CO-PRODUCTION

The modernisation of public services by staff and users

Zoe Gannon and Neal Lawson

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DIRECTION FOR THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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Executive Summary

- The public service reform agenda cannot succeed simply by the top down imposition of centralised targets or more market based choice. A new public service reform paradigm needs to be opened up based on the principle and practice of co-production.
- Co-production is simply the recognition that services can and are modernised and reformed every day through the interaction of staff and users.
- Co-production is about the recognition of mutual interests, co-operation and participation. It is based on the insight that workers know best how to deliver at the sharp end of service provision and the public cannot be passive recipients of services but have a decisive role to play in their co-creation.
- Crucially, co-production will help us manage the central paradox of public service reform, namely our competing desires for equality, or universalism, and the need for innovation through diversity. It can achieve this by creating spaces where tensions can be understood, shared and managed.
- Co-production taps into the latent dynamic energy and productive power of workers and users, combining the two to allow services to be modernised and reformed on an ongoing basis.
- Because it is about the empowerment of workers and users, co-production cannot be imposed from the top down; instead it requires a cultural shift that allows people to empower themselves. It is not an empty theory or a new buzz word but an intensely practical experience, which can only work through the process of production itself. It is going on all the time in public services. It just needs to be enshrined and scaled up.
- The benefits of co-production are both instrumental – more responsive and better services produced more efficiently – and intrinsic – ensuring services are valued because they are social, collective and participatory. Co-production adds to our sense of community and feeling of well-being. It provides a moral underpinning for public services.
- Like any reform model, issues will arise and need to be addressed. In particular the state locally and nationally will need to direct support to ensure that existing social and economic inequalities are not exacerbated by some participating in co-production processes more than others.
- Co-production has the potential to help transform users and citizens from passive receivers of consumption and production demands to active participators in the creation of public services. Workers can flourish as partners in designing and improving services, not just fulfilling the role of "robots" within a service specified and managed at a distance. Users will no longer be expected to accept what they are given within a limited choice range of rigid services. Working together they can refashion every aspect of a service collectively.

- Co-production cannot be legislated for. It can only happen through the process of shared production. The role of government is to create the necessary context through resources and support in which co-production can flourish.
- To allow that to happen there must be:
  - Greater autonomy in budgets and decision making
  - The spread of good practice
  - Knowledgeable and confident workers and users
  - Time and space to innovate, succeed and, yes, sometimes to fail.
- Co-production is an important approach in the process of re-energising public service workers and users, who are currently demoralised. Going beyond the market or machine models of reform, co-production provides a practical and values based approach to public service reform that is self-sustaining and enduring. On the basis of co-production, support for public service can be embedded regardless of who is in power.

Case Study 1

Peter Atkinson has worked as a psychiatric nurse in the community of Worthing in West Sussex for more years than he can remember. It is an important job. He has to assess mostly elderly people with health problems like depression or dementia, determine their needs and then work with the user and carers to make their lives as positive as possible. Sometimes his work involves obtaining medication for a user via the doctor, or placing a user in the care of social services at home, in a day centre or in a respite unit. Often his job involves ensuring that a user's carer gets a break and a chance to recharge their batteries. Talking to Peter makes me hope my Mum and Dad, if they ever need such help, end up with someone like him. You know they will get the best possible treatment and care.

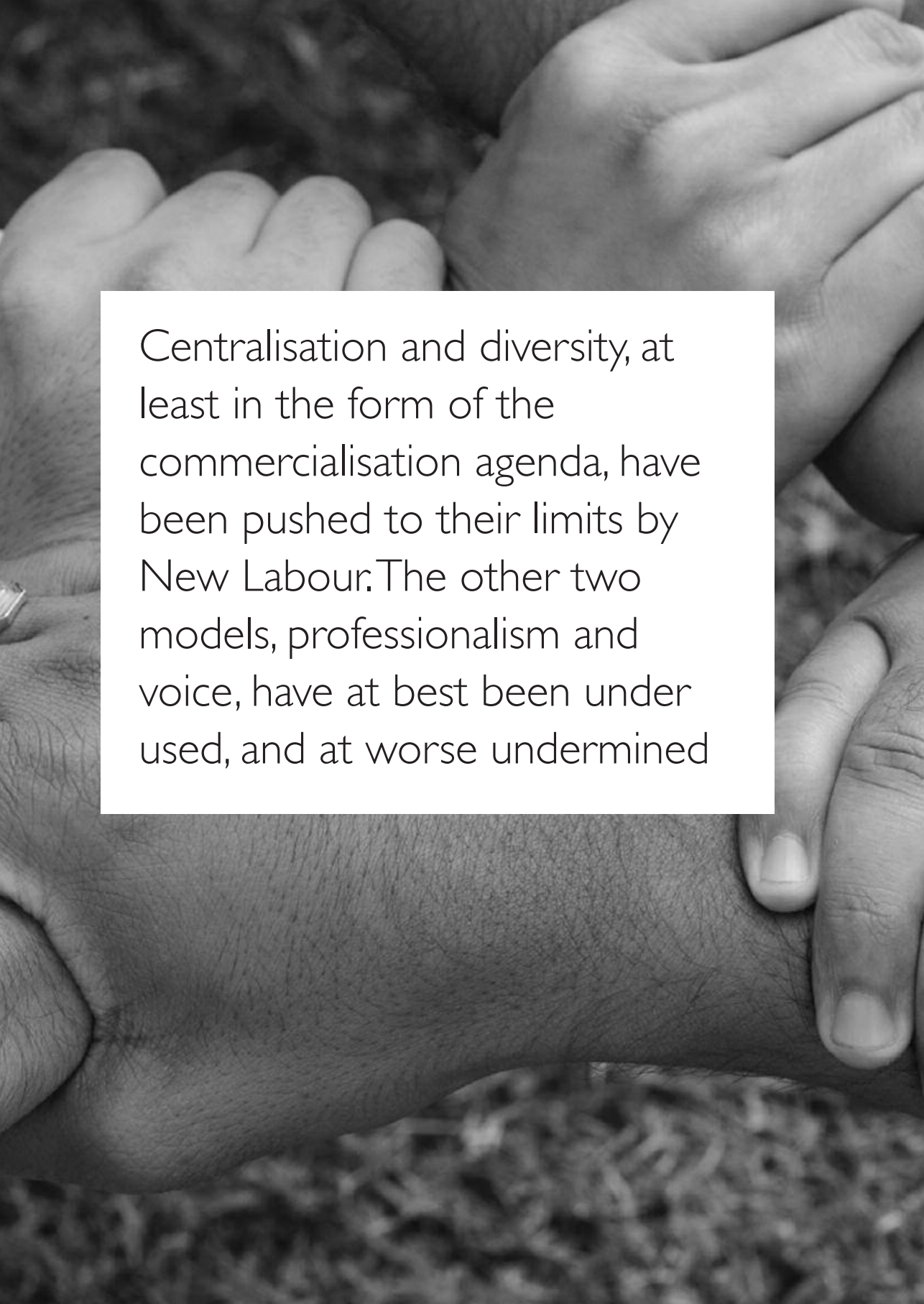
Part of his response to every question I ask him is "well everyone is an individual" or "the service has always been personalised around the user". Politicians, it seems, have only just stumbled on the concept of personalisation.

Public sector workers like Peter have been practising it for years. Notions of respect and dignity are just the day to day basic hygiene factors of the job for him and his colleagues. They are dedicated and professional – beyond reproach. And they are always looking at ways of improving the service they provide.

This happened five years ago in spectacular fashion when Peter and his colleagues pioneered the Single Assessment Process. They were the first team to sit down and analyse the quality of service provision they gave to users to make sure that they got it right the first time a user consulted them. Before this each user had been assessed independently by a nurse, doctor, psychologist or occupational therapist. It was piecemeal, took ages and cost a fortune as duplication, paper work and bureaucracy expanded at no benefit to the user.

Peter and his fellow workers didn't need to be told something was going badly wrong, nor did they need to be told what to do. After lengthy discussions with all service providers they formed multi-disciplinary teams and based everything on a single first assessment. By bringing all the relevant service providers together it made the assessment both holistic and quicker. The freedom of the staff to determine through their knowledge and expertise what was in users' best interests led to a better service that was also more cost-effective. Peter and his colleagues had worked out themselves how to improve the service and save money in the process. It is highly doubtful that top down management targets or, worse still, outsourcing the job to the private sector would have worked.

Management agreed to the system after it had been finished and tested. The Single Assessment Process has since become standard practice for judging users' needs quickly and effectively across the country. This was organically created reform, which came from front-line staff working together with users to improve provision.



