

How to use these materials

Introduction

This free guide accompanies The Staff College Project 2035 materials which can be found at:

www.thestaffcollege.uk/project2035

Purpose

Get your team together over coffee and cake and run a training session with a difference. Get people debating and sharing ideas about the future of Children's Services.

Time required: 2 hours

Who might find this workshop useful?

This short workshop is ideal for those wishing simply to come together in a group to discuss the four scenarios: activism, left behind, divided and networked set in 2035. This session can be used by teams and lends itself well to a short workshop over lunch.

Pre-workshop design

Send out the four scenarios in advance of the workshop and invite delegates to read each one. Lay out your venue informally, suitable for a relaxed and open discussion, perhaps as a café.

Required resources

- A copy of the Scenario toolkit game:
- The Project 2035 scenario introduction PowerPoint from the website
- Flipchart paper, pens
- Coffee, tea and cake!



Note: Participants should not comment on the cards as they are being read out. Wait until all cards have been read and everyone has a general sense of the scenario.

7. As the cards are being read out one by one, each participant are encouraged to write down the elements they:

Like, dislike, things that will never happen or see already happening.

8. The table leader then facilitates a discussion on what the group likes, dislike, thinks will never happen and what is already happening.

Note: The table scribe should record highlights, including what participants agree upon and disagree upon.

9. Participants are then invited to discuss, debate and agree what would need to be put in place in the short and medium term to realise the elements of our scenario we like and avoid the elements we dislike. (innovations, changes to services, changes to organisational culture, change in leadership style etc). The group should also decide who would need to act in taking these actions forward.

Note: each scribe should take note of the group's views on flipchart paper

10. Each group should then prepare and give a 5 min presentation to the other three groups including (i) a brief description of their world (ii) what the liked and disliked etc (iii) actions / changes that need to be made in the short term (iv) what those changes might mean for our team (v) the group should also present the timeline proforma detailing, for this scenario to have been reality, what must have happened during the 2020's. This is called the backstory.

11. The workshop organiser should bring everyone in a large group and invite each table to share the learning written on their flip chart paper. The organiser should reflect back the

Introducing the workshop

The organiser should use the Project 2035 Introduction PowerPoint to explain the aim of the workshop is to imagine the future and make the following points very clear:

- 1 We are going to look at four divergent scenarios for 2035
 - Activism
 - Left Behind
 - Networked
 - Divided

- 2 The four scenarios are not predictions but have been written based on research, evidence, views, opinions collected over a six month period. The organiser should introduce the 12 critical uncertainties used to develop the four scenarios. *Flip the page to learn more.*

- 3 Explain that the point of the session is to explore each scenario and consider which elements we like and dislike and what we might usefully do as a team now to move towards the more favourable elements of the four scenarios.

Suggested format

1. Split into 4 groups (optimal number per group is 5)
2. Each table appoints a leader who keeps time and ensures the format is being adhered to
3. Appoint a scribe
4. Each group receives cards relating to one of the 2035 scenario
5. The 40 cards per table are dealt out to the five participants
6. First, the table leader reads out the 'scene setting' speech from the fictitious ADCS President from 2035 from the website.

group any common issues, barriers, opportunities identified across the groups.

Timings

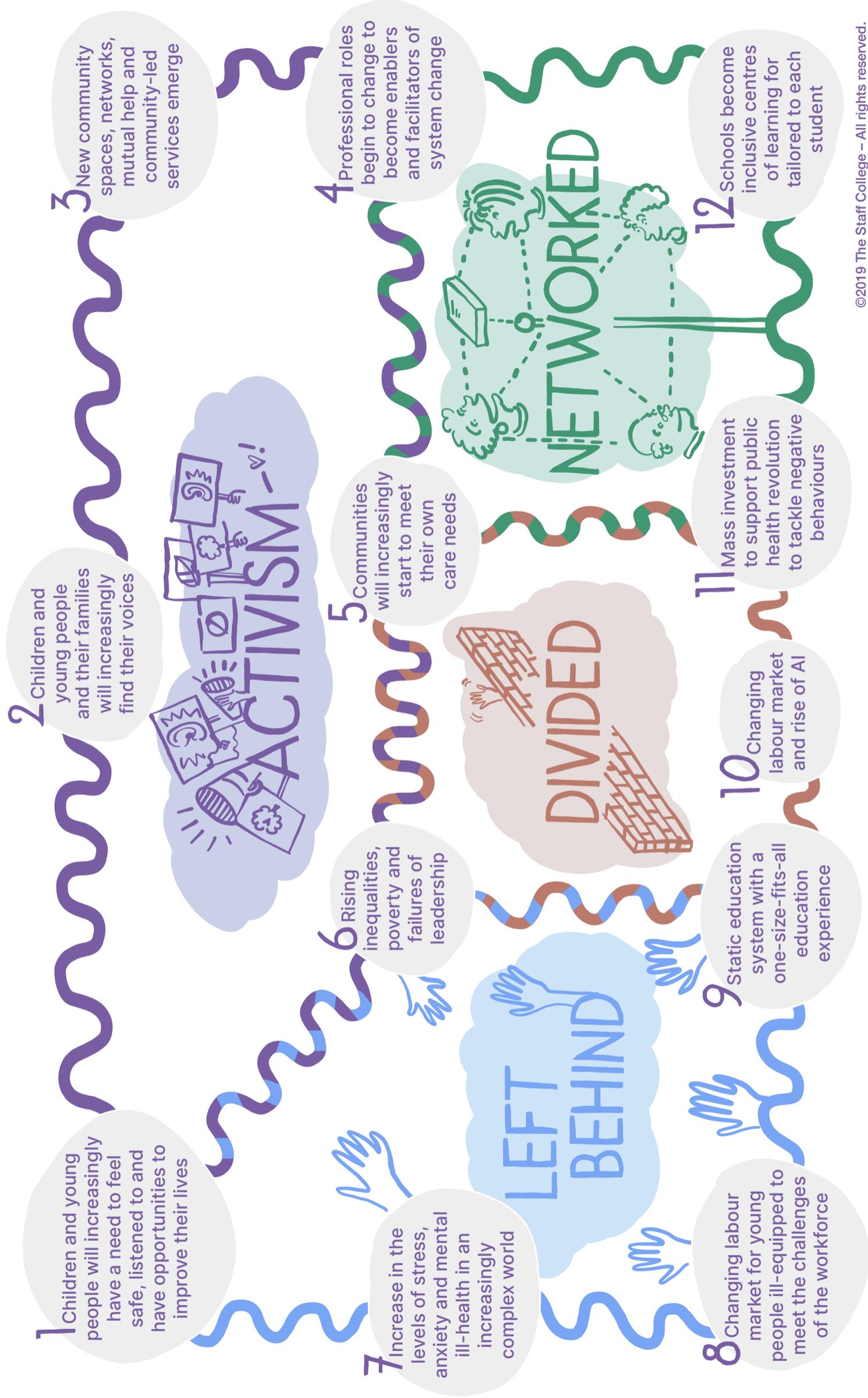
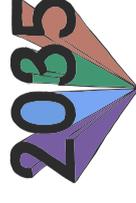
- Allocate people into four groups (5 mins)
- Introduction to the workshop, setting out aims and purpose using the short PowerPoint presentation (workshop leader) (10 mins)
- Each group reads out the 30 cards relating to their 2035 scenario (15 mins)
- Each group discusses amongst themselves what they liked, disliked etc (20 mins)
- Each group discusses and identifies the actions, innovations, changes that would need to be put in place in the short and medium term (20 mins)
- Each group gives a 5 minute presentation to the other groups (20 mins)
- Large group facilitated session between groups (30 mins)

