

Why don't we just introduce class based positive discrimination?

Written by Graham Whitham for The Big Issue North's 'Why don't we just' column

Our successes in life are down to our own merits. Or at least that's what we like to think. Talent always rises to the top, so we're told. If only that were true. It isn't.

We live in a country where the greatest determining factor of where you end up in life is your father's profession. Sons and daughters of lawyers and doctors become lawyers and doctors.

For some years now, the Labour Party has operated gender based positive discrimination in the selection of parliamentary candidates. 43% of Labour MPs are now women, compared to just 16% following the 1992 election. In total, 29% of all MPs are female, compared to 9% in 1992.

The increase in female MPs, and at a slower pace ethnic minority MPs, masks the ongoing dominance of parliament by the upper classes. A third of MPs went to fee-paying private schools (the national average is 7%) and a quarter went to Oxbridge. Parliament is dominated by people with backgrounds in finance, law and public affairs. Only 3% of MPs have a background in manual work.

This dominance of parliament by those from privileged backgrounds is replicated across the judiciary, the civil service, media and business. 71% of senior judges went to private school as did over half of all Whitehall permanent secretaries and the top 100 most influential people in the media. This dominance also spreads into the arts. Writers like Jimmy McGovern complain about a lack of young genuinely working class actors, not because they lack the aspiration to get into performing arts but because they can't afford the fees.

The impact on the psyche of the individual and our collective culture is intense. The economic impact of people from low income and modest backgrounds not achieving their potential is huge. The impact on our political debates is profound. A society run by people who have tended to find it easy to get on in life is less likely to understand the need to change things. So limited social mobility affects the individual - yes, but it is also bad for the country as a whole.

This dominance in our society is self-perpetuating, as better off parents hoard opportunities for their children, ensuring they get the best education and using contacts to get boost career opportunities. Addressing social mobility will require major shifts in education, the labour market and attitudes across society.

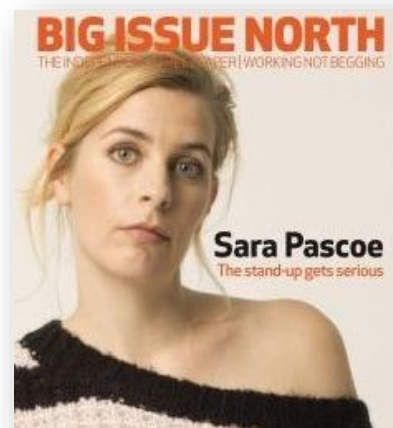


Graham Whitham

The impact of limited social mobility in the here and now is severe. If the Labour Party can positively discriminate in favour of women and the government can call on business to do more to ensure women are better represented at boardroom level, then why not positively discriminate in favour of people from non-privileged backgrounds. Political parties could do this when selecting candidates, redbrick universities through admissions processes, employers when shortlisting and the BBC when commissioning television programmes.

This isn't about the politics of envy. This is about fairness and opportunity. It is about what's best for our country. Radical action needs to be taken to ensure those with talent genuinely rise to the top.

Graham is a senior policy adviser for Oxfam who writes in a personal capacity for GM Poverty Action





What really signifies home to you? Fresh coffee in your favourite mug? Putting on your slippers at the end of the day? Putting fresh sheets on the bed?

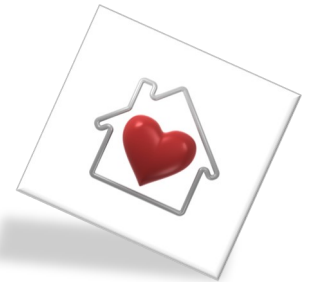
MASH wants to know and you could win £100 Arndale Gift Card!

MASH is a small Manchester charity that supports hundreds of women to keep safe and take control of their lives. We help women in sex work in lots of different ways: with addictions, family life, domestic violence or mental health but the support need that comes up over and over again is helping women find a home.

We think it's really important to start conversations about women who are homeless and ensure that their needs are being listened to. So, with the support of WTB Solicitors, we are running a photo competition to help raise awareness.

All you need to do is send us a photo of 'What home means to You'. To enter, send your photo, name, email address, the area you live in and a couple of sentences about your picture by [email](#) by midday on July 12, 2016.