Centralisation and diversity, at least in the form of the commercialisation agenda, have been pushed to their limits by New Labour. The other two models, professionalism and voice, have at best been under used, and at worse undermined

Introduction

The Public Service Reform Paradox

We need a new way to reform public services. The bureaucratic state machinery of the "Fordist" post-war years looks worn and tired. The "new public management" theory, which borrowed so heavily from the private sector, cannot square the circle of the social citizenship demands of the public services. Both machines and markets will have a limited role to play in the future. The next revolution in public service reform will not come from the bureaucratic or market state, but from the participatory and wherever possible the democratic state.[1]

Compass has identified a four box matrix (see the appendix) describing public service delivery based on four governance models:

- Centralisation: targets and inspection
- Diversity: localism and experimentation
- Professionalism: expertise
- Voice: participation, engagement and democratic involvement.

Centralisation and diversity, at least in the form of the commercialisation agenda, have been pushed to their limits by New Labour. The other two models, professionalism[2] and voice, have at best been under used, and at worse undermined. Effective public service delivery demands the right balance between all four governance models. Crucially it is now voice that needs to be strengthened.

"Co-production is an essential element of the new politics of voice"

Co-production is an essential element of the new politics of voice and its development and expansion will allow the government to establish a better mix between the four inter-locking components of the reform agenda.

1 See Neal Lawson (2008) *Machines, Markets and Morals,* Compass, for further information.

2 Compass is starting the process of examining the role of professionalism in public services and anyone interested in contributing should contact the Compass office.

Case Study 2

Greg Mandelman The Kings Cross area which is the home of the Holy Cross Centre Trust now appears rather nice but when the centre was set up 20 years ago it was a very different place. At that time Kings Cross was rife with deprivation; much of this deprivation remains but it now sits side by side with affluence and a massive regeneration scheme. Over this time the Holy Cross Centre Trust, a secular organisation with links that run throughout the community, has grown and changed. The Trust is now commissioned and funded largely by Camden council as a mental health day centre and works within a larger network of mental health groups. Over the last two years it has been actively involved in engaging with the philosophy of co-production and Greg was kind enough to tell me about their projects.

One project that Greg is involved in is called "Your Space", which has now been running for 12 months. Greg says it is still in its early stages and is keen to point out that this is a learning curve for the staff; he says they are only now getting to grips with it and they still have a long way to go. The project embodies the concepts of co-production. They had been given a resource in the form of a space to use in the crypt of the church. Your Space allows all those involved to work together to use this resource; it allows people to develop their own priorities, not simply be given a treatment of what those above think they need – most people know what they want. Pretty much anything is allowed as long as it is safe and improves well-being. Projects which have come out of Your Space include a coffee morning, organised by users, and a mental health support group for gay men. The staff act as facilitators, ensuring that everything runs smoothly, but they have a very hands-off approach. Greg says that the amount of staff hours and resources that would be needed to get a project like this off the ground without co-production would be huge, and he is very sceptical about whether any attempts to do this would have been nearly as successful.

It's hard work, it's about changing a mind set, away from what can be provided for me and towards what I can achieve. It's about giving people the time, space and encouragement to take ownership of a problem. Greg says that most people are "hungry to get their hands dirty and really get stuck in". However, it still isn't easy. It's about challenging a way of thinking for both staff and users and reshaping a relationship. Most importantly, however, it's about time – time to make mistakes and learn from them, and time to allow people to adjust to a new way of thinking. This is not about cutting corners and costs, it's not about philanthropy or volunteering, it's about all users being involved in reciprocal relationships each defined by what they have to give.

Co-production is a simple concept with transformative potential. Every time a parent helps their child with their homework and makes sure they get to school on time and are well behaved, they are engaged in a form of co-production. Every time a patient gets to a GP appointment on time and takes their medicine, they are engaged in a form of co-production. When users form themselves into expert patient groups, they are taking part in co-production. Sorting and recycling our rubbish is an activity of co-production. It happens all the time, organically at a micro level in every public service, and yet it is rarely talked about

and the principle never extended as a macro-level approach to modernisation. The challenge is to scale up what is already happening and working.

Co-production is an approach to public service reform that seeks to harness the skills and energies of users, staff and the public at all levels to innovate for better outcomes, in a way that is empowering and remains true to the egalitarian and collective spirit of public service.

New Labour's Record

New Labour came to power in 1997 with the promise of renewing the public services. To meet this pledge they have invested large amounts of capital in the public services, particularly education and healthcare.

Yet there remains a yawning gap between investment and public satisfaction with Labour's record. How can it be that both investment and dissatisfaction are at record levels? The answer lies in the nature of the reforms that went alongside the investment.[3] New Labour mixed centrally driven targets and commercial forces that unfortunately served to disempower and demoralise staff and confuse users. At the heart of the Blairite reform analysis is a belief that public sector workers cannot be trusted either to serve the public interest or to modernise and adapt services to meet the demands of increased efficiency and personalisation. Hence the stress on markets and machines; the staff will either be bullied or bribed to meet the government's reform agenda.

Such an approach was bound to unravel. First, the quality and scope of public service provision depends on the commitment, motivation and skills of public service workers. How could it be otherwise? Services by their very nature have to be about people's experience of delivery. If the basis of managerial and political control is one of mistrust then the experience of the end user is likely to be unfavourable when it relies on someone who clearly "cannot be trusted" to deliver.

But, second, neither centralisation nor diversity in the shape of market based reforms can address the central paradox of the public service reform agenda: the conflict between our desire for equality and the need for diversity. Innovation and empowerment necessitate diversity and localism – but this inevitably leads to difference and is therefore a threat to equality or universalism. Like all paradoxes this one can't be solved – only managed. To live with the conflict the people who produce the service – the staff and users – need to share the dilemma. Only

3 See Neal Lawson (2008) *Machines, Markets and Morals* for an in-depth analysis of the failings of centralisation and commercialisation reform programmes.

"Largely paternalistic models needed to be reformed in line with new demands from more active citizens"

through the decisions and trade-offs they make between how much diversity and equality they think is right can this paradox be managed. By sharing the problem rather than continuously attempting to regulate it away or pretend choice has all the answers, co-production allows the systemic tension inherent within public service to be contained through understanding, experience and empowerment.

In its reforms New Labour has failed to recognise the unique quality of the public services: that they are public and designed with a vision of equality and social citizenship. What the New Labour reforms have taught us is that capital investment is very important and that without it the services will struggle, as they did during the Thatcher years. However, it is clear that capital investment alone it will not foster the unique quality of the public services or assist their adaptation to the demands of the 21st century. We need investment in people too.

Public services are not just another segment of the labour market, or the economy; they are essential constituents of the "public domain", a domain of "citizenship, equity and service whose integrity is essential to democratic governance and social well-being".[4] Those who work for the services and those who use them know that regardless of wealth, age or gender these vital institutions are designed to provide a service equally to all, a provision designed around need. It is this key element of the public sector which must be strengthened and developed, and this can only be achieved through reforms that can augment the egalitarian, participatory and potentially democratic nature of these essentially public institutions.

An Alternative Reform Agenda

The post-war consensus can be seen as an era built on values of equality and solidarity and a general recognition of the need for social provision to protect the most vulnerable. Most importantly, however, it held an overarching sentiment, giving everyone a fair chance of playing their full part in our economy and society. This period saw the creation of national institutions such as the NHS, comprehensive education, and a host of services provided locally to individuals, families and communities that transformed people's lives and life chances.

But changing pressures and demands arising from momentous shifts in lifestyle, culture and the ever growing and globalising capitalist economy have left many of these institutions

4 David Marquand (2004) *The Decline of the Public: the hollowing out of citizenship*, Polity Press.

Case Study 3

Mathew Lay is a hostel duty officer in an approved premise for ex-offenders. In recent years the service has changed dramatically. The hostel used mostly to house people on bail who couldn't be bailed at home or in prison. Now hostels like Mathew's have to deal with many more difficult ex-offenders, almost as a half-way house between prison and probation. Public protection is the staff's first concern as well as the quality of service the ex-inmates receive. This sort of provision is less expensive than prison and has therefore become commonplace as government tries to save money. But it puts a strain on the staff.

Staff in these hostels have had to change everything about the service they provide. The premises and staffing systems have had to be adapted. New ways of working have had to be found. Mathew and his team devised new working arrangements and therefore new sleeping patterns that were suitable for their new roles and patterns of working, so they could deal with the new requirements of managing ex-offenders. They had to break down old working practices and operate with different units. The union was a massive part of this and took the lead on a working group on all staffing arrangements.

