a wealth of material and its great appeal is the real diversity offered throughout, ranging from Somalia to the welfare state, from Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) to combating voter disengagement.

Although each chapter is self-contained, several themes unite this publication: the first is the emphasis on providing an evidence base for policymaking. Morris and Evetts, for example, look at the changing demographics in the UK and

argue that the rapidly ageing population will break the pension system. Based on this, they present two novel policies for ‘defusing’ what they refer to as the ‘population time bomb’. Jain explores the intricacies and problems of the World Health Organization’s financial decision-making structures before delineating a fundamentally different vision of WHO. Blokvoort explores the difficulties of the UK’s existing welfare state and argues that there are economies of scale in providing a Universal Basic Income.

Another theme is the global nature of the pitches: Nazar and Khanna discuss the UK’s relationship with Iran and argue that a microfinancing initiative can kickstart a thawing of the diplomatic impasse. Baryar focuses on the stability of Somaliland in an otherwise unstable region and suggests that the UK needs to recognise it as a separate state which can be held up as a model for improving the wider fortunes of Somalia. Montague and Vonk propose financial incentives as a way of reducing voting apathy amongst the young, leading to greater integration and a more politically engaged population.

The final theme that runs through *Issues and ideas for an incoming government* is education. Okafor-Yarwood describes an educational programme for combating the social, cultural and personal damage of FGM practices in the UK. Alabi passionately advocates for teaching more black history in British schools as a way of improving social integration and combating racism. Depala argues that the GCSE is defunct and no longer fit-for-purpose, instead advocating for the adoption of the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme as a way of reversing declining educational trends.

Education is crucial, of course. And that’s why competitions like Policy Idol – that embed advocacy and communications skills, emphasise the importance of evidence in the policy process and demonstrate the often untapped potential of academic research to have a wider impact – are so important. Long may it continue.

Mark Easton  
BBC News Home Editor



# 1 | From Smallpox to Ebola: the rise and fall of the World Health Organization

*Winner: Policy Idol 2015*

## Vageesh Jain

Vageesh is a medical student, currently intercalating a Master of Public Health at King's College London. He recently worked with members of the King's Sierra Leone Partnership on an article about Ebola. As he explored the reasons behind the uninhibited destruction of fragile health systems in west Africa, an idea took shape. His motivation for taking part in this competition is founded solely on the belief that the current state of the World Health Organization (WHO) is costing lives. His hope is that this platform will serve to highlight the necessity for change.

# 1 | From Smallpox to Ebola: the rise and fall of the World Health Organization

The vital work carried out by the World Health Organization (WHO) has resulted in significant global health improvement.<sup>1</sup> However, WHO is not without its problems and it is critical that it recognises these if it is to live up to its potential.

The recent Ebola outbreak in west Africa has decimated much of the belief that WHO can effectively lead the global emergency response.<sup>2</sup> The outbreak has exemplified the deep-rooted inadequacies of the organisation and the key question facing us is how can WHO re-establish itself as the world's custodian of health?

Many international aid agencies were calling for help and support in the initial stages of the Ebola outbreak in March 2014, but there was over a four month time lag between detecting Ebola and WHO declaring it as a global emergency.<sup>3</sup> And by that time the total number of cases was approaching 2,000.<sup>4</sup> After heavy criticism for their slow response, WHO admitted that their response was inadequate for the scale of the crisis.<sup>5</sup> WHO Director General, Margaret Chan, said she was not aware of the scale of the Ebola crisis until June 2014.<sup>6</sup>

1 World Health Organization, *World Health Statistics 2010*, 2010.

2 Robbins, A. and Phyllis, F., 'Is WHO ineffectual because its members are ministries not states?' *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 2015.

3 Sun, L., Dennis, B., Bernstein, L. and Achenbach, J., 'How Ebola spread out of control' *The Washington Post*, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2014/10/04/how-ebola-sped-out-of-control/> (accessed 17 April 2015).

4 Centre for Disease Control and Prevention. *Ebola Virus Disease – Previous Case Counts*, 2015. <http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/outbreaks/2014-west-africa/previous-case-counts.html> (accessed 17 April 2015).

5 Gale, J. and Lauerma, J. 'Ebola Spread Over Months as WHO Misses Chance to Respond', *Bloomberg*, 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-10-16/who-response-to-ebola-outbreak-foundered-on-bureaucracy> (accessed 17 April 2015).

6 *Ibid*

However, the problem is not simply one of a lack of communication. For example, an internal UN review discovered that those in key positions in African offices were appointed through political motivation, rather than on merit.<sup>7</sup> Regional offices do not report directly to WHO Geneva Headquarters and have considerable autonomy.<sup>8</sup> This has created a system of several organisations of varying quality, rather than a single unified agency of high quality.

Whilst corruption and ineffective communication are important reasons for the poor Ebola crisis response, funding has also been at the centre of these debates. It is unsurprising that WHO lack the emergency funds needed to combat global disease when they spend almost a third of their budget on administration costs alone.<sup>9</sup>

Money is available to tackle health problems, but WHO lack authority over where it can be spent. There are two components to the core funding of WHO: assessed and voluntary contributions. Assessed contributions come from governments and provide a source of flexible funding. WHO can spend this money at their discretion, in emergencies or in any programme experts deem worthy. The remaining proportion of core funding is made up of voluntary contributions. In most cases donors restrict this money to a particular activity within the organisation.<sup>10</sup>

Over time, the proportion of funding coming from assessed contributions has decreased from 44 per cent in 1996 to just 21.5 per cent in 2013.<sup>11</sup> Such a monetary profile limits the financial flexibility of the organisation, consequently resulting in a limited response to global emergencies. A lack of government investment has constrained WHO's capacity as a world leader in global health.

WHO must follow other international organisations such

7 Boseley, S., 'World Health Organization admits botching response to Ebola outbreak', *The Guardian*, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/17/world-health-organisation-botched-ebola-outbreak> (accessed 17 April 2015).

8 *Ibid*

9 Clift, C., *What's The World Health Organization For?* London, Chatham House, 2014.

10 *Ibid*

11 *Ibid*



as the World Bank in evaluating its own structure and processes. Restructuring the organisation will involve taking out unnecessary tiers of management. Funds recouped in this way can be reinjected into healthcare programmes or saved for emergency funding. Job cuts at a regional level will help to minimise corruption and streamline the existing workforce into a smaller unit of healthcare experts. A recent survey found that only 18 per cent of WHO Headquarters staff agreed that there was sufficient coordination between the six worldwide Regional Offices.<sup>12</sup> Regional Offices and Headquarters must be more successfully integrated, with a robust system of accountability in place. Much of the work of WHO is carried out through the African Regional Office and it is here where reform must start.