Conditions for success

- Send the website link to Project 2035 out in advance and encourage people to look about the site, read the flash fiction stories describing different experiences of living in each scenario
- Ensure an informal and discursive setting for the workshop
- Emphasise there are no right and or wrong answers and everyone will have views to share
- Participants should be encouraged to suspend their disbelief. Whilst there will be things each participant hates about their world and some events they simply cannot see happening, the scenarios are nonetheless plausible.

12 CRITICAL UNCERTAINTIES

BY 2035 ENGLAND WILL BE A COUNTRY THAT WORKS FOR ALL CHILDREN?



1 Today in 2035, children grow up in an environment where they are respected and their voices are heard. Inspirational young leaders like Greta Thunberg, Malala Yousafzai, Cori Gauff and the thousands of young people in Hong Kong spurred on more children and young people to demand change and have their voices heard, from the youth-driven protests of the Summer of 2021 to the present day. Children know their rights and responsibilities, and nowadays people talk about the liberating power of the 2020s in much the same way as they did about the revolutionary freedoms gained in the 1960s.

Activism



#Project2035

2 Today the “Covenant Generation,” as they have become known, are taught from the age of 3 at nursery what they can expect as they grow up. The Children’s Covenant came about initially in response to the fatal stabbing of two fourteen year old boys in North London in the summer of 2024, but grew into a national campaign spearheaded by children and young people with care experience who wanted their voices to be heard. The voting age was lowered to 16 in 2027 as part of the Covenant; politicians of all parties support children’s rights and recognise them as part of the electorate.

3 Their Covenant affirms, I will have an affordable, warm and safe house; I am helped by my local community, my family and my friends. They love me and keep me prepared; I am not in poverty; I am supported to grow and develop in education, building my confidence and preparing me for adulthood; I am supported early if I have any emotional, health and/or physical needs; My contribution is both valued and recognised. I am responsible to myself, other human beings, and the planet and I will uphold the law and act with integrity.

4 Over the last ten years, there has been a marked change in the public perception of teenagers – recognising that this stage of development is exciting and creative and also needs nurturing rather than something to be vilified. The age of criminal responsibility is now 16. Whilst there is enduring structural poverty and inequality embedded across England, the money that is available for public services is targeted at providing invaluable early, prevention-focussed support to young people, to build their confidence as they prepare for adulthood.

5 Despite early fears that the Citizen's Income, introduced in 2025, might provide a disincentive to work, today evidence is emerging that the opposite is true. The universal payment, which gives all citizens a basic standard of living, has removed stigma, stress and mental health issues for many. Those who previously suffered from lack of confidence in the workplace prior to the introduction of the Citizens Income, have found new confidence, and a desire and willingness to work.

6 The Citizens Income is, however, changing working practices in England's proactive urban areas. While economic activity is required to match lifestyle wants and needs, increasingly parents are choosing to work part-time. Current figures show that fathers and mothers are working an average three-and-a-half-day week. People are using the time they would have worked to provide care and support for their families and immediate communities or to gain a better life balance.

7 Changes in the workplace, driven partly by automation, has also helped rebalance the amount of time people spend at work. Most parents work fewer hours each week, with a four-day week now the norm. As a result, children grow up in households in which there is less stress and are able to spend more time with parents who enjoy a healthier work-life balance than previous generations.

8 Nowadays parents have more time as a result of working less hours. Children benefit greatly from direct involvement with their parents' non-work time and activities within the community. Children are learning from their parents a sense of community, of responsibility and of caring for others. They also learn the value of 'giving back' to the community that supports them. This in turn has visibly reduced the tendency towards children growing up feeling they are on their own.