In addition the staff took a lead on planned interventions to help the development of the people in their care. This involved new group and one to one work on things like pro-social behaviour and developing cognitive skills. Staff had to work much more flexibly to meet these new demands. Mathew talks you through the recent changes with a world weary stoicism suggesting that he has seen and done it all before. He knows that he will see it again as new targets and demands are issued from a remote Whitehall office and he and his team will respond positively and professionally by adapting and innovating to meet the needs of the fragile people who pass through their hostel. The way in which Mathew adapted was not because of the targets, it was through co-producing with his union; it was through innovating above and beyond the call of duty.

struggling to cope. A barely containable level of social and economic inequality – resulting from market fundamentalism – cannot be contained by applying the same free market measures to public services.[5] But people are rightly demanding more responsive and personalised services. The cultural unravelling of social deference, and the rise of a consumer society, began to undermine a post-war welfare settlement built around standardised and bureaucratic public services. Largely paternalistic models needed to be reformed in line with new demands from more active citizens. These trends are placing extraordinary strains on welfare institutions tasked with enshrining equality and solidarity. So our public services do need modernising. The issue is how?

5 Mike Brewer, Alissa Goodman, Alistair Muriel and Luke Sibieta (2007) *Poverty and Inequality in the UK: 2007*, Institute of Fiscal Studies.

Case Study 4

Keith Parke works for Together, an NHS mental health charity for residential care projects, outreach and more general campaigns on mental health issues. He is a senior bank worker, who does cover work all over the place looking after the well-being and development of users and staff. It is a stressful job and he says they paid "f*** all for it". But like the rest of the staff Keith isn't there for the money – he is there because he cares and wants to give something back to some of the most vulnerable people in our society. We can't all be flash city bankers – and anyway someone will need to look after them if they are unlucky enough to have breakdown. Keith will be there.

Off his own back Keith has looked for ways to ensure that the well-being of service users improves. He says that users tend to get institutionalised and just need things to do – ordinary things that we take for granted. So he works with users to organise trips to the cinema and the theatre. It breeds a culture of expectation among users. It gives them hope and feeds their imagination. These are people who have never been to the West End or seen a show. Or he might fix up massages for users and the staff who have an incredibly stressful job. Many staff are exhausted by long hours and low pay.

It is hard to fit this in though. No one told Keith to do it. There is no target for well-being or cultural activities like these as people's happiness is not something that can be measured. But Keith has been working with patients long enough to know how important activities like this are. He offers a life line to the rest of society and a taste of "normality". Keith's work is about more than just organising trips to the theatre, he gives users an empowering experience, which builds networks between them and encourages them not to settle for what they are given but to be more involved and gain from this involvement. This is well outside Keith's job description and is a key building block towards co-production.

As we enter a period of threatened economic downturn where investment in public services is being squeezed, it has never been more urgent to strengthen their intrinsic values and the social and political alliances that can sustain them.

Co-production offers a potential route out of this ideological and political cul-de-sac, for three reasons. First, co-production can give users real control over their services, with the knock-on positive effects of empowering users, improving services and creating a provision which is collectively implemented. Second, co-production has the potential to empower users and reform services with, and not against, the staff and professionals who work in them. Reform is based on mutual interest and consensus building wherever tensions arise. Third, and perhaps most significantly, co-production can strengthen the intrinsic values of the public domain, providing a moral underpinning to the notion of public service.

Central to a new and sustainable reform agenda is the realisation that there is a better way to improve the quality of services, which must:

- Recognise that all citizens have something to contribute, even those currently cut out or ignored by the system; by tapping into these latent or ignored assets the quality and efficiency of public service could be transformed
- See that both the users and the providers of services have a combined interest and a role to play in improving the services; in recognising this, the government can begin to return trust to those centrally involved in the services
- Know that the value of public services is not just instrumental, restricted to the actual service benefits afforded by them, but intrinsic, of benefit because of how they make us feel about ourselves, public institutions and the notion of social citizenship.

This pamphlet is the start of a debate. Its goal is to put forward the principles and case for co-production. It uses case studies to show what is already happening on the ground and therefore what the potential of co-production is. It also accepts the questions and issues that co-production raises before outlining some of the steps that will be required to allow the co-production of public services to flourish.

Politics turns on a gamble about people's instincts and character. Neo-liberalism is built on the assumption that people cannot be trusted to act in the wider public interest and have to be coerced by markets to be competitive or machines to take orders. The gamble of the democratic left is that people can be trusted to do the right thing for themselves and others: the more they are trusted the more reliable and innovative they become. The modernisation of public services through co-production is not just a practical answer to the difficulties faced by these crucial social institutions but is morally right in terms of egalitarian and democratic values.

Co-production is about the improved provision of the service, and for the citizens involved in the co-production it is about creating a strong, supportive and resilient community

Defining Co-production

The conceptual roots of co-production can be found in the 1970s work of the US political economist Elinor Ostrom,[6] who looked at case studies of citizens' involvement in the production of public goods. These included neighbourhood alert patrols in ghettos, recycling schemes and the construction of sewage systems in the favelas of Brazil. Ostrom's later work recognised that the "production of a service, as contrasted to a good, was difficult without the active participation of those supposedly receiving the service".[7] From this realisation the term co-production was developed to discuss the relationship between the "regular producer", such as the teacher, the nurse, the social care worker and the "client".

In the 1980s the term was taken up again by the civil rights lawyer Edgar S. Cahn.[8] Cahn's version advocates a dual approach where for the agency in charge of the service co-production is about the improved provision of the service, and for the citizens involved in the co-production it is about creating a strong, supportive and resilient community. The interaction between these two complementary goals and outcomes creates a form of co-production that is more meaningful and has the significant potential of improving services and the lives of those who co-produce.

Cahn argues that beyond the market economy where value is defined by economic contribution there is another much more significant economy: the "core economy".[9] For Cahn this core economy of social networks, families and civil society could be saved through forms of co-production that strengthened this intrinsic quality of society, which had until this point been ignored and damaged because it was not part of the formerly recognised market economy. Co-production under this definition is about four things:

- Assets: all citizens, whatever their situation, have something to contribute
- Reciprocity: the understanding that relationships should not be one-way acts of largesse and that wherever possible they should instead be two-way transactions
- Social networks: humans need a social infrastructure. This infrastructure requires ongoing investments of social capital generated by trust, reciprocity and civic engagement

6 Vincent Ostrom and Elinor Ostrom (1971) "Public choice: a different approach to the study of public administration", *Public Administration Review*, 13 (March/April), pp. 203–16.

7 Elinor Ostrom (1995) "Crossing the great divide: co-production synergy and development", in Peter Evans (ed.) *State-Society Synergy: government and social capital in development*, University of California International and Area Studies Digital Collection, Research Series 94, 1997, p. 99, http://repositories.cdlib.org/uciaspubs/research/94 (accessed 21 January 2008).

8 Edgar S. Cahn (2000) *No More Throw-Away People*, Essential Books Ltd.

9 Annie Kelly (2007) "Core Values", *Guardian*, 10 October, www.guardian.co.uk/society/2007/oct/10/guardiansocietysupplement.voluntarysector (accessed 1 February 2008).

Case Study 5

Maria Meska Like most people Maria has had a number of careers and in fact graduated with a degree in fashion design, but for the last year she has been working in Catford engaging in the values of co-production. Maria is a time-bank co-ordinator and was kind enough to tell me about some of the projects she's been involved in. Time banks in essence are a simple idea and embody many of the qualities that co-production does. Members of a time bank will give an hour of their time to do something for someone else – for example cleaning, decorating or teaching someone a new skill – and for this hour of their time they earn an hour in return. This creates invaluable social networks and embodies a sense of social cohesion. The Catford Time Bank is very interesting because it emerged initially through the work and sponsorship of the local GPs' surgery in 2000. Maria says that without the initial support and continued involvement of the GPs' surgery the project would not have been nearly as successful as it is. It was the expertise and knowledge of the GPs of the local area and of local need that enabled the project to get off the ground and it is their involvement in the reciprocal relationship with individuals that allows a lot of the work to take place. The time bank and the GPs have maintained close ties and much of what Maria told me highlights how co-production builds on traditional delivery services and enables individuals to do much more.

The time bank deals with numerous projects, which generally involve providing the sort of help that would traditionally be seen to fall under a social care remit. One of the most interesting things that Maria told me about was the "friend on a phone" project. GPs' work load has increased and the number of people each GP serves has grown, so the average time a GP can spend with any one person is severely limited. The GPs in Catford Rushley Green recognised this and worked with Maria and other members of the public to set up the friend on the phone project. The principle of the project is simple: GPs put forward the names of people who are home bound, elderly, bereaved or just lonely and the volunteers give an hour of their time to phone these people to give them someone to talk to. This is well above and beyond the role of a GP and would only be possible through co-production with volunteers. The most uplifting story Maria told me was about a woman named Molly. Molly had been home bound and had felt disempowered and lonely yet through the friend on the phone project she felt included and was given someone to talk to. Now Molly is actively involved in co-producing herself, and acts as the friend on the phone for other people and helps to edit the newsletter.