Current structural emphasis on vertical communication is the root of lengthy response times to global pandemics. Ebola has broken out seven times in the Congo since 1976. Some argue that earlier involvement of the Congolese could have provided valuable expertise on how to contain the outbreak in west Africa.<sup>13</sup> The current structure is top-heavy, with all communication channeled through Regional Offices and a lack of lateral communication between nations. Such structural weaknesses limit the ability of this large, bureaucratic organisation to respond quickly to disease outbreaks, where a matter of days or weeks can be crucial.

There have been key failures of the existing WHO and there is little doubt that government support is a long-term requirement for the success of the organisation. But first, WHO must critically evaluate its own processes and structure, and seek ways in which to independently and drastically improve its response to health emergencies.

<sup>12</sup> PricewaterhouseCoopers, *WHO Evaluation Reform Staff Survey Analysis*, October 2013, [http://www.who.int/about/who\\_reform/whoreform-stage2evaluation-appen2-pwc-2013.pdf](http://www.who.int/about/who_reform/whoreform-stage2evaluation-appen2-pwc-2013.pdf) (accessed 17 April 2015).

<sup>13</sup> Heymann, D., 'The Ebola outbreak this year that you won't have heard about', *The Guardian*, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/15/ebola-outbreak-central-africa-contained> (accessed 17 April 2015).



Vageesh Jain receives the Policy Idol 2015 prize from Professor Denise Lievesley, Dean of the Faculty of Social Science & Public Policy, King's College London





## 2 | An anchor in Africa: the value of the state of Somaliland

*Runner-up (advocacy): Policy Idol 2015*

### Bakht Baryar

Bakht is a final year BSc Political Economy student at King's College London with research interests in state building, governance in failed states and counter-insurgency. He has been involved with many United Nations (UN) simulation conferences including London International Model United Nations (LIMUN) and was the Warwick Junior Commissioner on 'energy and sustainability' at the University of Warwick. Recently, he spent the summer working in post-conflict development consulting in Somalia on a range of projects. Bakht enjoys working with data and empirical research is one of his strengths.

## 2 | An anchor in Africa: the value of the state of Somaliland

Somalia is one of those perplexing puzzles that international development and global diplomacy have been unable to solve. Annual peacekeeping costs amount to roughly \$1 billion and a range of international donors contribute.<sup>1</sup> UN peacekeeping in the 1990s, supported by US forces and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) forces since 2007, have been largely unable to control the al-Shabab insurgency, tribal feuds and armed militias.

Security, then, is still elusive. Al-Shabab may have lost control of the ports but it is still a potent force with vast influence in rural Somalia. It is extending its reach into Kenya and there is a real threat of it declaring allegiance to Islamic State that would compound security problems. From a foreign aid perspective, the story is no different with billions of dollars in assistance flowing in over the decades. The UK has contributed about \$550 million since 2011 in development aid.<sup>2</sup> The effectiveness and impact of this aid exercise is still to be seen, but the question remains: how do we bring stability to the Horn of Africa and how do we solve the Somalia puzzle?

The solution to the puzzle was in plain sight but the international community failed to realise this for more than two decades. Somalia is one country on the map but there exists another small, virtually independent state in the north with its own military, institutions and government. This is Somaliland. Although it is internationally unrecognised, it has 24 years of democratic tradition and 90 years of distinct cultural history. It is a true oasis of peace in a desert of instability.

Why is Somaliland different from Somalia? In terms of identity, budget, foreign assistance and constitution, Somaliland manages itself as a real and functioning state. Its population has a national identity, the government collects and manages a budget, minimal amounts of foreign assistance are required and a workable constitution binds the tribal society together. By comparison, the Somali government relies on African Union (AU) forces to prop it up and extends little influence outside Mogadishu; indeed, it is far from clear how the political landscape will look once AU forces withdraw. Somaliland has managed to build a small but relatively well-trained military force despite an embargo on doing so and this military has successfully managed to keep al-Shabab out and piracy under control.

Somaliland, then, is a real African success story.

But it is at a critical juncture. The UK with its historic cultural ties to Somaliland, once a British protectorate, needs to respond. But in order to do, it needs a nudge. It not only needs to work towards recognition of an independent Somaliland but also to work proactively to develop its capital, Hargeisa, into a strategic and commercial ally. Britain can benefit from the immense investment opportunities that Somaliland has to offer in fishing, livestock and oil. UK businesses and the financial sector can back and invest in the port infrastructure at Berbera to turn Somaliland into a major trade hub for landlocked east African economies. At the same time, Somaliland has the potential to become one of NATO's major maritime allies by helping to secure the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Aqaba and the Bab al-Mandab straits leading up to the Suez Canal. With Yemen, on the other side of the straits, teetering on the brink of collapse, the UK must work for the stability of Somaliland to ensure the security of vital maritime zones and shipping lanes, which account for 7.5 per cent of global maritime trade and 3.8 million barrels per day in oil related supplies.<sup>3</sup>

Countries such as Russia, India and China are increasingly

<sup>1</sup> Global Humanitarian Assistance, 'Somalia Country Profile', <http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/countryprofile/Somalia> (accessed 16 April 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Department for International Development, 'Operational Plan 2011-2015', *DFID Somalia*, June 2012, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/67414/somalia-2011.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67414/somalia-2011.pdf) (accessed 16 April 2015).

<sup>3</sup> EIA - US Energy Information Administration, 'World Oil Transit Chokepoints', 10 November 2014, [http://www.eia.gov/countries/analysisbriefs/World\\_Oil\\_Transit\\_Chokepoints/wotc.pdf](http://www.eia.gov/countries/analysisbriefs/World_Oil_Transit_Chokepoints/wotc.pdf) (accessed 16 March 2015).

signing trade, strategic and defence partnerships with African countries. The world realises the geo-strategic importance of the African continent and that the future of global economic growth rests in Africa. The UK must reinvent, reorganise and reinvigorate its foreign policy and future strategic outlook in order to compete and stay relevant in a fast changing global political landscape. Threats such as Islamic State, al-Shabab and instability in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt are making the MENA region a complicated quagmire of political, economic and diplomatic problems.