9 The national children's charity Kids First, reported last year that children feel less isolated and alone than they did a decade ago in 2025. The Chief Executive of Kids First said...

We know children need just one dependable adult who they can rely on in their formative years. That makes all the difference and younger parents with more time to spend with their children are modelling sound parenting...

10 We've also noticed from the children we've spoken to that whilst they are very savvy about their rights as children, they are being brought up in a society where they are not the centre of their own universe. We think that is a good thing.

11 Community-run living centres have become the new social hubs. Operating from defunct or underused public sector buildings, for a peppercorn rent, these centres provide crèche facilities, homework clubs, sports and social activities and support groups for all ages. Staffed mainly by the recently retired and the “young” old, these places are so well used there is no need for any signs to direct people to relevant activities. As a volunteer pointed out in a living centre newsletter recently, signs? Why would we have signs? You don't need a sign in your own house to find the living room, do you?

12 The living centres have facilitated the creation of new community networks in affluent and deprived, rural and urban areas across England, where families can come together and share their knowledge about their social, economic and civil rights and gain access to public services. The centres also provide valuable support networks, where families facing similar problems can help each other navigate issues, through practical and emotional support.

Activism



#Project2035

13 Community centres and hubs also create a space for children to explore and discuss life, politics and their ambitions with other young people and adults in a supportive environment.

For older children and teenagers - with greater connections to their communities and a reduced sense of individualism - their better understanding of the inequalities in society has led to them being more politically engaged.

14 Young people are increasingly using their power to organise at the local and national level around issues that are important to them - climate change, social justice, and inequality.

In community hubs, they are more educated about the multiple channels by which to effect change, and more and more young people aged 16+ stand for elections (at the local, regional and national levels), participate in protests, sign petitions and boycott companies who have been called out for exploitation or environmental degradation.

Activism



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15 The #dontdrive campaign from 2033 was a prominent example of youth-led action, which called on young people to pledge not to learn to drive but instead champion cleaner forms of public transportation. Children and young people's voices have been crucial in changing environmental policies, and they now grow up with cleaner air, less pollution, carbon-emission-free public transport, and more green spaces to enjoy.

Activism



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16 Some older people complain about the state of the world today. They feel they are expected to do a lot for themselves, and in communities across the country they have to rely on each other. Older people are unhappy about the reduction in pensions, the increase in the state pension age to 75, and reduced NHS services. There is little by way of a state safety net for anyone struggling. However, older people have not mobilised along the same lines as young people, lacking the same vitality and time, as those under 75 are in (continued) employment of some form.

17 The creation of the 'National Children's Workforce' (NCW) over a decade ago has revolutionised child services in England. Although it was originally thought to be a waste of taxpayers' money, leaders within social care recognised that a rebranding would help all workers who work with children to feel bonded and better able to work together. It worked and today people who work for the NCW have the same pride to work there as people did working for the NHS in the early part of the century.

18 The children's workforce is now more integrated and effective. Joined-up services mean that children and families are dealing with less fragmentation in the system, and have their needs met in a holistic fashion. The National Children's Workforce has instilled a high level of dignity and self-respect among staff and volunteers, who each wear their 'NCW' lanyard with pride. Children's social work has become a highly valued profession - in terms of salary levels, personal development and training, and flexible working - and staff morale is high.

19 A happier, valued workforce feeds into better, more positive relationships with children and families, who trust, respect and recognise the expertise of the NCW. Furthermore, social workers have more time to develop strong trust-based relationships with other professionals and the families that they're working with, and in turn, families and children appreciate the warmth and competence exhibited by NCW staff.

20 Staff surveys amongst Social Workers, year-on-year, report one of the key reasons for high staff morale is because they feel valued and are making a difference in the lives of clients in a less pressured way.

21 The growing trend of converting disused and abandoned properties into new homes, using freely-available smart-design templates from the Community House Builders Federation, gives young people and their families more housing options. The conversion of empty homes means that communities are safer and more attractive to live in, thereby strengthening the local economy. Cooperative housing projects have been particularly successful, which are jointly owned and run by their tenants.

22 The government has provided special tax breaks for cooperative housing projects, and numerous blocks of flats (which had previously been ear-marked as unfit for purpose) have been taken over by local communities, who have jointly renovated the buildings and provided additional community support for elderly people and families with young children, through in-house creches and meeting rooms.

23 Cooperative housing follows a general trend of increasing community-owned and public spaces - both in urban centres and rural areas. Communities have worked together to reclaim derelict public spaces to create community gardens and green areas. Changes in land ownership and community empowerment legislation has enabled rural communities to purchase community-owned land, creating affordable housing, jobs and clean energy supplies. This type of community infrastructure is now perceived as a valuable resource that people can invest in when they are able to, and depend on when they need it.

Activism



#Project2035

24 Community-run living centres offer a range of leisure activities for children and young people to pursue at no-cost, such as sports clubs, chess clubs, arts and crafts, dance lessons, yoga, cinema nights and make-your-own-toy workshops. Children thus have more time to play, and to build friendships with neighbours and others in their communities. The centres also run toy, book and film libraries, where children can borrow and share video games, movies, books, board games and a host of other toys. This has led to a decrease in consumer spending on toys and games, which saves families money and contributes to environmental sustainability.

Activism



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25 With more time freed up by a shorter average workweek, increasing numbers of people are pursuing a 'side-hustle' business venture. However, rather than the purely profit-seeking 'side hustles' of the late 2010s, today people are - with greater ethical purchase and awareness - pursuing cooperative, family-run and social-value business ventures.