[More information](#)



Mustard Tree

Combating homelessness and disadvantage

For over 20 years Mustard Tree has been a Greater Manchester based charity committed to providing life support for the homeless and marginalised.

Mustard Tree supports communities where 'poverty and disadvantage remain a key challenge' and where 'levels of unemployment and economic inactivity are amongst the highest nationally' ([Manchester Poverty Commission, 2013](#)). For those facing homelessness and the greatest disadvantage, we seek to open doors to a better future.

Our involvement begins with the provision of life support such as emergency food, clothing and furniture and quickly progresses to sustainable solutions which is offered through our work readiness and life skills programme, the Freedom Project. [Watch this inspiring, powerful and emotive film](#) featuring past and present Freedom Project participants sharing their story.

For more information about Mustard Tree please visit their [website](#)



GMPA on Social Media

Love it, hate it, use it, ignore it . . whatever you may think of it, social media is here to stay. GMPA has a [Facebook](#) page where we post items of interest and information about the great organisations and fantastic people within our community.

On [Twitter](#) we have just passed the milestone of 500 followers - that might not sound much but we only started in 2014 and we don't tweet about celebrities, sport, gossip or mainstream news so we are only growing slowly.

You can help us by 'liking' our Facebook page or following us on Twitter. #Thanks



Forthcoming Events:

How has Manchester welcomed refugees?

Thursday June 30th, 2016 from 6 - 8pm at the Portico Library & Gallery, 57 Mosley Street, Manchester M2 3HY

Do you have a burning question about the role we've played in supporting refugees? Are you interested in learning how to make Greater Manchester a more welcoming place? Expert speakers from refugee support organisations, the refugee community and academia will be joined by public figures to discuss how our city has provided a place of safety for people fleeing persecution over the decades.

[More information and to book](#)



End Hunger UK campaign planning session

Monday July 18th, 2016 from 3 - 5pm

at Bridge 5 Mill, 22a Beswick Street, Ancoats, Manchester M4 7HR

Come and plan your local End Hunger events as part of a national campaign on World Food Day.

Leading on from two previous End Hunger UK events in Manchester, and the building of a national campaign, individuals and groups will be meeting to share ideas and plans for their events on World Food Day in October.

All are welcome to come along to discuss your plans for holding events in your local area, as part of this national campaign, and to get inspired by each others ideas.

The meeting will be facilitated by Niall Cooper from Church Action on Poverty, the driving force behind this national campaign.

The event will start at 3pm but you can arrive to register and get a cup of tea from 2.30pm.

Event Fee £3 [More information and book](#)

What the Dickens Walk

Wednesday September 7th, 2016 from 6 - 8pm at Wood Street Mission, 26 Wood Street Manchester M3 3EF

The walk has been specially commissioned by Green Badge tour guide Suzanne Hindle, who has researched Wood Street Mission's archives held at the John Rylands library and will take in sights around central Manchester of historic and contemporary significance.

Cost £7 including a pie and pea supper and drink.

[More information and booking](#)



What the Dickens Walk

Why GM Poverty Action?

In the Recommendations Report of the GM Poverty Commission, 2.4 *Maintaining Momentum on Poverty* called for the formation of a Poverty Action Group to help take forward the work of the Commission.

A small number of public, private and civic sector individuals came together to form GMPA. This group has since grown to over 100 organisations plus many independent individuals.

GMPA is based upon principles of cooperation between organisations.

For more information about Greater Manchester Poverty Action

please visit our [website](#), follow us on [Twitter](#) or visit our [Facebook](#) page.

All these platforms are there to share news and opinion from our readers, from GM Poverty Action and from the community.

We want to celebrate our successes, find new ways of working together and provide a voice for the people living in poverty in our region. But we can only do this with your help and support.

For more information or to share your news please contact [Chris](#) or [Peter](#).

Copies of previous newsletters are available on our [website](#)

If you would like to contact us or submit an article for inclusion in a newsletter please get in touch in one of the following ways:

Post: c/o 5th Floor Church House,
90 Deansgate, Manchester M3 2GH

Or contact our Communications Manager:
Chris Bagley T: 07419 774537 [Email](#)
and we will reply as soon as possible.

NB GMPA does not have full-time dedicated administrative support so please do not expect an immediate response.