There is, however, an opportunity for the UK to help establish a legitimate state that can serve as an anchor of stability in the Horn of Africa. Somaliland can become an example of stability and peace in Africa. In the long term, all countries including the UK, can save on the huge amounts of development and security costs that go into the region. If, as the government claims in its National Security Strategy<sup>4</sup>, we are to stop the exploitation of instability in countries such as Yemen and Somalia, Britain should lead the way to state-building without bloodshed, setting new precedents for global diplomacy and foreign policy.

<sup>4</sup> HM Government, *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy*, London, The Stationery Office, October 2010, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/61936/national-security-strategy.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61936/national-security-strategy.pdf) (accessed 16 April 2015).



Bakht Baryar awarded runner-up prize (advocacy) by Baroness Jay of Paddington





Ifesinachi Okafor-Yarwood delivers her pitch on Female Genital Mutilation

### 3 | How can we stop the 'cutting and stitching' of the girl child?

*Runner-up (analysis): Policy Idol 2015*

#### **Ifesinachi Okafor-Yarwood**

Ifesinachi (Ife) is a PhD candidate at the African Leadership Centre, within the International Development Institute at King's College London. Her most recent degree is a MA in Conflict, Security and Development from King's. Ife also has a BA in International Relations and Peace and Conflict Studies from London Metropolitan University.

Ife was motivated to apply for the Policy Idol competition following personal experience with NHS professionals during her pregnancy and childbirth last year. As a result, she made a resolve to contribute her 'quota' in bringing about the change she'd like to see in her society.

### 3 | How can we stop the ‘cutting and stitching’ of the girl child?

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is prevalent in parts of the Middle East, Asia and Africa, but worryingly, it is increasingly becoming a problem here in the UK.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), FGM is practiced by different cultures for different reasons, including but not limited to protecting the chastity of female children.<sup>1</sup> FGM is mostly classified as type 1 – partial or total removal of the clitoris, type 2 – partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora and type 3 – narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal.<sup>2,3</sup>

Although it has been illegal for more than 30 years, in the period September 2014 to January 2015, more than 2,600 patients were treated in the NHS for whom it was newly identified that they had undergone FGM.<sup>4</sup> In addition, studies have established that there are some 65,000 girls under the age of 13 at risk of being cut in the UK, and that 137,000 women and girls with FGM, born in countries where FGM is practiced, were permanently resident in England and Wales in 2011.<sup>5</sup>

1 World Health Organization, ‘Female genital mutilation’, 2014, [http://www.who.int/topics/female\\_genital\\_mutilation/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/female_genital_mutilation/en/) (accessed 22 April 2015).

2 NHS Choices, ‘Female genital mutilation’, 2013, <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/female-genital-mutilation/Pages/Introduction.aspx> (accessed 22 April 2015).

3 World Health Organization, *Eliminating Female genital mutilation: An interagency statement*, Geneva, World Health Organization, 2008, [http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2008/9789241596442\\_eng.pdf?ua=1](http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2008/9789241596442_eng.pdf?ua=1) (accessed 22 April 2015).

4 Department of Health, *Commissioning services to support women and girls with female genital mutilation*, London, Department of Health, March 2015, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/418549/2903842\\_DH\\_FGM\\_Commissioning\\_Accessible.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/418549/2903842_DH_FGM_Commissioning_Accessible.pdf) (accessed 22 April 2015).

5 Macfarlane, A. and Dorkenoo, E., *Female genital mutilation in England and Wales: Updated statistical estimates of the numbers of affected women living in England and Wales and girls at risk; interim report on provisional estimates*, London, City University London, 2014.

Over the years, the UK has made efforts to counter the problem. Under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003, the government closed a loophole and made it illegal for young women to be taken abroad for circumcision, although numerous stories suggest that this has not been as successful as had been hoped.<sup>6</sup> More recently, various government and non-governmental agencies have intensified their calls for an end to FGM across the globe.<sup>7</sup> The NHS has been involved too, by helping to identify the victims of FGM as well as those at-risk individuals, and have trained healthcare professionals accordingly.<sup>8</sup>

Yet more than 30 years after the practice of FGM became illegal in the UK, there have been no convictions of its perpetrators. There is an urgent need to confront the basic beliefs behind this practice, as well as change the law to make the justice system work as it should. As a first step, we need to change the terminology, to simplify the term, to say it exactly as it is: ‘cutting and stitching’. ‘FGM’ does not capture the severity of the problem. By terming the practice FGM there is a real danger that ‘stitching’, arguably the most horrific aspect of this practice, is being ignored. And are we sure that all forms of FGM are reported appropriately?

The issue should also be part of the national curriculum. By including it, the UK will be a step closer to ensuring the safety of its children and its children’s children by educating them to recognise, challenge and confront the myths of FGM. Since ‘cutting and stitching’ might take place as early as at birth, it is important to introduce the topic early in the curriculum – perhaps even as early as Year 7 – and for cultural justifications and myths behind the practice to form a key part of the educational process.

There is a real need to work with ‘potential perpetrators’ too. To find a way to reach them and to educate them. It may seem

6 Home Office, *The Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003*, February 2004, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-female-genital-mutilation-act-2003> (accessed 22 April 2015).

7 Home Office and the Rt Hon Norman Baker, *Female genital mutilation declaration*, February 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-genital-mutilation-declaration> (accessed 22 April 2015).

8 NHS Choices, ‘Female Genital Mutilation’



a bit far-fetched, but if the government is able to convince the ‘perpetrators’ to work with them, the war against ‘cutting and stitching’ is half won.

What is stopping the current system from working, as it should? Why have there been no convictions in the last 30 years? There is no clear answer, but one possibility is that the government is taking cultural sensitivity so seriously that they are failing to protect vulnerable girls when needed. To mitigate this, a lesson could be learnt from France, where more than 100 people have been convicted.<sup>9</sup> There is an urgent need to provide adequate training to everyone involved in tackling this problem – namely, the police, social services and NHS personnel – to remove any ambiguity or unfounded assumptions.

Despite government commitments, current measures have so far failed to discourage people from putting their daughters through ‘cutting or stitching’ and have not encouraged ‘victims’ to come forward. Imagine a NHS where mothers can, as part of their antenatal visits, speak to their midwives about their intentions to put their daughters through this procedure and get the expert advice they need. We cannot have the future we want until we safeguard the future of our children and our children’s children, especially because ‘cutting and stitching’ leaves most of its victims stigmatised for life.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, J., ‘Convictions for female genital mutilation. France: 100. UK: Nil.’ The Independent, 21 July 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/convictions-for-female-genital-mutilation-france-100-uk-nil-8722934.html> (accessed 29 April 2015).