26 In their spare time, many parents can be seen working together on community business projects - such as community cafes, organic farm cooperatives and re-wilding tree-planting projects. The ancient English sense of 'making', of work, and of everyone putting their shoulder to the wheel, has led to stronger communities not to mention better mental health, particularly amongst men. Profit-driven business models are being replaced by non-profit, ethical and social-value business models, which seek to catalyse social and environmental change.

27 Children and young people are encouraged to purchase from ethical sources, they learn about the circular social economy at school, and they get first-hand experience of how to run cooperative, social businesses from their parents and communities. The traditional '3 Rs' in school have been replaced with 'reduce', 'reuse' and 'recycle'.

28 Communities are keen to use facilities more effectively. Local learning hubs include the use of public buildings and business premises. These are open 24/7 to allow people to learn at a time and pace that suits them. Further and higher education institutions have sought to support local learning hubs, to embed the values of community-empowered, lifelong learning in society. People can also study at home: the hubs are underpinned by technology, known as 'flipping the classroom', with learners downloading lectures and communicating online with educators and other students.

29 Young and old are able to combine study, work, family and community in a way that suits their individual circumstances and preferences, so that ongoing, flexible learning becomes part of life and not a precursor to life.

30 The new approach to continual, flexible learning is also reflected in changes to primary and secondary education. The educational system has become less competitive and more focussed on cooperation amongst educational and key welfare actors. There is less emphasis on testing and targets, and all exams are banned until the age of 15.

31 There has been a general move away from summative assessment (evaluating student learning at the end of a course and comparing it against a benchmark) towards formative assessment (supporting student learning through ongoing feedback), resulting in a shift away from 'achievement' towards continual learning, which is then encouraged at the tertiary level.

32 Education - from primary school to lifelong learning - has become focussed on creating environments that encourage wellbeing, and - along with this emphasis - developing the kind of analytical and empathetic skills, and emotional intelligence, that are impossible to 'automate away'. Pupil wellbeing - both physical and mental health - is prioritised above all else, and pupils are encouraged to pursue their own interests in creative ways, with less focus on rigid curriculums.

33 Children and young people with disabilities and special needs are fully supported and empowered to pursue their interests and make a full contribution to society. The Children's Covenant - which secures the rights of all children, regardless of their ability - has led to a reduction in stigma, and an increase in educational and welfare support for children with different abilities and needs. This attitudinal shift has been accompanied by the practical realisation at the policy level that designing services with a disability lens benefits everyone in society.

34 The more inclusive services are, the more accessible they are to all users. For instance, home automation systems and self-drive cars have improved access and support for people with disabilities, as well as elderly people and users in general. At a practice level, workers are listening, being clear with families about what they can and cannot do, and explaining what support they can expect.

35 There is still some way to go but much progress has been made with policies being increasingly designed with a disability- and environmental-lens, often revolutionising public and private transport systems and empowering people with disabilities and special needs by making technology accessible and simpler to use (for instance through voice commands).

36 Although there have been, at times, failures of leadership, as well as reductions in investment in public services, the move from central command-and-control policy-making to local democracy and community empowerment has changed the way in which children and young people are being supported.

37 The reduced amount of money in the system is being spent in the specific areas - affordable housing, accessible technology, joining-up educational and welfare services, workforce support - and is having an impact. For instance, the government report 'Designing Against Demand' of 2025 was influential in empowering the workforce to get alongside people to stop rising costs to the NHS and expensive residential care. This cooperative and community-led focus has often protected people from rising poverty and a retracting state, and is balancing off rights and responsibilities.

1 Today in 2035 there has been a collapse of children's services in some areas due to chronic under-investment. Councils maintain their statutory duty to protect the most vulnerable children and adults. However, due to constraints on budgets, they meet only the minimal requirements, and social workers, teachers and mental health workers often have to resort to crisis management. There is very little investment in preventative work.

Left Behind

2035

#Project2035

2 Thresholds for social work intervention are so high that unless a child is at imminent risk to themselves or others, little is done. Two years ago, the Police officially stopped sending Concern Reports of low-level negative behaviours to relevant social work departments. Nothing was ever done as hard-pressed social workers were only ever able to respond to the highest levels of risk.

3 Last year, the Association for Directors of Education similarly announced that it would only be making referrals to charities and third sector organisations in the hope of attracting support for struggling pupils and their families.

4 However, even third-sector organisations have been forced to reduce their volunteer-led children's services and many have been forced to shut down, owing to a combination of public sector cuts and a reduction in public donations, resulting from more people living in poverty following the financial crash. This has drastically reduced services for children.

5 Children's services themselves are fractured, under-funded and suffering from low staff morale and high levels of stress. Professionals and volunteers are under-paid and there is little training or practice learning for newly qualified Social Workers. As services are required to devote most of their time and energy to resolving crises amongst children and young people with multiple needs, they are unable to invest in long-term preventative measures that tackle root problems.

6 Having been let down so many times, professionals are viewed with suspicion by families. They are unable to develop meaningful, trust-based relationships with families, and are increasingly seen as part of the problem. This further decreases the morale of staff, who are trying hard to plug gaps with few resources, and know full well that more and more children are in urgent need of help.

7 Across England, more and more children are living in poverty, without their basic human needs being met. Professionals working in children's services are woefully aware of this and with only a small number of high-risk children are eligible for their support the phrase no statutory reason for our involvement is habitually typed into case notes.

8 The Chief Executive of the national charity 'Child Line' told a conference last month that: With rising levels of poverty and unemployment, increasing numbers of children are living in impoverished, neglectful and dangerous situations, where they may be subject to physical and emotional abuse. There are few places for these children to turn.