The interesting and innovative projects that take place in this particular time bank show how co-production needs to be incorporated into the public services. More than anything, I felt that those working in the time bank did not just improve services but built on the intrinsic qualities of solidarity and community that we so badly need. Maria pointed out that what she does isn't always easy; her work isn't just about allowing people to do whatever they want, nor to do everything for them. She said that sometimes her work is user driven, but at other times she needs to give people support and act as a safety net or, most importantly, provide balance. Maria said that one of the things she thought was of the greatest benefit to her was the support and training she had been given by the network of time banks in London and by her predecessors. Co-production must be supportive for the users involved and for the staff there to facilitate it; for both groups it is about being given the support and space to co-produce.

- Redefining work: work is no longer defined only within the market economy but includes everything that redresses injustice and makes democracy work.

The term co-production found its way to the UK in the 1980s and can be seen in discussions by Anna Coote in her work for the Institute for Public Policy Research (ippr). The English version of co-production retained the basic definition of the term as a way in which users and providers could work together to improve services. Yet it is arguable that what was lost in the journey across the Atlantic was the recognition that the rationale of co-production goes beyond improving services and also develops the intrinsic qualities of solidarity and equality that is at the heart of modern centre-left politics.

Over the last decade the importance of co-production to the reform of public services has been recognised in the work of new economic theorists such as David Boyle at the new economics foundation and Clive Miller and colleagues at the Office of Public Management. Increasingly it is also to be found in the rhetoric of some government ministers. Ed Miliband in particular has argued that:

> We must argue not only for continued investment in the public realm. It has worked so far but there is further to go. The question is how we make that investment. Rather than a "letterbox" model in which we see the individual as simply having the service "delivered" to them, we must think in terms of a more collaborative model which understands the essential roles of users and communities…
>
> The task for the future must… be to systematically look at each public service and think about how the user can become an integral co-producer. Sometimes users will contribute individually, sometimes collectively… Community involvement is essential because many services are inherently collective.[10]

Such thinking is also reflected in the recent Comprehensive Spending Review laying out the government's service delivery plans to 2010–11, which states:

> At the heart of the Government's programme of public service reform for the CSR07 period are new plans to ensure the public has a greater say in the design, delivery and governance of their services, giving them more control over and responsibility for their outcomes in health, education and other key areas. This will be accompanied by steps

10 Rt Hon. Ed Miliband (2007) "Putting users and communities at the heart of public services", speech to UNISON and Compass, 18 January 2007. See also Miliband's "Modern Equality" speech at the launch of Making it Personal (Demos): "The knowledge and skills of users is a huge resource, which increasingly is being tapped into but still not enough. The skills of parents, patients and neighbours must be mobilised if services are to succeed in their mission… This is what some people call co-production."

Case Study 6

Peggy Brame is a cleaner at West Suffolk Hospital. She was going to retire a week after we spoke. Peggy's is not a story of big new initiatives and innovative developmental schemes but of daily perseverance and adaptability to make sure her ward, nurses and most importantly patients work and heal in the cleanest and safest circumstances that they can. She knows that a dirty hospital means that everything goes down hill.

It is literally a daily struggle. There are three factors which determine how clean a ward is: the equipment, the training and the number of staff on duty. Like other colleagues who work in the service, Peggy doesn't moan or look for scapegoats, but too often she is working with half the number of cleaning staff she should be. And it's tough. Rightly they have got to meet the government's Cleaner Hospitals targets. But Peggy says she doesn't need to be told what clean means – she knows after 23 years of cleaning. And anyway the patients and their visitors are watching you all the time.

The stress of the job leads to sickness absence, which puts more pressure on the staff who are working. It is a vicious cycle. Peggy and her colleagues have to be prepared to make the very best of whatever staffing situation they find as each day comes. They will do their best to make sure that the staff they have got are placed where they are most effective and that they see to the essentials like beds and toilets. The job is all about keeping the dirt at bay, remembering what has been high or low dusted.

There are monthly meetings of all 120 cleaning staff every month. At the meetings Peggy and others suggest ways of making improvements. They suggest the best time to clean certain wards or around certain patients – finding ways to fit in best around the nursing staff. Peggy is on the front line and she knows how to improve the service she works to provide. As she is engaged actively in reform, not as an added on afterthought, Peggy's years of expertise are put to good use. The front-line workers like Peggy know it's best to make beds and then clean around them. Every day Peggy and her fellow workers make the best of a not brilliant situation and keep West Suffolk Hospital clean with their commitment, experience and ingenuity. You could tell them it was co-production – they would just see it as their job. We wish Peggy all the best in her well earned retirement.

> to give front-line professionals greater opportunities and more power to shape service delivery and respond to the needs of the public… Bringing the public and workforce together in this way will help contribute to greater innovation and efficiency, improved outcomes and higher levels of customer satisfaction and staff motivation.[11]

However, the fact that this passage appears alongside new plans to shrink social spending as a share of national income, cut back public sector pay levels, and require public service

11 HM Treasury (2007) "Empowering the workforce and public to shape services", in *2007 Pre-Budget Report and Comprehensive Spending Review*, HM Treasury.

providers to slice 3 per cent off their cash budgets every year perfectly encapsulates the tensions in the government's agenda and predicament. Against this background there is a danger that idealistic rhetoric of collaboration and empowerment will seem remote from the day to day reality of demoralised public servants struggling to maintain minimal service levels with diminished human and physical resources in the face of rising social needs.

Even worse, the language of co-production could be used to cut back public services further, shifting burdens and risks onto vulnerable individuals. There are already worrying signs that this could be the effect of substituting voluntary initiatives for investment in public capacity, or of rolling out "personal budgets" with inadequate funding and systems of support. As Baroness Jane Campbell, a leading campaigner for disability rights now at the Equality and Human Rights Commission, has argued:

> When I think of co-production, it is a collective exercise. One thing that worries me about the emerging personalisation agenda, which is very different from the one the independent living movement developed, is that it is an individual pursuit rather than a collective, mutually supportive exercise. As Demos have pointed out, the very advantages that personalisation and co-production potentially offers also contain the seeds of building further inequality and disadvantage… When disabled people developed independent living – peer support, information, advocacy and training were at the centre of the concept. Without a collective critical mass, to guide, train and support, only the very able, white, middle-class had the personal resources to succeed. Organisations of disabled people, in collaboration with all those engaged in the caring relationship, in my view, must be the critical mass at the heart of the personalisation agenda.[12]

There will inevitably be a fine and contested line between encouraging independence on the part of individuals and communities, and leaving them to fend for themselves or rely on charity. But if co-production becomes a rhetorical cover for cutting costs and individualising risks, it will exacerbate the demoralisation and cynicism among citizens and staff that already threatens the political project of public service renewal.

This report works from a definition of co-production as all service stakeholders working together to create or improve a service by making it both more innovative and fairer. It is about the formation of a space in which meaningful dialogue between government, management, staff and users can maximise innovation and ensure consensus on all levels

12 Baroness Jane Campbell (2008) "Social care as an equality and human rights issue", speech to the ippr event Power to Carers and Users: Transforming Care Services, 19 February.

of provision from commissioning right down to front-line provision. It is about creating a new settlement between government, workers and the people who use and need the services.

The concept of co-production is moving up the public service reform agenda. The case studies scattered throughout this document highlight this organic body of co-production from various levels, including the work of staff. This work is simply an expansion of good practice to co-produce with users, inventing a new relationship and new form of service. Each of these case studies illustrates a unique and significant aspect of co-production, which brings to the fore the diversity that co-production can bring and the dynamic effect it can have on services, staff, users and the wider society.

They may not yet recognise the term but many members of the public are deeply committed to the principles and practice of co-production and contribute their time and expertise to work with professional providers to improve the quality of the services they receive and to foster the unique quality of the public services. There are an estimated 170,000 individuals volunteering within the NHS[13] and over 350,000 people serve as school governors.[14] We must recognise and highlight the positive impact that this involvement has on services but also recognise that it does not go far enough. Although these people are committed to the values of co-production they can still be as disempowered as other users and staff under the current structures of administration.