Ifesinachi Okafor-Yarwood awarded runner-up prize by David Willetts, former Minister of State for Universities and Science, and Visiting Professor at the Policy Institute at King's



Baroness Jay of Paddington  
judges the competition

## 4 | Population time bomb: two ways to defuse the bomb

*Audience prize: Policy Idol 2015*

### Rupert Evetts

Rupert is a graduate student at King's College London. He has a diverse portfolio of interests, with a particular focus on security. Rupert has a wife and two children, and wants to take a more active role in influencing the future they will inherit.

### Rich Morris

Rich is currently attending a post-graduate course at King's College London and is studying a broad range of topics from international relations and strategy to history and politics. Rich lives in Devon with his wife Catherine and they are expecting their first child in May.

## 4 | Population time bomb: two ways to defuse the bomb

**We are all living longer. A child born today has a 1 in 3 chance of seeing it through to their 100th birthday - but this is not necessarily a good thing when the working population provides care and financial support for the elderly.**

Advances in healthcare and lifestyle changes have resulted in people living longer, but this growth in the ageing population has not been matched by a growing youth and fertility rates have remained relatively stable. The rising imbalance in the demographic profile of the UK is forecast to get much worse in the coming decades. The government projects that the number of over 65s in the UK will rise from 10 million today to 15.5 million in 2035 and then 19 million by 2050. Within this total, the number of very old people grows even faster. The number of over 80s is set to double by 2030 and nearly triple by 2050.<sup>1</sup> This has implications for health and social care, as well as pensions.

The UK population faces a future without care or support, unless action is taken now. If you are one of the 3.8 million over 65s who lives alone today, you will be lucky if you receive a 15 minute whirlwind visit each day from a carer. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) predicts that spending on health and long term care could reach 12.7 per cent of GDP by 2050.<sup>2</sup> The main consumers of healthcare are older people. For pensions, 1 in

6 people are at risk of entering 'pensioner poverty' when they retire.<sup>3</sup>

How does the UK defuse the population time bomb? The government has raised the age of retirement, but this will not solve the problem. There are other mechanisms for shaping the demographic profile - such as imposing age limits on the immigrant population - but this will only have a relatively minor impact. Initiatives for increasing fertility are also an option, but only store up issues for later.

However, there are two, until now neglected, national assets that can resolve this problem - £150 billion for a Sovereign Wealth Fund to provide healthcare and pensions for the elderly and the 20 million people in the UK who can provide 'care for care'.

It is tempting to see the number of over 65s as the problem. However, under the 'care for care' proposal, those in the early days of retirement become part of the solution. By contributing time to help others whilst in their 60s and 70s, people can earn time credits to receive reciprocal care when they themselves are in need. This locally managed scheme is designed to encourage the more mobile members of the retired population to contribute to society on the basis that they themselves will soon benefit from the generosity of others. Furthermore, it does not need be limited to those who are retired - anyone could contribute.

To meet the costs of pensions and healthcare for the elderly, a UK Sovereign Wealth Fund is needed to generate additional income. Every borough or council has a Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) and these assets could be aggregated together into a single £150 billion Sovereign Wealth Fund. Managed by a third party and underwritten by the government, this pot of money will be used to invest in key national infrastructure projects that will generate economic growth - such as regional airports, better roads, improved

1 Cracknell, R., 'Key Issues for the New Parliament 2010: The ageing population', *Value for Money in Public Services*, House of Commons Library Research, <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/key-issues-for-the-new-parliament/value-for-money-in-public-services/the-ageing-population/> (accessed 23 March 2015).

2 Appleby, J., 'Spending on health and social care over the next 50 years', London, The King's Fund, 2013, <http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/time-to-think-differently/publications/spending-health-and-social-care-over-next-50-years> (accessed 10 March 2015).

3 Help to Save finds that 11 million people are at risk of entering 'pensioner poverty' when they retire - Policy Exchange, 'Help to save: Defusing the pension time-bomb', 22 January 2014, <http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/publications/category/item/help-to-save-defusing-the-pensions-time-bomb> (accessed 10 March 2015).



rail networks and new energy solutions. Improved national infrastructure increases productivity and in many cases the returns will far exceed that of LGPS, which have on average performed no better than the index for the relevant investment category.<sup>4</sup> Infrastructure returns can achieve high value for money.<sup>5</sup> For example, Crossrail returns could be as much as a 3.1 benefit-cost ratio (BCR).<sup>6</sup>

The UK is sleepwalking into the greatest welfare disaster this country has ever seen. However, as a nation we are capable of extraordinary things. By adopting 'care for care' and the Sovereign Wealth Fund we can defuse the population time bomb and look forward to retirement once more.

4 Selman, L., and Wright, J., 'LGPS structure Analysis', Hymans Robertson LLP for Department for Communities and Local Government, December 2013, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/307926/Hymans\\_Robertson\\_report.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307926/Hymans_Robertson_report.pdf) (accessed 25 March 2015).

5 Above 2.5 benefit-cost ratio.

6 Department for Transport, 'Crossrail', *National Audit Office*, London, The Stationery Office, 23 January 2014, <http://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Crossrail.pdf> (accessed 25 March 2015).



Audience member voting  
for their favourite pitch



Precious Alabi

## 5 | Why we should teach black history

### Precious Alabi

19 year-old Precious is from Essex and is the youngest of three. She is always active in her community and has volunteered in an elderly care home, children's nursery and at a local pharmacy. She attends a local church where she is a member of the creative team and has also helped to organise youth events. A first year student at Kings College London, she is studying pharmacy and is motivated by how science is constantly evolving to improve lives and believes this should be replicated in all aspects of society. She is also a Student Representative.



## 5 | Why we should teach black history

**We live in a system where we constantly praise ourselves for being multicultural, but in reality we have only just scratched the surface of equality.**

If, as the evidence suggests, 'historical narratives are key to shaping how communities understand themselves'<sup>1</sup>, why are children being taught an 'airbrushed' version of history? A version of history where it seems the achievements of Black and Ethnic Minority groups are being ripped out of the history books.

Black History Month began in the UK in 1987 and is a reason why several people in majority groups will claim racial inequality is over. 28 years ago this was an amazing achievement in the war against racism. 28 years later, we need to move forward. It is almost as though Black History Month is being used as a night light to protect us from the sinister reality. A reality that needs to be faced head on. Discrimination still exists.