Left Behind

2035

#Project2035

9 A record number of young people have no option but to live on the street. Child homelessness has vastly increased, and given that funding for shelters and temporary housing has been cut, tens of hundreds of children are living in disused housing estates and in some areas vast tented camps have emerged that were once public parks. Lacking food, accommodation, sanitation and safety, many children in these makeshift camps are being exploited, manipulated, and forced into prostitution or selling drugs.

Left Behind



#Project2035

10 Education was once seen as a route out of poverty. However, the disinvestment in the education system has halted social mobility and worsened children's outcomes. Parents initially sought to plug the gap in education funding through regular donations to schools, to pay for basic equipment - such as paper and pencils. However, parental contributions led to further reductions in education spending, leading to the closure of many schools.

11 School closures has led to increased competition amongst parents to move to the 'right' catchment area so their children can attend a 'decent' school. This has led to poorer families being forced out of school catchment areas, due to rising housing prices, which in turn has led to greater levels of segregation within schools - with only children from families with high earnings being able to afford to attend. Children from poorer families and those with special education needs have either stopped going to school or have been forced to move to other areas.

12 School curricula have been tightly focussed on targets, exams, and 'achievement', but with little time to focus on pupil wellbeing. Children who do not perform well, or who misbehave, are treated punitively and threatened with expulsion - indeed, waiting lists for children to enter schools (since the widespread school closures) means that competition is extremely high not only to enter, but also to maintain a place at school.

13 Only children able to maintain high marks and educational standards are allowed to stay in school; with all children being scored on a monthly basis. Children feel increasingly pressured by a one-size-fits-all education system overwhelmingly focussed on rigorous testing and benchmarking, which negatively impacts their mental health.

14 State education has failed to move with the pace of the world - in particular, continuing advances in technology - and in consequence, while children work exceptionally hard to keep their places at school, the education system does not actually offer children the skills and competences required in the modern workplace.

Left Behind

2035


#Project2035

15 The education system is one-size-fits-all, which is all the funding will allow for. There are no support measures for children with different needs and there are no creative arts classes (i.e. drama, music, art). There is an enduring obsession with exams and curriculum and inspection reforms, which has led schools to focus exclusively on academic attainment rather than wellbeing.

16 Children in care, children with disabilities, children with learning needs, and children in poverty are more likely to struggle with the one-size-fits-all educational 'requirements' demanded by schools to win and maintain a place. Furthermore, there is no tailored support for such children in state schools. They are therefore more likely to be excluded from schools, despite the clear evidence over many years that children who are excluded have poorer outcomes going into adulthood.

17 The Children and Families Act of 2014, which tried to empower families of children with special education needs and disabilities, has long proven to be impossible to implement and tribunals are a rarity today. “What’s the point?”, one parent of a boy with special education needs complained on Twitter. Even if I win, everyone knows, nothing will happen. There’s no money for anything to be done. Parents and workers have become resigned to that and expect little from the state.

Left Behind



#Project2035

18 A higher number of children facing multiple disadvantages are being excluded from education, living in poverty, homeless, suffering from mental ill-health, lacking support from alternative provision and family and children's services, more likely to have contact with the criminal justice system and are generally excluded from society. In this way, exclusion is a rejecting act and sets many children and young people on what feels like a pre-determined path.

19 The National Crime Agency's annual report in 2033 explained that it was now unable to map out 'county drug lines', as drug trafficking routes were literally everywhere. An increasing number of socially excluded young people have joined local criminal gangs, which have carved some of the larger English towns and cities up into different 'zones', leading to 'turf wars'. Some of the more violent gang wars ways have rendered some districts 'no go zones'.

20 The criminal gangs have proven attractive to many marginalised young people as they provide a degree of acceptance, protection, respect and cultural identity. Gangs also provide a source of income to young people, through stealing and selling drugs. However, young people in gangs are at increased risk of drug addiction, sexual exploitation, violence, trafficking and criminal conviction.

21 The employment prospects for young people are worse than they used to be. There have been consistently high levels of youth unemployment since the financial crisis, with young people unable to get on the 'career ladder' and having to take up insecure, zero-hours, poorly paid roles. Furthermore, state school pupils are generally ill-prepared for the future job market, where robotics and AI have replaced many administrative and routine physical tasks, leading to a retrenchment of the economy around creativity and innovation.

22 In rough round figures, a third of state school pupils go onto vocational training, a third into work, and a third are not in education, employment or training. It is the latter group - who are not actively included in society - that are especially vulnerable to gang life.

23 A record number of children and young people suffer from mental ill-health, caused by chronic stress, post-traumatic disorders, loneliness, dysfunctional relationships, poor employment and housing prospects, and poor physical health. Over 65% of children and young people aged 12-24 have been diagnosed with, and sought help for a mental illness, including anxiety, depression, eating disorders, PTSD and bipolar disorder.

24 Tragically, the suicide rate amongst young people - in particular, young men - has continued to increase year on year since 2020, and there are now over 10,000 deaths by suicide per year.

Left Behind

2035



#Project2035

25 Loneliness has become a particular problem, as children and young people have become socially isolated from communities, which has fuelled a rise in drug addiction. This is especially evident in rural communities, where even fewer services are available. However, young people experiencing mental health problems or drug addictions are unable to receive support or treatment that could help them, due to the cuts to children's services and in particular CAMHS.

26 There are few dedicated spaces for children and young people to socialise and support each other. Funding for youth centres has been removed as 'non-core' services, and public parks have been poorly maintained or taken over by homeless groups. Community infrastructure has been left to fall away, as families no longer have the time or energy to invest in their neighbourhoods and communities. As a result, children and young people have access to few community networks, free leisure activities or opportunities to volunteer and find a sense of passion and fun in life.