Empowering Users

The promise of the choice agenda was that consumers would be empowered and services would be better tailored to meet diverse needs. In reality choice has often proved limited and unhelpful. The public are too often simply offered a choice between providers that all offer the same limited service instead of a service that really meets their needs and that they can shape. Many of the changes have made services less rather than more responsive, for example using call centres that separate the "front office" from the professionals needed to solve users problems – or complicated contracting systems using under-skilled or rushed staff taught to focus on delivery targets rather than the needs of each individual. The result is this "reform paradox" – despite

"Choice has often proved limited and unhelpful"

13 Karen Day (n.d.) "From rhetoric to reality: engaging users in public service reform", Future Services Network, www.ncc.org.uk/nccpdf/poldocs/NCC163pd_from_rhetoric_to_reality.pdf (accessed 11 January 2008).

14 J. Birchall and R. Simmons (2004) *User Power: the participation of users in public services*, National Consumer Council.

Case Study 7

Lindsey Dyer has held a board level post at Mersey Care NHS Trust since her position was created in 2001. In April 2001 a number of mental health services came under one roof, and as with all restructuring of provision there was a series of consultations. During the consultations service users came forward and made it clear that they were not interested in the restructuring if it was going to be just another reorganisation. Instead they wanted to be actively involved: they wanted to be listened to and they wanted to work with the Trust in shaping delivery, not simply be on the receiving end of services.

To its credit the Board agreed and has made the view that service users and carers have the right to be involved central to everything the Trust does, from planning building design to recruiting and inducting staff. Users and carers are actively involved, not because it's good for them or the Trust, but because it is their service and they have a right to shape provision. They are valued and offered recompense for their time.

Lindsey says that what is key to the success and what makes her work unique is that the Trust involves people as people at every level, from provision to delivery to design. The practicalities of the restructuring project were initially simple. People said they wanted to be involved in a number of key areas: recruitment of staff, induction and training of staff, research and the review of serious incidents. So this is where the Trust started. There are now 120 users and carers who have been trained in the recruitment of staff and over 1,600 staff have been employed with service users or carers involvement.

This initial involvement has spread and now Lindsey sends out a monthly information pack to more than 400 people advertising all the new ways in which they can be involved. They can do as much or as little as they want this way and can fit it around their own skills and interests, not to mention their busy lives.

Lindsey says that this has had a massive impact on service users and carers, the staff and the culture of the Trust. It gives the service users and carers interesting things to do, confidence, skills and the opportunity to meet new people and form new social networks. It acts as a constant reminder for the staff of why they are there and what they want to achieve, and it has given the whole organisation a culture of innovation and improvement in an atmosphere that it is truly personalised and responsive. This was very much an organically created reform – it was service users who wanted it but without the support and encouragement of staff it would not have been successful.

the investment and all the political attention, the public's perception of public services has been deteriorating.

Co-production has the potential to succeed where a simplistic choice agenda has failed. Involving users as collaborators rather than consumers enables them to shape services in

line with their needs and priorities, and has the potential to overcome the sense of disconnection that has proved so problematic for the politics of public service renewal. Derek Wanless (2002) told us that a sustainable NHS, in an era of chronic disease and advancing science and technology, would require the "full engagement" of the people. This is as true for all areas of public services as it is for healthcare.

Given time, a virtuous cycle will develop in which people learn through participation and acquire a sense of status and well-being through the recognition of their contribution. This can allow those previously ignored by the system to contribute positively. This was what Maria, (in case study 5) talked about passionately: she felt that what was gained in terms of confidence and sense of achievement when people were involved in co-production was beyond the narrow "what works" traditions of the public services. Co-production seeks out and makes use of the hidden assets of individuals as part of a wider collective effort. As one user who was involved in work with the mental health services stated: "The work I do here helps me to maintain a sense of balance and self-worth."[15]

It is increasingly recognised that well-being is not associated with consumption but with relationships.[16] Co-production forges relationships between people and expands the opportunities open to them,[17] improving not only the services but the lives of all those involved through the experiences it gives and the social networks it builds.[18]

Mobilising the Workforce

Public services are likely to remain highly labour intensive. By far the most significant component of spending is on the workforce; staff remain key to improving services and outcomes. It is the cleaner in a hospital, the teaching assistant at a school, and the domiciliary care worker visiting people at home, as well as doctors, nurses, teachers and social workers, who understand the workings of the service and the needs of the people they serve better than any civil servant or minister.

A massive failure of the past ten years has been the damage done to staff morale and commitment. Job satisfaction declined when trust was removed through target and

15 Michael Turner and Peter Beresford (2005) *Contributing on Equal Terms: service user involvement and the benefits system*, Social Care Institute for Excellence, www.ocdaction.org.uk/ocdaction/documents/SCIbenefitsReport.pdf (accessed 8 January 2008).

16 Charlie Leadbeater and Hilary Cottam (2004) *Red Paper 01 HEALTH: co-producing services*, Design Council. See also Kevin Skinner (ed.) (2004) *Community Leadership and Public Health*, The Smith Institute, www.smith-institute.org.uk/pdfs/comm_leadship_pub-health.pdf (accessed 9 December 2007).

17 David Boyle, Sherry Clark and Sarah Burns (2006) *Hidden Work: co-production by people outside paid employment*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/0356.asp (accessed 2 March 2008).

18 Dave Prentis (2007) "Experts and navigators: public services in a participatory society", in Stella Creasy (ed.) *Participation Nation: reconnecting citizens to the public realm*, Involve.

Case Study 8

Jonies Henry is a time-bank co-ordinator who has worked in recent years at Hargrave primary school. What interested me most about one of the projects that Jonies was involved in at Hargrave primary school was that it incorporated pupils and staff to improve students' experience of education.

A few years ago Hargrave primary school – in a project initiated by teachers working with pupils – implemented the key principles of co-production. At the centre of this project was a student-led project involving what is now called the "buddy bench". Again, this is a simple idea. If a child is upset or has a problem they can go and sit on a bench during playtime. The child will then be approached by a designated buddy monitor. These are Year 5 and 6 pupils who have offered to help. At the beginning of the year they were trained in conflict resolution and given all the help and support they need by staff. Initially a charity was asked to come in and teach them but now the students and staff are so confident about the project they can do the training themselves. The information and experience is passed on each year to the next generation of buddy monitors. This would not work without the support of staff to co-ordinate and ensure that people's needs are being met but the project is also driven by the enthusiasm of the students. Jonies told me about one Year 4 child she had recently spoken to who couldn't wait to be allowed to join in next year.

This co-production improved children's experience of schools and went well above and beyond the remit of the school. The scheme enthused the children with sense of community, citizenship and solidarity and gave them the essential skills they would need when they went on to secondary school and for the rest of their lives.

This project highlights how those normally excluded from a system of provision can be actively involved to improve it. In instilling these qualities in school, children learn that there is more to life and education than sitting in a classroom. This project is about helping each other and learning new skills in return. Isn't this what education should really be about?

market led agendas. Co-production can return to these workers their faith in their roles and improve job satisfaction. By restructuring the relationship between workers and users so that the delivery model of reform is transformed into a co-producing relationship workers will feel empowered and motivated to own and push the reform agenda.

This is not about adding more targets and regulations to what workers already do. It must instead be about recognising that co-production has always been an essential dimension of their work. It is work patterns and central controls that often get in the way of the flexibility, resources and skills front-line staff need to use in order to extend and deepen the essential

Case Study 9

John Bangs is the head of education and equal opportunities at the National Union of Teachers. He was kind enough to take the time out of a very busy week to discuss the union's stance on school councils. Over 90 per cent of schools now have some form of school council. They often represent the key principles of self-evaluation and improvement:

- They involve all aspects of the school, from the pupils to the staff to the parents and give a collective voice to those who are normally disempowered.
- They help innovate and allow schools to tune into pupil experience, knowledge, time and energy to provide a more personal service.
- They aren't about teachers delivering a service, they are about pupils being involved in shaping provision to adapt to rapidly changing needs.

This is not something that government can do and the significant contribution school councils make needs to be recognised. However, John argued that this sort of reform cannot be imposed from above – if it is, it is destined to fail. You cannot force the cultural change that effective school councils represent. Instead John emphasises that effective school councils only grow organically if they provide the right conditions for pupil involvement; they cannot be grafted on. John says that you must instead provide the necessary space and culture for school councils to co-produce and trust that people know what they want and how to improve services; otherwise school councils will fail to have the positive impact they are capable of.

relationship they have with users and communities. It is this alliance between public servants and members of the public that will provide the strongest and most durable basis for effective, responsive and popular public services.

Strengthening the Public Domain

A truly progressive reform agenda can have a deeper social value, which goes beyond the immediate experiences of users and staff. Co-production can restore and strengthen the principles of equality and democracy that public services express and aspire to. Privatisation and marketisation have weakened our most valuable institutions. A preoccupation with market transactions, and an assumption that service is only provided for profit, undermines the values that are essential to a healthy society. It undermines social networks, our sense of solidarity and our desire to support each other. A hospital or school is not like a business. A social care worker is not like a shop assistant. They both help us – but with very different motives and therefore in very different ways. If form does indeed follow function, then the function to serve the public as equals must take a different form from the profit motive.