Underlying our modern society lie tensions that have not been fully uprooted. After the shooting of Mark Duggan in 2011 we saw these tensions at their peak.<sup>2</sup> They acted as motives for the London riots and the anger held by young people of all races across England. The response to the riots, which some have criticised, served to highlight issues within our communities. With less stereotyping by those in places of power through education, we can combat these issues and face the racial tensions head on. Treating the sickness and not just the symptoms.

1 Freedman, S., Weinstein, H., Murphy, K. and Longman, T., 'Teaching History after Identity-Based Conflicts: The Rwanda Experience', *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 52, No. 4, July 2008.

2 Jackson, P., 'London riots: Tensions behind unrest revealed', *BBC News*, 7 August 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14436529> (accessed 15 April 2015).

In the pursuit of equality, history needs to be properly integrated in a way that is thorough, concise and truthful. There is a need to integrate facts about people of black descent into our national curriculum up until Year 9 (pre-GCSE). In a way that enables everyone to believe in themselves regardless of their background. In a way that educates people about the achievements of those who went before them regardless of the shade of their skin. In a way that enables us to see that black history is a part of the history of the UK. If history is told in a truly inclusive manner then it would be clear that racial factors should be trivial in determining who can have an impact.

From the 12th century to the Second World War and beyond, many people of African and Caribbean descent positively contributed to life in the UK. Forgotten people. People such as Mary Prince who was the first black author to be published in England in 1831<sup>3</sup>, people such as David Louis Cleveland who gave his life to fight in the First World War<sup>4</sup> and people like Charles R Drew who developed the blood banks that saved thousands of lives in the Second World War.<sup>5</sup> These people deserve to be remembered - from the Blackamoors to more recent Black Britons. Otherwise, the message we're sending to young people is that they can try to succeed in life and change the world but the colour of their skin restricts recognition.

The benefits are endless. There will be reductions in racism and discrimination that will stem from reducing ignorance by educating everyone in black history. There will be more opportunities and better access for everyone - to succeed in the workplace, in education and to better understand one another. There will be a truly cohesive community - where understanding and accepting one another in a more committed and less superficial manner is at the core. A world with equal rights and an equal playing field for all.

3 Hochschild, A., 'The Unsung Heroes of Abolition', *BBC*, 17 February 2011, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/abolition/abolitionists\\_gallery\\_04.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/abolition/abolitionists_gallery_04.shtml) (accessed 15 April 2015).

4 Magazine, 'The officer who refused to lie about being black', *BBC News*, 17 April 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-31796542> (accessed 15 April 2015).

5 'Charles Drew', *Bio*, 2015, <http://www.biography.com/people/charles-drew-9279094> (accessed 15 April 2015).



Roy Blokvoort delivers his pitch on the Universal Basic Income

## 6 | The Universal Basic Income: revitalising the welfare state

### Roy Blokvoort

Roy is a MA Political Economy student at King's College London. Born and raised in the Netherlands, Roy has a BSc in Political Science from Radboud University, Nijmegen. The reason he entered the Policy Idol competition is straightforward - he thought that a Universal Basic Income could solve some major flaws in the current welfare system and, since he's not afraid to stick his neck out for something he believes in, he was eager to find out if a panel of public policy experts agreed with him.

## 6 | The Universal Basic Income: revitalising the welfare state

The 20th century is known for many of its life changing inventions. The steam train and the automobile opened up the world by offering fast and cheap transportation devices to everyone. Radio and television offered us information, entertainment and images from all over the world.

However, when we think of the great inventions of the 20th century, we tend to forget the invention that, arguably, impacted people's lives the most. The welfare state.

As it was originally conceived, the welfare state was more than just a set of institutions. It was a tool for all British citizens to make the most out of their lives. It played a huge role in bringing down crime rates.<sup>1</sup> Some would say that it made the American dream a British reality. But above all, the welfare state was the promise of a safety net for all British citizens.

However, the welfare state has not lived up to its promise. More than 30 per cent of people who have a right to welfare do not receive it.<sup>2</sup> This lack in take-up is astonishing and is mostly caused by a lack of knowledge of the welfare system. Also, many people that work hard every single day, do not receive the fruit of their labour. Due to the income cap on many welfare programmes, making an extra penny sometimes results in a loss instead of a gain in income. The same happens to many unemployed, who lose income after accepting a job. This does not reconcile with the original ideals of the welfare state. So, have the ideals of the welfare state become outdated?

1 Savolainen, J., 'Inequality, Welfare State and Homicide: Further Support for the Institutional Anomie Theory', *Criminology*, Vol. 38, No. 4, October 2000, pp. 1021-1042

2 Department of Work and Pensions, 'Income-Related Benefits: Estimates of Take-Up in 2009-2010: National Statistics First Release', February 2012, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/222914/tkup\\_first\\_release\\_0910.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/222914/tkup_first_release_0910.pdf) (accessed 12 April 2015).

Has it become an outmoded invention of the past?

Even the best institutions need an update every now and then, and so does the welfare state. Its ideals are not the problem, its programming is. We need to change the welfare state to version 2015 and this version contains a major update: the Universal Basic Income.

The Universal Basic Income would ensure that everyone over the age of 18 receives a basic income of £72 a week, the same amount as the current maximum Job Seeker's Allowance. On top of the Universal Basic Income, additional support will be provided to parents and pensioners – with pensioners receiving £76 a week<sup>3</sup> and parents receiving £50 pounds a week per child.<sup>4</sup> The Universal Basic Income replaces the Tax Credit system and all welfare programmes, except for Housing Benefit and Disability Living Allowance. When introduced, the Universal Basic Income fixes the three major flaws of the current welfare system.

First, it makes sure that every penny you earn will result in a higher income, as you do not lose the Universal Basic Income after reaching an income that is 'too high'. This is a welfare system that rewards hard work, instead of partly punishing it. Nonetheless, some people might fear that it will lead to people rejecting jobs they do not like. However, experiments with basic income, such as the MINCOME experiment in Dauphin, Canada, have shown that most people work and invest in their future because they want to, not because they are forced to.<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, the Universal Basic Income guarantees that everyone who needs welfare gets welfare. Under the current means-testing system, many people do not get the welfare they need simply because they are not aware of their rights. The Universal Basic Income is there for everyone, regardless of his

3 This ensures that pensioners will receive the same amount as the current basic pension: £148.

4 This is to compensate parents for the loss of Child Benefit and other child-related programmes, such as free school meals.