27 Children and young people are seeing less of the world. Travel is completely curtailed and package holidays are expensive and out of reach for many families. Continuing failure of several airlines has led to an increase in flight costs and pushed up prices overall. The continuing weakness of the pound makes hotels, food and tourist prohibitively expensive.

Left Behind



#Project2035

28 During the summer holidays, the odd day out to a nearby coastal town in England and a packed lunch on the beach is the only holiday many kids can look forward to. Kelly, one of the volunteers at the 'Sunshine Trust' who arranges seaside trips, says it's ok. Throwing cheese sandwiches into bags she points out, many of these kids have never been off the estate, so this is like a holiday for them. However, taking shorter holidays in England, rather than going abroad, is benefiting the economy as well as the environment.

29 At the same time, the Government has strongly encouraged foreign tourism to England, where a weak pound means that holidays for non-Brits is economical, especially if they are staying in Airbnbs. However, this has the downside that, with an increasing number of people letting out their flats/houses to tourists through Airbnb, the rented housing stock has gone down and rental prices have gone up, leading to more families becoming homeless.

30 Community centres work closely with the local food banks and are often both located in the same place. Pop-up shops within church halls and disused buildings in town centres are used regularly to meet community needs. It's the only place to buy single nappies on a Friday to see you through the weekend says Bianca, regular at a local pop-up shop.

31 Women have less equality. There is less affordable childcare available, so many women are having to juggle low-paid home-based work with looking after the children. The gender gap has furthermore widened due to the restructuring of the labour market, as zero-hours and fixed-term employment contracts have become standard, and people have less job security.

32 Racism and xenophobia have been on the increase. Ethnic and racial minority groups and people with a migrant background have been targeted by extremist political groups and media, leading to shockingly high levels of hate crimes. Many of the new youth gangs that have emerged have also made 'hating foreigners' their raison d'être. Children from a BME or migrant background face extreme discrimination in all walks of life, from the education system to the job market.

33 Homophobia has also increased over time, undoing years of equalities gains for LGBTQIA+ communities. More and more children and young people in the LGBTQIA+ are refusing to publicly reveal their sexual orientation, and are suffering anxiety and depression as a result.

1 Today in 2035, communities reap the benefit of the huge levels of additional money that was injected into the sector during the 2020s. In part, this funding was used to support a national drive to reinvent, re-energize and reimagine community development work, fit for the 2030s.

Networked

2035



#Project2035

2 With a raft of 'Inclusion as Prevention' (IaP) projects around the country the evidence is clear that involving and including young people in decisions about their own lives reduces the likelihood of them entering the youth and criminal justice system.

Networked



#Project2035

3 A large amount of the 2020s investment was spent providing additional support for children within mainstream schools, ensuring that resources were available to include every child - regardless of ability or needs - within a mainstream school.

Networked



#Project2035

4 The Department for Education's 'Every Child is an Individual' report of 2025 was far-reaching in shaping educational reform around an inclusion agenda. Literally tens of thousands of people answered the call to work in schools with children in a variety of roles, meeting shortages in the educational sector and increasing the value, prestige and salaries of people working in school-related roles.

5 The 'Every Child is an Individual' report also encouraged a cultural shift in schools, with a greater emphasis on pupil engagement in school decision-making. Two notable outcomes of pupil engagement were the re-design of schools to be fully accessible and conducive to their mental and physical health, and a reform of the curriculum, signifying a move from summative assessment (exams) to continuous, formative assessment (ongoing learning).

6 With every child receiving a tailored education experience, an overall reduction in stigma has been reported by young people, who may have otherwise faced discrimination. This cultural change, initiated by the systems-wide change to the sector, has meant that nearly all children now attend some form of education setting and every young person is now being guided into the world of work or further/higher education by caring adults - some of whom are professionals, and some of whom are volunteers.

7 Health colleagues work very closely with children's services and educational institutions through smart data systems, and that intelligence is used to tackle negative behaviours at an early stage, and through 'inclusion as prevention' measures.

Networked



#Project2035

8 Sustained public health campaigns to change the eating and drinking habits of young people (and their families), particularly in areas of deprivation, have shown great results. Children report being happier, with higher levels of physical and emotional wellbeing and lower reported rates of stress and mental ill-health.

9 Today in 2035, any professional or volunteer working with children and young people has, as part of their training, the expectation that the system is:

- Child-focused - it ensures any child or young person – and their family – is at the centre of decision-making about the support available to them.
- Based on an understanding of the wellbeing of a child in their current situation. It takes into consideration the wider influences on a child or young person and their developmental

10 Professional training is also

- Focused on prevention - so that children and young people (and their families) stay well and understand how to be healthy and happy, thereby reducing physical and mental ill-health and avoiding potentially damaging behaviours.
- Underpinned by joined-up working - it is about children, young people, parents, and the services they need - all working together in a coordinated way to meet the specific needs of the individual and improve their overall wellbeing.

11 The children's professional workforce has worked hard to ensure all children and young people receive the right help, at the right time, from the right people. This has led to young people growing up feeling loved, safe and respected so that they can realise their full potential. Our system ensures children who need it get extra help, and it means families work in partnership with those who can support them through strong, trust-based relationships, such as teachers, doctors, social workers and nurses.

12 Children with disabilities or special education needs are provided with tailored support and the tools to integrate into mainstream education. More staff have been employed to specifically support children with additional support needs, while all teachers undergo extensive, ongoing training in how to support children of different needs, challenges and abilities.

13 Schools now have the time, resources, training and motivation to ensure that the individual needs of every child are met. School buildings and spaces have been redesigned through a 'disability lens', including wheelchair- and crutches-friendly access to all rooms and spaces, and 'calm rooms' for those children who need regular mental health breaks.