But reform cannot only be about improving provision, important as this is – it must be about the way we think of ourselves and our membership of society. Public services help to constitute a realm of equal standing and mutual commitment where the atomising forces of the market can be held at bay.

Advancing towards a fairer and more inclusive society depends on our ability to beat back the neo-liberal assault on public spending and progressive state action. Co-production is an essential dimension to creating a different kind of state – a humanised and truly social state.

The notion of "progressive universalism" remains a compelling goal – all are encouraged and enabled to help tailor services to match individual and collective needs with the necessary support and resources flowing to those who need most help to do this

Addressing the Issues of Co-Production

Co production is not a panacea and raises important questions that need to be addressed. The argument of this pamphlet is that these risks should not be a reason for retreating from the attempt to unlock the progressive potential of co-production. But nor should they be dismissed. The task is to identify how to overcome them so that co-production can be advanced in a way that strengthens the project of creating a fairer, stronger and more dynamic society.

Equality of Provision

There will always be people who are advantaged and thus better able to work the system than others who are less articulate and less well resourced. Public services reside within a largely capitalist society and therefore reflect the widening wealth, income and asset inequalities that already exist. Some will have more time, or are more educated or simply more confident in their abilities to make the services work better for them. This is exacerbated by the fact that these people often live in the same areas, and thus a greater reliance on co-production could lead to an increase in the postcode lottery. Evidence suggests that as it stands now co-production is already disproportionately practised by the better off.[19]

"The notion of 'progressive universalism' remains a compelling goal"

At the same time, however, many have pointed to the potential benefits of engaging and empowering the least advantaged in our society in the design and delivery of the services they need.[20] The notion of "progressive universalism" remains a compelling goal – all are encouraged and enabled to help tailor services to match individual and collective needs with the necessary support and resources flowing to those who need most help to do this. This principle needs to be applied to co-production by ensuring that space and resources are targeted at the least well off in the community.[21]

19 M. Taylor (2003) *Public Policy in the Community*, Houndsmills.

20 J. Birchall and R. Simmons (2004) *User Power: the participation of users in public services*, National Consumer Council. See also A. Joshi and M. Moore (2003) *Institutional Co-production: unorthodox public service delivery in challenging environments,* Institute of Development Studies.

21 See Stuart Weir (2008) "The unequal distribution of social capital in the UK" *Renewal* 16(1) and Claire Methven O'Brien "Entrenching social citizenship" *Renewal* 16(1).

Case Study 10

Madeleine Davis
In 2004 Breakthrough Breast Cancer piloted a scheme focusing on engaging users, improving relations between staff and patients, and making services local. The structure of the project is simple. Breakthrough Breast Cancer devised a national template on how services could be improved. This template is then taken to a local area and users are encouraged to engage with the programme. The involvement of individuals varies from simply filling out a questionnaire, to taking part in one to one interviews, to being a patient representative. The goal is to produce a localised service pledge designed around the needs and desires of the users in breast care. However, it really goes beyond this: it engages users and encourages them to be involved; it challenges traditional notions of service delivery; and it improves relations between users and staff.

I asked Madeleine what the staff thought of the project. She said that overall they wanted to improve the service, but that sometimes there was an initial cynicism – "after years of failed reforms why would they believe this one?" – But she says that once the staff realise the potential they always want to be involved. Users and staff know how to reform; they know what will work, what's needed and how the service can tune in to local needs. They just need the space and encouragement to do it. Madeleine is very straight talking and says what's really important in any project like this, and in fact in all the work she does, is accepting that some people want to be involved in reform but some people don't; they just want a good service. This project enables both of these groups to contribute and encourages as much engagement as people want to have.

The project is increasingly successful and now operates in 15 hospitals. The national network and the standing of Breakthrough Breast Cancer allows good practice to spread across the country and means the network can really engage users and staff.

Professionalism and Public Service

The end of deference does not necessitate the end of professionalism, or a denial of the important skill and knowledge of experienced public servants. But we need a different sort of public servant, the sort that Donald Schon referred to in his compelling work in the 1980s on "reflexive practitioners", who are able to work on equal terms in partnership with the users of their service, respectful of the "expert knowledge" that users bring about their own conditions and their own lives; and willing to negotiate solutions that make sense from both perspectives.

Co-production is not about "DIY welfare", but a series of multilateral, dynamic relationships among users and staff that makes optimal use of their diverse but integral contributions to individual and social outcomes.

Resolving Conflict

Another related issue is how to balance the conflicts that arise from differences in values between co-producers.[22] Longstanding models of representative democracy and bureaucratic procedure grew up in part to deal with the fact that the immediate needs and priorities of different users and citizens may not readily harmonise, and so need to be aggregated and arbitrated through overarching political and administrative structures. We can perhaps put greater faith in the public's altruism and tolerance than policy makers have been willing to do in the past, but we need to do so in the context of tackling the inequalities that create a clash of vested interests. While these do not go away simply because you engage staff and service users, they are at least open to scrutiny and exploration. Engagement and trust can develop stronger reciprocity and an understanding of one's own needs in relation to the needs of others. It can help users to develop an awareness of collective and shared needs, at the same time as providers gain recognition of the differences between individual needs.

Co-production needs to involve a process of mutual learning and recognition that ultimately takes in the full range of groups and communities who produce, use and rely on public services. Where conflicts arise, the best way of airing these conflicts, and the best chance of resolving them, comes by engaging all citizens in a genuinely inclusive process that can begin to build a progressive consensus over a shared common good. It may not be quick or easy but the democratic left instinct is that voice is not just morally superior to the market or targets but ultimately more efficient too.[23]

Consistency and Reliability

One of the factors that has restricted public services from becoming more flexible and innovative has been a concern to protect a minimal threshold of service provision that can be counted on at all times, and the need to standardise in order to guarantee this. Reliability and consistency remain important characteristics that citizens value in public services. As resources begin to shrink, services increasingly depend on the availability of individual or collective voluntary efforts that may be uneven or unpredictable. We need to decide as a society where we require minimum standards of care or provision, and to ensure that there is support for successful community initiatives (often made possible by the vision, energy and availability of a few or even just one key individual) to offer back-up or failsafe systems, which can move into place if these services experience problems or individuals burn out. We need a state that can make room for and support creativity when it is forthcoming, at the same time as stepping in and filling the gaps where it is not.

22 M. Taylor (2003) *Public Policy in the Community*, Houndsmills.
23 The methodology to measure efficiency and public value is a further piece of research that Compass is planning to undertake.

Case Study 11

Joan Eatock works in home care on the Wirral in the north west of England. Her job is to ensure that the quality of people's lives are improved to the full by enabling them to live at home as long as possible, rather than in a hospital or care home. Usually but not always she works with the elderly. Joan recognises that often she has to provide a lot of support and care, but she also knows that those under her watch have a lot to give. Therefore she has a coaching role, providing a safety net for more junior staff but space for independence. She knows where, when and how she can help.

There is pressure to stop bed blocking and so management want patients out of hospital and back home as soon as feasible. As long as it is safe and they are ready, home is the best place for patients to be. Patients are moved home from hospital at a faster rate than in the past, while ensuring the highest quality of care, and providing services like occupational therapy at home, for example after a stroke or a hip replacement. According to Joan the trick is to help patients to help themselves, to coach them back to independence.

Joan and her colleagues were part of a pilot called the Wirral Early Discharge Team (WEDT), which led the way in developing this new fast track service. It involved managers, sisters on the ward and the home care team. UNISON members like Joan were involved from the start. They developed a free six week home care package, with much front-loaded support, which was then gradually reduced over the weeks to encourage independent home living as soon as possible.

In 2003/04 UNISON worked very closely with Wirral Social Services to develop a different type of service delivery within the in-house Home Care Service. Several meetings were held between UNISON, Social Services management and hospital representatives. Home care union stewards were included on the UNISON team.

A pilot scheme known as Wirral Enablement Discharge Service (WEDS) was set up in partnership with the Occupational Therapy Department from Wirral Acute Hospital Trust. Home carers who joined the WEDS team were given additional training to work with service users. This involved the home carer enabling the service user to regain or relearn the skills of daily living. WEDS has been a success and gained national attention from the Department of Health's "Care Services Improvement Programme" for its innovative approach to partnership and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the service.