5 Forget, E., *The Town With No Poverty: A History of the North American Guaranteed Annual Income Social Experiments*, Canada, University of Manitoba, May 2008, <http://public.econ.duke.edu/~erw/197/forget-cea%20%282%29.pdf> (accessed 12 April 2015).



or her knowledge of the system.

The third problem it fixes affects all of us - unnecessary government bureaucracy. At the moment, the means-testing system requires Revenues & Customs to do double the work they actually need to. They need to check for welfare fraud in all systems and then, at the end of each year, calculate the amount of tax we all need to pay. The Universal Basic Income reduces this work as Revenues & Customs need only calculate the amount of tax. The exact amount of spending cuts that is realised with this proposal is unclear, as many government agencies do not publish their overhead costs. Only National Insurance publishes their administrative costs, which amount to approximately £1.3 billion per year.<sup>6</sup>

In order to make this administrative cut, the government needs to increase its revenue by £95.4 billion. This figure is based on the UK's age structure<sup>7</sup> and the state's current spending on welfare programmes (£169.8 billion<sup>8</sup>) that would be cut after implementation of the Universal Basic Income. However, when executed correctly, the Universal Basic Income does not cause an increase, but a decrease in the tax burden on British citizens, as the money raised for the welfare system will immediately be invested back into society.

The Universal Basic Income guarantees that for everyone, every earned penny results in a higher income, guarantees that those who need welfare get welfare and fights unnecessary government bureaucracy. The time has come to bring the welfare state back to its idealistic roots. It is time to upgrade social security to the 21st century. It is time to implement the Universal Basic Income.

6 Government Actuary's Department, *Report by the Government Actuary on the Draft Social Security Benefits Up-Rating Order 2013 and the Draft Social Security (Contributions) (Re-Rating) 2013*, London, The Stationery Office, January 2013, [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130904203407/http://www.gad.gov.uk/Documents/Social%20Security/GAD\\_Report\\_2013.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130904203407/http://www.gad.gov.uk/Documents/Social%20Security/GAD_Report_2013.pdf) (accessed 12 April 2015).

7 Total population: 63.5 million. Of which, 14 million age 0-18, and 11 million age 65+. Retrieved from: Office for National Statistics, 'Census 2011', <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Population+Estimates+by+Age+and+Sex> (accessed 12 April 2015).

8 Department for Work and Pensions, 'Outturn and Forecast 2014', March 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/benefit-expenditure-and-caseload-tables-2014> (accessed 12 April 2015).



Compère Mark Easton  
interviews Roy Blokvoort on stage



## 7 | Demanding a better education: what we can do to improve education for 16 year olds

### Nikul Depala

Nikul has lived in North London his entire life. He is currently in the second year of his undergraduate degree at King's College London, where he studies a BA in International Politics. He applied to Policy Idol because he thought it would be a good way to engage more practically with the idea of policy and why it matters. Equally, he thought it would be an alternative method to articulate and express an issue that he has a profound interest in.



## 7 | Demanding a better education: what we can do to improve education for 16 year olds

When Tony Blair made his famous speech in 1996, proclaiming ‘education, education, education’ as his priority for office, it was widely regarded that this would herald in a new era of excellence in schools up and down the country. It was with a sense of déjà vu (and for some, nostalgia) that many looked upon the former Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove’s radical new proposals to make qualifications more ‘demanding and rigorous’.

However, these proposals and those before them only mask the fact that the way we approach teaching, and indeed learning, is fundamentally misguided - albeit with the best of intentions. Staples of secondary education have been churned out as if the classroom were a factory floor and passively accepted without subsequent thought and reflection. The need for students to challenge the status quo, explore bigger ideas and stretch themselves intellectually were not - and are not - fulfilled with GCSEs.

The education system needs urgent attention. It is all very well to add more content, remove coursework and give schools more autonomy, which is what has happened recently. But students are being starved of the cultural context within which a language is spoken, starved of knowing if and why a particular period of history is relevant in a contemporary context. If we want to have a successful education and qualification system, we need to move away from plain facts and figures and engage students to think independently and, above all, critically. These are the best indicators for success at university and in the workplace.

In a recent poll<sup>1</sup>, 47 per cent of teachers said they had considered leaving teaching. Why? Partly because of constant changes to the curriculum. The National Association of Headteachers said it fears an extended period of volatility, with students unsure which exams and subjects to take.<sup>2</sup> It is now perhaps more than ever evident that constant changes in education policy from government to government have undermined long-term confidence and stability in the education system.

You can shout at the mechanic, kick the engine and service it over and over again. But if a car is broken, you have to replace it. In much the same way, successive attempts to reform the GCSE illustrate the deep-rooted challenges it now faces. We are at a critical juncture and a revolution in teaching and learning is needed. Sir Antony Seldon, outgoing headmaster of Wellington College, has with good reason been one of the most vocal advocates of the revolution we need - namely implementing the Middle Years Programme from the International Baccalaureate.

The Middle Years Programme gives teachers full freedom to devise and implement what students are taught, so that education is suited to the needs of each individual child. It requires students to make practical connections between what they learn in the classroom and what exists in the real world. It treats the classroom as a laboratory of the mind - where attributes, skills and characters are brought out and reflected in the assessment of students, which does not require passive memory but active thinking.

There is no room for excessive government intervention with the Middle Years Programme; teachers make the curriculum and the International Baccalaureate is an organisation independent and free from the control of Whitehall. It is no wonder then that its global uptake is has increased 8,000 per

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1 ComRes, *NASUWT Teachers' Satisfaction and Wellbeing in the Workplace Survey*, December 2013, <http://www.comres.co.uk/polls/nasuwt-teachers-satisfaction-and-wellbeing-in-the-workplace-survey/> (accessed 25 March 2015).

2 Hargreaves, G., 'Exam changes risk problems for schools, say heads', *BBC News*, 5 March 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-31732450> (accessed 22 April 2015).

cent in the space of 20 years.<sup>3</sup> If we want the best engineers, lawyers, business leaders and writers, developing a culture of inquisitiveness is crucial earlier on in life when the minds of young people are most ripe to awaken their natural curiosity.