14 Children and young people who have other equalities characteristics - based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, or religion - have their rights respected and their needs accounted for. The children's workforce of professionals are better able to anticipate and identify any potential problems, barriers or discrimination that children with equalities characteristics may face at school, at home or in the community.

15 As children's services are fully integrated with other services - such as health education - they are able to work together effectively to minimise any negative consequences of discrimination (such as homophobia, racism, ableism, sexism, xenophobia) and support the wellbeing and resilience of children in dealing with these issues. A government drive to ensure policy coherence around inter-sectional equalities issues has further resulted in positive outcomes for children and young people.

16 The higher education sector has expanded its 'widening participation' portfolio, which has now become a statutory requirement of state-funded universities, and has seen increasing numbers of young people from disadvantaged and less-privileged backgrounds entering university. Tuition fees were scrapped in 2028, in response to spiralling levels of student debt, which further opened the doors of universities to families with less income.

17 With the further education sector proving to be less nimble in coping with the demands of the market and many colleges closed, however the network of vocational learning centres that replaced them in 2025 is continuing to perform well a decade on.

18 Young people entering the labour market are better-prepared, better-supported, more confident, and more qualified to embark on successful careers of their choosing. As children's services operate in a holistic way, this has encouraged joined-up working between schools, further/higher education institutions and employment agencies - encouraging a more seamless transition and blurring of the lines between education to employment. There are always people at every step mentoring children and young people along their post-education pathway.

19 In the labour market generally, there has been a curtailment of working practices that led to job insecurity in recent years, including the abolition of zero-hours contracts. More and more school-leavers and graduates are able to directly enter permanent employment. Technology has had an important impact on the labour market, which most children and young people are prepared for through their education and learning experiences.

20 The government has also introduced a Social Insurance Scheme to support workers into new jobs affected by AI - so parents (with benefits to their families) are re-trained within the labour market.

21 Today, in part through government funding, young people leaving home are fully supported to move into social housing, enhancing their independence and confidence.

22 Homelessness has rapidly fallen in recent years. As the Chief Executive of Shelter said last month, when opening a new complex of low-cost housing for former homeless people, “the private housing market bubble has finally burst as new, low-cost housing is introduced to the market, and housing becomes more affordable for all with smart design.”

23 Technology continues to enable transformation in many areas of life. Virtual personal assistants for older people, voice-activated technology, wearable technology, personal development apps all play their part. Families can access more services online. Augmented reality and AI have also made children's and young people's learning experiences in schools, colleges, universities more interactive and accessible.

24 Despite many years of professionals saying it could not be done, the children's workforce of today benefits from years of investment into data-sharing systems, to enable them to integrate data from different service providers, to create comprehensive datasets on individuals and families, enabling them to create accurate needs assessments.

25 Computer-driven systems work with big data and algorithms to make predictions about where needs may emerge, and what the effects of different interventions might be.

26 Finally, in 2027, 5G broadband was extended to every household in England, which has enabled children's services to use digital technology more effectively, and it has also empowered families from all backgrounds to connect, learn, and work more effectively and flexibly. The unintended negative consequences of technology (potential for exclusion, inaccessibility, ethical issues) have thus been mitigated.

27 Regional devolution has effectively transferred power to a level 'closer to the people' and regional assemblies have provided a new layer of democracy for people to participate. Regional devolution allows politicians and policy-makers to respond more effectively to the needs of regional populations and economies.

28 Over the years, regional executives have accumulated more and more powers from local authorities, especially in the areas of health, education and housing. Some people have welcomed this, saying that it allows for the standardisation of services across local communities. However, others have criticised the regional concentration of powers as disempowering local communities and creating the potential for a 'race to the bottom' mentality of reducing tax rates and de-regulating business.

29 Local communities themselves are 'surviving but not thriving' as the Chair of the Citizens Advice Bureau pointed out in their Annual Report this year. Regional assemblies have taken over many powers that councils used to exercise, and do not engage as extensively with community groups as the councils used to. Local community and voluntary groups therefore have less voice in decision-making over local issues. This has been partly offset by the efforts of national and regionally devolved services to include community organisations in 'joined-up' approaches to children's services, such as creating stronger links between schools and communities.

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30 Third sector and community organisations have also benefited from a change in public procurement practices, which has created more opportunities for collaborative commissioning and reduced the competitive drive for funding.

1 Today in 2035, England is a country with entrenched inequalities. There are ever-widening gaps between rich and poor, North and South, privileged and less-privileged. The level of wealth inequality between the richest and poorest people in England is the highest in the developed world.

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2 Many neglected regions in England, particularly in the North, have experienced half a century of stagnation and decline, while London and the South-East continue to benefit from private-sector growth. Many children and young people live in households in which parents are forced into low-paid and insecure work.

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3 People with protected equalities characteristics - race, ethnicity, ability, gender, sexual orientation, religion - face even greater discrimination today with the gradual dismantling of protections, meaning worse life outcomes than straight, white, able-bodied men (SWAMs).

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4 Decades of welfare cuts have created a significant segment of the population living in absolute poverty, forced to rely on food banks and other forms of charity to get by. These conditions have worsened with the food and medicine shortages, which have pushed prices out of reach for low-income families.

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5 Doctors are seeing higher levels of malnutrition amongst children and young people, due to a lack of fruit and vegetables in their diet (which are too expensive for many to buy). There has also been a return of several 'Victorian-age' diseases due to poor nutrition, poverty, and people being forced to live in squalid, cramped conditions - including polio, tuberculosis and rickets.