Building on the success of WEDS, in October 2006, Wirral Social Services Departmental Management Team gave the go-ahead to a proposal to reorganise the Home Care Service. Teams of 40 home carers will incorporate the re-ablement skills and assessment skills. This part of the service will be called Wirral Home Assessment and Reablement Teams (Wirral HARTs). The first team is already proving popular; the second team is currently undergoing additional training. The WEDS Service is also under the Wirral HART umbrella.

There are positive aspects of this development:

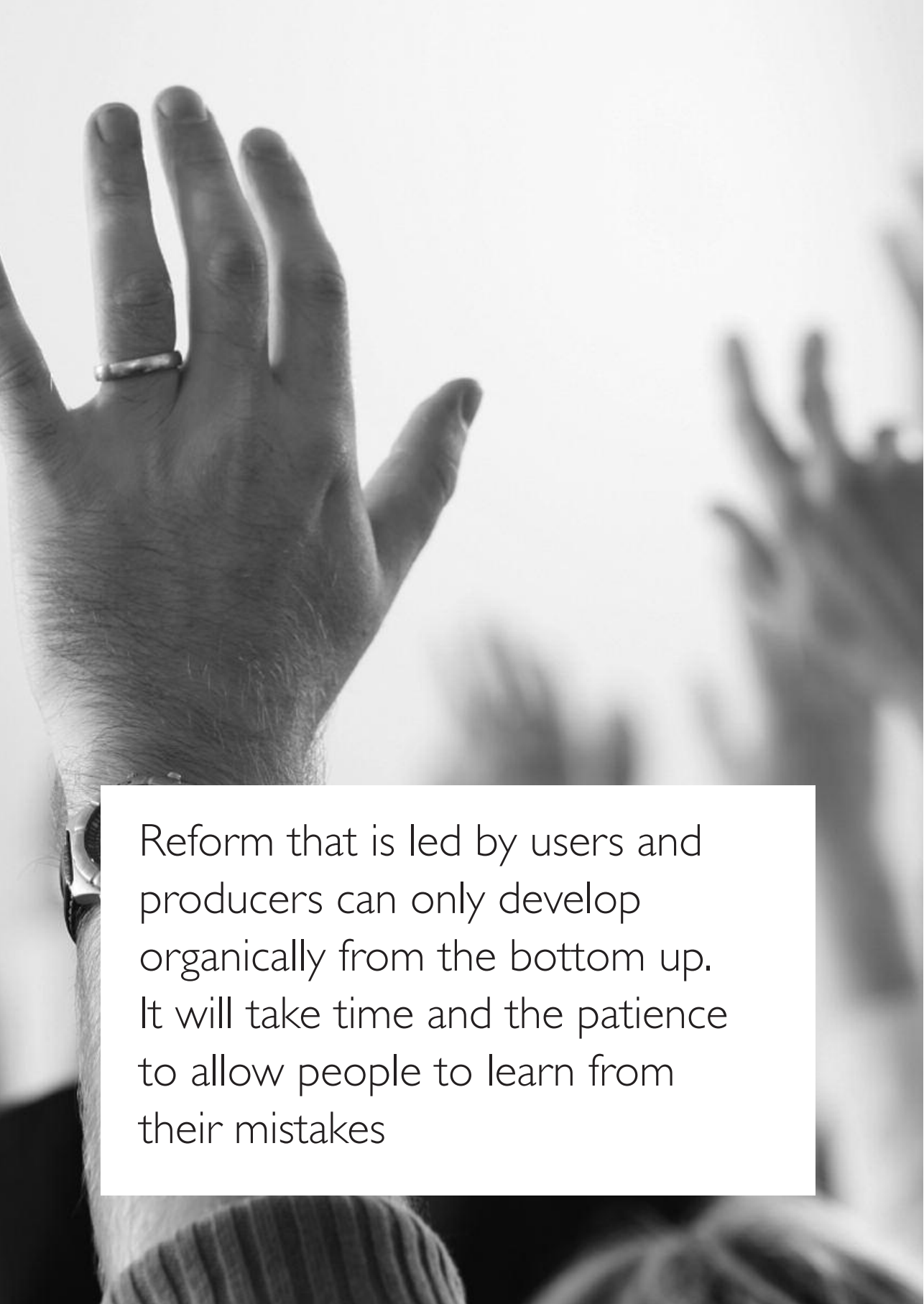
- Staff sickness levels are falling.
- The service user is not charged for the Wirral HART Service (service delivery up to six weeks).
- Home carers' skills are finally recognised and home carers are being allowed to use them along with the additional training, providing greater job satisfaction.
- Service users no longer pay for unnecessary packages of care.
- It promotes the independence of service users.
- Eventually all hospital discharges and those in the community who fit the criteria will come through to Wirral HART.
- After six weeks any long term domiciliary care needs are assessed by the organisers of the Wirral HART team and then passed on to the in-house service or the dependent sector.
- Staff costs are reduced. The regular assessments ensure efficiencies for the appropriate level of care, for example a service user at the beginning of care had regular visits each day of the six week package, then through regular assessment the care was reduced each week. At the end of the period the service user no longer needed any carer to attend them and had regained their independence. In the past a service user was given a package of care that over time would become irrelevant, but create a dependency on the service. The staffing cost for one service user is approximately £14 per day.

Cost and Efficiency

At a time of deteriorating economic performance and tightening public finances there is a danger that co-production could become an excuse to leave individuals struggling to help themselves without the social entitlement and public provision we have grown used to as part of the welfare state. Co-production can only succeed if users do not feel exploited or abandoned. It requires a serious commitment of resources and the hard work of skilled and motivated public servants to ensure that all individuals and groups are engaged and empowered.

Nevertheless, as hard choices have to be made about the use of resources, the current wasteful and inefficient use of resources through too many targets and inappropriate market forces cannot be sustained. Current services designed and run without valuing the contribution of users often wastes and consequently frustrates the use of untapped resources of talent, ingenuity and energy. When citizens are engaged in reform the transformation of services becomes possible. Research by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister suggests that the costs of involving communities in the delivery of mainstream services were more than outweighed by the benefits.[24]

24 ODPM (2005) *Improving Delivery of Mainstream Services in Deprived Areas – the role of community involvement,* Research Report 16, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and Home Office.



Reform that is led by users and producers can only develop organically from the bottom up. It will take time and the patience to allow people to learn from their mistakes

Putting Co-Production into Practice

The temptation with any good idea is to believe that it will be universally applicable. But there will always be areas of high risk, for example child protection or criminal justice, where professionals have an important role to play and where the contribution of users and carers has to be balanced by the needs of public safety or the achievement of important social goals. What we must seek is an "intelligent co-production" which recognises areas where it can work and where it cannot.

Co-production cannot be a quick fix, unlike the simple but empty promises of short term targets or the competition and choice agenda. Reform that is led by users and producers can only develop organically from the bottom up. It will take time and the patience to allow people to learn from their mistakes. Co-production can be nurtured, and we can try to create a more hospitable environment for it, but it cannot be imposed or reproduced to order. It may take longer to reveal its worth, but the benefits would be exponential.

The examples highlighted in this pamphlet demonstrate the resources of talent, ingenuity and commitment that exist in the paid workforce and the individuals and communities that use public services. In many cases they show what is already being achieved when users and staff are given the opportunity to collaborate and the freedom to innovate.

Restructuring the Relationship

Co-production is about the renegotiation of relationships. To act as partners, both users and providers must be empowered. This is ultimately something they can only do for themselves through the production process. The job of government is to create the conditions in which self empowerment is more likely. All relationships are about the negotiation of power, which is why the ability of front-line staff to develop reciprocal relationships and respond directly to the concerns of the users of the services they provide is crucial in "rebalancing" the power of service users. As Gail Wilson has said:

> greater understanding of co-production and the development of theory and practice which will combine the management of co-production with the empowerment of users will be essential.[25]

25 Gail Wilson (1994) "Co-production and self-care: new approaches to managing community care services for older people", *Social Policy and Administration*, 28 (3), pp. 236–50.

Co-production requires a knowledgeable and confident group of users who can form multi-lateral partnerships with professionals. This can be done through education schemes, open discussions between users and providers, and an introduction of channels through which users can be provided with support from other users, professionals and government.

The National Consumer Council shows that 70 per cent of users have already expressed their opinion at some stage on how to improve public services.[26] Service users have highlighted two activities as central to making user involvement work: people being able to get together to work collectively for change and mutual support, and the importance of making known their own experience, views and ideas.[27]

"Users are not empowered by excluding front-line professionals and staff from a role in decision making"

Self help groups have played a key role in the health domain, forming essential collectives of expert patients learning to self-manage chronic conditions. This can be essential to countering the potential individualisation of service use by attaining real empowerment through mutual support.