The Middle Years Programme includes structured inquiry into established bodies of knowledge, which acts as the platform for harnessing curiosity from which students deconstruct, challenge and rebuild conventional wisdom. These abilities need to be instilled from an earlier age for them to be more ingrained in our knowledge economy. Curiosity arises when young people try to make sense of the world around them and, when an expectation about the way the world works is challenged, curiosity is born.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> International Baccalaureate, *The MYP Statistical Bulletin: June 2014 Examination Session*, The Netherlands, International Baccalaureate, 2014, <http://www.ibo.org/contentassets/4482e305ad0f43aea46f6b1eff78e3e5/2014-june-myp-stat-bulletin.pdf> (accessed 22 April 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Loewenstein, G., 'The psychology of curiosity. A review and interpretation', *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 116, No. 1, 1994, pp. 75-98.



David Willetts, former Minister for Universities and Science and Visiting Professor at the Policy Institute at King's, judges the competition



## 8 | Unlocking Persia's potential: towards a working relationship with Iran

### Rohan Khanna

Rohan is a first year undergraduate studying Liberal Arts with a major in politics at King's College London. He was born and has always lived in London. He spent his formative years with refugees from the Middle East, including many from Iran itself, given his parents' role as foster carers. This sparked a passionate interest in the politics of this troubled region and he entered Policy Idol believing that now is the right time to change our relationship with Iran, not only as part of a new policy strategy, but to help further the cause of global peace.

### Raza Nazar

Raza is a first year undergraduate law student at King's College London. He is fond of travelling and has lived in Pakistan and Singapore for most of his life. He took part in Policy Idol because he wanted to take part in an activity that mirrors what he sees himself doing in the future. He believes that a youth that is empowered is instrumental for lasting change. His maternal grandparents are from Iran and he has fond memories of visiting Tehran as a child. He believes that through changing our relationship and approach with the country, the region could become a very different place.

Chair of the judging panel and Director of the Policy Institute at King's, Professor Jonathan Grant (right) speaking to Rohan Khanna (left) and Raza Nazar (centre) prior to the competition



## 8 | Unlocking Persia's potential: towards a working relationship with Iran

It has been heard all over the news - day in and day out. It's time to 'strike a deal', we can't let them get 'the bomb'.

Though the framework for a deal with Iran has been agreed to, is it really likely that it will be maintained? With Islamic State rampaging through Iraq and Syria and a pragmatic leader Hassan Rouhani sitting in office, now is not only the ideal time to build trust, but also the necessary time to build that trust.

Why is Iran important? Iran has plenty of influence; it directly affects the leadership in Baghdad, Damascus and Beirut and is a key player in the recent crisis that is unfolding in Yemen. It has also got the third largest oil reserves<sup>1</sup> and second largest gas reserves in the world.<sup>2</sup> The nation is clearly a key regional player and thanks to its nuclear programme, is quickly becoming a global one too.

It appears that UK Prime Minister David Cameron's meeting with Rouhani in September 2014 - the first meeting between the Iranian and British leadership since the Revolution - envisaged a new dynamic in the UK's relationship with Iran. How can this be developed? For a lasting agreement, it is vital to build trust at the highest levels (world leaders) and also the lowest levels (individual people on the street). It is time to take a step back and be a little imaginative.

What should we do? Firstly, Rouhani should be called to the UK for the opening of the Iranian embassy. This would be a historic landmark, providing an opportunity to extend the efforts of September 2014 and the chance to build a working

relationship through extending direct diplomacy. The recent rapprochement between Cuba and the US, symbolised by US President Barack Obama's meeting with Raul Castro shows just how effective such diplomacy can truly be. We can and must take similar initiative.

But what is a relationship without mutual exchange of support? Under the Joint Action Plan signed in Geneva in 2013, the UK is obligated to provide a financial channel to engage in humanitarian trade in Iran.<sup>3</sup> This creates the perfect conditions for a microfinance social venture. The UK can make use of the Geneva plan and microfinance through banks in Iran as a form of sanctions relief.

Why microfinance? It empowers people. The UK can loan funds, offer long repayment periods and no interest rates in accordance with Islamic Finance, to rural communities and small businesses. The UK has already done this in south Asia and with great success.<sup>4</sup> With 80 per cent of Iranian businesses having less than three workers, this policy could have a huge impact. A lack of trust is the key issue preventing any reconciliation between the two sides today. Microfinance might just provide a chance to build the trust that has been lacking over the past few decades, presenting a gesture to the conservatives - the very people who attacked the British Embassy back in 2011.

Is this practical? Though there may be obstacles in achieving a working relationship, these can be overcome. This idea poses no threat to Israel or any of the UK's other partners in the region. It is important to stress that this isn't an alliance with Iran. It is simply a way of providing relief to poorer rural communities in Iran and symbolically inviting the Iranian leader to the UK for further talks. No more at this stage and no less.

The nuclear issue still remains a thorn in the side of any

1 EIA - US Energy Information Administration, 'Countries', <http://www.eia.gov/countries/index.cfm?v=reserves> (accessed 25 March 2015).

2 Central Intelligence Agency, 'The World Factbook', <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2253rank.html> (accessed 25 March 2015).

3 European Union External Action, 'Joint Plan of Action', Geneva, Europa, November 2013, [http://eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131124\\_03\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131124_03_en.pdf) (accessed 25 March 2015).

4 Department for International Development, *Helping women open up for business in Pakistan*, DFID Pakistan, July 2012, <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/helping-women-open-up-for-business-in-pakistan> (accessed 25 March 2015).

détente. But these ideas seek to reduce hostility. This could mean that the need for nuclear deterrence on Iran's part will reduce, making a comprehensive long term agreement that will survive the next Iranian and US leadership even more likely. The window of opportunity is fast closing - the conditions for kick-starting a new working relationship with Iran won't last forever. It is vital that we act now.



Audience members discussing their favourite pitch of the evening





Erin Montague (left) and  
Anne Lieke Vonk (right)

## 9 | Combating disengagement: getting young people to vote

### Erin Montague

Erin is currently a candidate of the MSc Public Services Policy & Management programme at King's College London. Erin completed a Project Management certificate at the University of Toronto, as well as a BA in International Development and Political Science at Dalhousie University. She has worked in a variety of administrative and operational roles in Canada before focusing on policy work within the public and third sector. In her spare time, Erin volunteers with non-profits to improve youth learning and engagement.

### Anne Lieke Vonk

Anne is a 22-year-old Dutch student currently reading for a MSc Public Services Policy & Management at King's College London. Coming from an international background, having lived in 5 different countries and speaking 4 different languages, she has a passion for public affairs in the world around her. International development through public policy and management has, in her view, the objective of providing people with the environment for opportunity to improve their lives and those of their children. She applied for the Policy Idol competition to gain experience in the policy advocacy process and to change people's thinking about societal problems.