Users are not empowered by excluding front-line professionals and staff from a role in decision making. Without help and support from professionals who understand their problems and can help to solve them, users can be isolated and confused. The knowledge and experience of front-line staff makes possible the implementation of intelligent co-production – making sure some people are not "working the system" and some people are not being left behind, and identifying who can speak up for themselves and who needs additional help to gain the services they need.

Even empowered users cannot act alone; they need to be able to access public resources and systems of support. The roll out of individual budgets in areas such as long term social care are already leading to users pooling resources to "buy" higher quality services collectively. In effect they are forming co-operatives and then negotiating with providers how best the service can be delivered by well paid and trained professionals – not using

26 National Consumer Council (2007) *Putting People into Public Services*, www.ncc.org.uk/nccpdf/poldocs/NCC175alt_putting_people_in_public_services.pdf (accessed 20 January 2008).

27 Fran Branfield, Peter Beresford, Eamon J. Andrews, Patricia Chambers, Patsy Staddon, Grace Wise and Bob Williams-Findlay (2006) *Making User Involvement Work: supporting service user networking and knowledge*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/1410-user-networking-knowledge.pdf (accessed 11 February 2008).

Case Study 12

Mary Larner is a classroom assistant in Tower Hamlets, the poorest borough in London, which has some of the most deprived communities in the country. It sits cheek by jowl with the squillionaires in the City of London.

Some schools in the borough have children with over 100 different first languages, so teaching is a challenge. Mary has been a classroom assistant for almost a quarter of a century and mainly looks after children with special needs and behavioural problems. She works to adapt everyday teaching practices and make them as relevant as possible to the children who need this special attention.

As a front-line worker Mary is an expert and she puts her expertise into practice every day to innovate and co-create. Take maths. Nowadays it is usually taught on a white board at the front of the class. Mary's kids would just switch off from this. It is just too remote. Mary has to innovate to get and keep their attention in a much more hands on and direct way. She cuts up paper to show them what fractions are, as they cannot understand formulae written on a board. It's the same with the literacy hour. Mary cuts up words and fits them back together like a puzzle.

Mary says it is tough. There are few resources in the schools and space is always tight. Often she is teaching in whispers in corridors. But nothing seems to deter Mary. The kids come first and everything is done to make sure that however disadvantaged their upbringing they get the best possible education. Mary is never really managed. She says that after all her time in the job "it would be embarrassing if I had to be told what to do". Every day brings a new challenge with new children and she has to adapt to them and the circumstances, which can't be planned for or profited from. Mary's role, like that of many people working in schools, already involves the key elements of co-production. All that is needed now is the space to let it happen.

budgets to get the lowest possible price. Co-production depends on empowered providers who can use their knowledge and experience to guide users through complex systems.

Spreading Good Practice

Empowered users can help empower others. In the case of Hargrave School (case study 8) we can see that after initial training and support from a voluntary organisation the students and staff were confident enough to continue the project together. In turn, they could pass on their learning to the next generation of pupils. Existing, if weakened, social networks still remain the most effective way of engaging people, because of this, users will be essential to spread good practice. You are far more likely to be involved if your friend or family member is.

Voluntary organisations already play a central role in spreading co-production. This varies from helping to set up support groups for individuals diagnosed with cancer to forming community neighbourhood watch schemes. Those involved in patient groups or the equivalent are in many ways already experts. They have had direct contact with citizens and worked alongside professional bodies. Their expertise should be used. This is not about using the voluntary sector to replace services provided by the public sector; indeed, there is evidence that drawing voluntary bodies into a competition for public service delivery contracts can compromise their ability to act as independent advocates and innovators.

Unions can also play a key role. Unions do not simply protect the narrow economic interests of their members, they also address members' concerns about the nature of their work by negotiating access to training and learning, bargaining for greater autonomy and workplace involvement, developing positive policy proposals and generally promoting the values of public service in society. Playing a unique role in empowering and mobilising public service staff, unions have a central role to play in progressive public service reform.

We must also recognise the significance of introducing co-production into public discourse, so that no discussion of public services can ignore the significant contribution that users and citizens can make. The media is central to such an engagement, as are local and national government and voluntary organisations.

Supportive Structures

Although users, providers, voluntary organisations and unions will be at the front line of co-production, there is a crucial enabling role for government in removing obstacles and ensuring that the necessary structures and resources are in place. Moving beyond the rhetoric will take real commitment and some political courage.

First, government must trust both users and producers to reform and improve public services. The forms of co-production shown through the case studies in this pamphlet demonstrate that people often have to fight upstream; they take place in spite of current structures not because of them. Moving away from a culture of targets – which control from the top down or market based competition – and instead strengthening the relationship between front-line public services and those who use them will help take co-production into the mainstream.

This has a number of implications but none of them constitute a difficult barrier for policy and decision makers. A cultural shift is required: letting go and giving trust in order to receive it back is what matters most. It calls for a government that is ready to:

- Devolve more fiscal and financial autonomy to local government and other front-line staff
- Incentivise change through recognition of successful schemes
- Encourage a culture of experimentation with more front line and local discretion
- Commit resources, most notably in terms of time and space, to co-production as an investment in long-term social efficiency.

The potential of co-production is that it is already happening and working in thousands of places across the country

Final Word

It is perhaps strange for a report on public services reform not to end with a list of demands for government to spend or do more. The potential of co-production is that it is already happening and working in thousands of places across the country – only it is hardly ever recognised, rewarded or replicated. It happens naturally. All that is needed now is a context in which it can happen more often in more places. By creating the space and allowing this organic innovation to happen it does not really require government to spend or do more. People, as users and producers, will do it for them. Co-production is deeply practical and has the strong moral purpose of building communities and social networks, and improving services, based on the practice of "what works".

Appendix: Compass matrix for public service reform

The Compass matrix for public service reform. The issue is how to strike the right kind of balance between the four governance models.

CENTRALISATION

What: Targets, plans and regulation

Why: Important because it is the basis of equality; those who get the worst services would love a big dose of uniformity if it meant their services were raised to the standards of the best

How: As little as possible to ensure the maximum amount of equality

DIVERSITY

What: Localism, working with or learning from private and third sectors, organisational autonomy, challenge, contestability and choice

Why: Important for innovation and local involvement and freedom to experiment, to learn from best practice and from mistakes; localism also allows for setting of local priorities

How: As much as possible commensurate with the demands of equality

PROFESSIONALISM

What: Ethos, training, judgement and experience

Why: Because doctors, nurses and other staff have unique expertise and experience that will always be an essential ingredient of any successful programme of modernisation, and can work on long-term goals

How: As much as possible while ensuring it is accountable and responsive

VOICE

What: Participation, democracy and co-production

Why: Because it is the only route to sustainable reform improvements

How: As much as possible, in all circumstances and at all times, up to the point that citizens and workers want no more of it; care must be taken to ensure all voices are heard otherwise there can be a clash with equality

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Please contribute generously. Compass is funded solely by organisations and individuals that support our aim of greater equality and democracy. We rely heavily on individual members for funding. Minimum joining rates are suggested below. To join, simply complete and return this form to Compass, **FREEPOST LON15823, London, E9 5BR**. Paying by Standing Order or Paypal means we have a regular income to count on, consequently we are offering new members a discount for paying their membership in this way. To join by Paypal you will need to go to the Join Us section of the Compass website at www.compassonline.org.uk/join.asp.

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If you're already a Labour member what is your CLP?

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☐ I'm not eligible to be a member of the Labour Party (i.e. you're a member of another political party in the UK) and I would like to become an Associate Member of Compass (with no voting rights).

About Compass

Compass is the democratic left pressure group whose goal is both to debate and develop the ideas for a more equal and democratic society, then campaign and organise to help ensure they become reality. We organise regular events and conferences that provide real space to discuss policy, we produce thought-provoking pamphlets, and we encourage debate through online discussions on our website. We campaign, take positions and lead the debate on key issues facing the democratic left. We're developing a coherent and strong voice for those that believe in greater equality and democracy as the means to achieve radical social change.

We are:

- An umbrella grouping of the progressive left whose sum is greater than its parts.
- A strategic political voice – unlike thinktanks and single-issue pressure groups Compass can develop a politically coherent position based on the values of equality and democracy.
- An organising force – Compass recognises that ideas need to be organised for, and will seek to recruit, mobilise and encourage to be active a membership across the UK to work in pursuit of greater equality and democracy.
- A pressure group focused on changing Labour – but Compass recognises that energy and ideas can come from outside the party, not least from the 200,000 who have left since 1997.
- The central belief of Compass is that things will only change when people believe they can and must make a difference themselves. In the words of Gandhi, 'Be the change you wish to see in the world'.

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DIRECTION FOR THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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Photography: Chris Taylor

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