## 9 | Combating disengagement: getting young people to vote

Many young people today feel disconnected from their society because they feel underrepresented. This is a creeping dilemma that has problematic consequences. In their search for a connection which recognises their specific interests and needs, young people become isolated from mainstream society.

Politically and socially isolated youth in communities can affect the UK as a whole. A study in the US indicated that an individual's propensity for anti-social behaviour, such as committing a crime, can be reduced by political participation because it promotes social integration and pro-social attitudes.<sup>1</sup> The UK, and others, have seen a rise in anti-social behaviour and anarchy amongst young people when their circumstances become intolerable. Consider the student-led London riots of 2010 over cuts to education and tuition fees. Rebellion as a result of isolation is common across the globe, as seen in the recent Quebec student tuition strikes in Canada. The youth of many countries are struggling to find their voice and position in this complex world.

This is particularly apparent in the level of youth political participation. Political disengagement is commonly associated with social exclusion.<sup>2,3</sup> Unfortunately, 18 to 24 year olds traditionally vote the least and the voter turnout has steadily declined over the past few decades in the UK.<sup>4,5</sup> According

1 Gerber, A., Huber, G., Biggers, D. and Hendry, D., *Can political participation prevent crime? Results from a field experiment about citizenship, participation and criminality*. New Haven, Yale University, July 2004.

2 *Ibid*

3 Johnson, C., *Social Exclusion and Political Engagement*, London, The Electoral Commission, 2005.

4 Russell, A., Fieldhouse, E., Purdam, K. and Kalra, V., *Voter Engagement and Young People*, London: The Electoral Commission, 2002.

5 Henn, F. and Foard, N., 'Young people, political participation and trust in Britain'.

to Ipsos Mori, 54 per cent of 18 to 24 year olds do not feel it is their civic duty to vote<sup>6</sup> and in the 2010 election, only 44 per cent of 18 to 24 year olds voted, compared to the overall average of 65.1 per cent of the general population.<sup>7</sup> This number may not seem critical, but this age group makes up more than a tenth of the total UK population<sup>8</sup> and their vote will make a difference in any election.

Independent studies on civic engagement in the UK, US and Australia have indicated young people are disengaging because they feel they lack the knowledge to participate politically, that their single ballot is not influential and because they generally do not trust politicians.<sup>9,10,11,12</sup> It is a catch-22 in terms of meeting the needs of young people, who show little interest in getting engaged in the political process. Rather than ignore these concerns, a turning point is needed.

Studies have shown that voting is more likely to be habitual after participating just once.<sup>13</sup> This positive habit should be encouraged and young people should be incentivised to vote. It is in the best interest of the government to set forward a policy with long-term benefits from an initial investment. The trick is finding a great enough incentive to counter the costs of first time voting (ie the time taken to register and research political platforms, transport costs and the cost of an hour of a young

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Paper presented at the EPOP Annual Conference, University of Exeter, September 2011.

6 Ipsos MORI, 'Trend: How Britain Voted in 2010', May 2010, <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/2613/How-Britain-Voted-in> (accessed 27 January 2015).

7 *Ibid*

8 Office for National Statistics, *Reference table: Population Estimates for England and Wales, Mid 2012*, June 2013, <http://ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/pop-estimate/population-estimates-for-england-and-wales/mid-2012/rft---mid-2012-population-estimates-for-england-and-wales.zip> (accessed 2 February 2015).

9 Edwards, K., Print, M. and Saha, L., *Youth Electoral Study: Report 1: Enrolment and Voting*. Sydney, Australian Electoral Commission, December 2004.

10 Flanagan, C., *Civic Measurement Models: Tapping Adolescents' Civic Engagement*. A. Syvertsen and M. Stout eds., 55th ed. Maryland, Circle & The Pennsylvania State University, 2007.

11 Russell, A., Fieldhouse, E., Purdam, K. and Kalra, V., *Voter Engagement and Young People*, London: The Electoral Commission, 2002.

12 Henn and Foard, 'Young people'

13 Gerber, A., Green, D. and Shachar, R., 'Voting may be habit-forming: Evidence from a randomized field experiment', *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 2003, pp. 540-550.

person's time).

An incentive tax break for 18 to 24 year olds will create this habit, and young people agree. In a 4 year study conducted at the University of Sydney, a tax break was the top recommendation by teenagers to incentivise young voters.<sup>14</sup> A tax break would counter the transaction and opportunity costs of voting for the first time. Simple, but efficient.

This policy is counter to the increasing trend of compulsory voting in other countries, where individuals are fined for not voting. Compulsory voting has been successful at creating voter engagement, but it comes at a cost. Studies have indicated that it does not improve engagement with voters in the long term<sup>15</sup> - possibly because it does not address the hostility non-voters have towards the political process, or resolve the information gap the general public experiences. Compulsory voting requires huge administrative costs and resources to penalise non-compliant voters. But the biggest concern is its restriction on a citizen's freedom of choice.<sup>16</sup>

Pilot incentive programmes have also been tested, for example in local elections in Los Angeles and by private industries. In contrast to compulsory voting, pilot incentive programmes have shown positive results in continuous voter turnout.<sup>17</sup> The UK has the chance to be the first to implement this policy properly. Incentivising voting puts the choice back in the hands of UK citizens, rather than putting the responsibility on government. It promotes engagement of the biggest non-voting group within our society. Incentivising changes habits, counters path dependency and covers the opportunity cost of first time voting. Most importantly, it is a solution for the long term.

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<sup>14</sup> Edwards, K., Print, M. and Saha, L., *Youth Electoral Study: Report 1: Enrolment and Voting*. Sydney, Australian Electoral Commission, December 2004.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>16</sup> Lever, A., 'Compulsory Voting: A Critical Perspective', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Schwarz, H. 'Can paying people to vote increase voter turnout? L.A.'s looking into it and the answer is yes', *Washington Post*, 19 August 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/govbeat/wp/2014/08/19/can-paying-people-to-vote-increase-voter-turnout-l-a-s-looking-into-it-and-the-answer-is-yes/> (accessed 2 February 2015).



BBC News Home Editor  
Mark Easton compères the event





Competition judges: Professor Denise Lievesley, Dean of the the Faculty of Social Science & Public Policy, King's College London (left) and Dr Jennifer Rubin of RAND Europe and, as of May 2015, Professor of Public Policy and Director of Policy Analysis, The Policy Institute at King's College London (right).

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