6 Children from deprived backgrounds are more likely to enter the prison system than the job market, and are more likely to experience mental health difficulties throughout their lives. They are also more likely to have been excluded from the school system - where privatisation has eroded the quality and existence of state schools - and are therefore more likely to be illiterate, significantly reducing their job prospects.

7 In contrast, in the affluent areas across England, young people have life experiences that are radically different from those in deprived areas. Living in private housing, with access to expensive high-quality food, private medical and dental care, and private schooling, wealthier young people have been unaffected by the economic recession.

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8 Becoming very popular in the 2020s, affluent, middle-class parents routinely set up extensive off-shore investments, have been buffered from the financial crash. Their children are likely to attend private university-level learning centres and go on to become the 'elite' of society - lawyers, politicians, judges and bankers. While a proportion of wealthy children have equalities characteristics - such as being disabled - their families have been able to purchase disability AI products, thereby largely avoiding discrimination. State provided children's services are practically non-existent for these large swathes of the population.

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9 In educational terms, the differences for rich and poor could not be wider. For children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, school is a penance and access is limited. School hours have been reduced to 9:00-11:30am due to budget cuts and staff shortages, thereby reducing the time to learn.

10 The curriculum is basic and harsh, focussed on a rigorous testing regime, with no room for creativity or difference. There is little emphasis on technology, health sciences or innovation, which is necessary for today's job market.

11 Many state schools have been shut down across the country, due to a lack of funding and investment, leaving many children without access to a formal education, and relying on parents' limited time and ability to home-school. Pupils attending state schools are expected to maintain a high grade point average (a system adopted from the USA), or otherwise face punishment.

12 Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds often have difficulty dealing with this highly demanding and competitive education system, and more and more children find themselves excluded from the education system entirely.

Children with complex needs who are not sufficiently supported by children's services often take their frustrations out in school, putting further strain on the education system. Lack of coordination between children's services and schools means there is little in the way of 'wrap-around' help for these children.

13 For children from wealthier backgrounds, the educational options are quite different. Underperforming state schools have mostly closed down in the South of England, as parents invest in private education. At the fee-paying private schools, young people and their parents demand learning and tuition in computer science, software development and financial management. Soft skills are seen as important to the changing job market. Many young people aim to become self employed and provide artisan bespoke services.

14 The Independent School Association has pointed out a sharp increase in recent years in the number of children and young people presenting with mental ill-health issues. They said in an article last month, “even though there is so much support given to our children, that in itself can feel like quite an artificial environment at times and for some the ‘small things’ can become ‘big things’ in their lives. Unfortunately, self harming and eating disorders have continued to increase in our schools despite our best efforts”.

15 Affluent young people are well rehearsed in the kinds of jobs which AI will create and which ones it will replace. Today in 2035, they are entering the world of work demanding a new deal from employers. They know that they have skills which are in demand.

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16 Many poorer young people have not gone to 'traditional universities' which have been dramatically devalued in recent years. They instead go, at a high cost, to highly sought after privately-run learning centres which prepare young people with the required, adaptive skills for tomorrow's labour market. When they enter the high-end of the labour market, young people from more affluent backgrounds have more choice, in terms of sector and region.

17 With advancements in technology, people are no longer bound to live where they work, and as such, people with good educations and jobs can move to rural areas for a better quality of life for themselves and their families, and to get away from crime-ridden urban areas. Many affluent people live in 'gated communities' where they collectively employ private security firms to protect their properties.

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18 Young people from wealthier backgrounds have populated the senior management ranks of UK branches of American multinationals that have monopolised the 'gig economy', such as Uber, Google and Amazon. Through successfully lobbying, they have been able to maintain tax breaks and weaken industrial relations, to ensure the stability of the gig economy. This has resulted in lower amounts of money being invested in public services and weaker trade unions.

19 For young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, social mobility has ground to a halt. They find it challenging to find permanent, well-paid employment; instead, zero-hours contracts in low-paid industries is the norm. Young people from low-income backgrounds, unable to gain an education, are often forced into the black market, working for criminal gangs who sell illegal drugs and counterfeit goods.

20 Poverty and homelessness are at an all-time high for society's most vulnerable people with protected characteristics.

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21 Despite automation having eliminated many jobs, those who do work still work long hours for relatively little reward, with little time for their families, self-care or maintaining a work-life balance. Young people educated at state schools lack the skills and abilities to succeed in the fast-growing technological and health sciences industries.

22 Furthermore, as the workplace has become more based around digital and AI technology and the use of various innovative techniques and devices, this often reinforces existing inequalities, with those from poorer backgrounds less likely to have been educated in these technologies, less likely to own 'smart' devices, and less likely to grow up learning how to make the most of the opportunities they offer.

23 Many young people, particularly from refugee, migrant and socially disadvantaged backgrounds, find it very hard to find out what it is necessary for them to do to access employment and further education opportunities.

24 Children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds do not believe that they will have a better quality of life than their parents, and with the odds stacked against them, many have become fearful of the future, triggering a range of mental health disorders. However, the lack of investment in children's services and mental health services for young people has created a vicious cycle - issues continue to manifest themselves later in life, putting more pressure on the prison system and other services.

25 A sense of hopelessness pervades those communities which are 'left behind' and struggle financially; drug use and alcohol dependence has increased amongst the most vulnerable families in society.

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26 Housing has become precarious for those on low incomes. The old, remaining stock of social housing has been increasingly converted into private homes through a new regulation, thus reducing the number of affordable, low-cost homes left in England. People from disadvantaged backgrounds predominantly live in low-quality, rented, temporary accommodation.

27 People living in extreme poverty live on the streets. Home ownership is a luxury of the rich, with homes now costing an average of 10x people's annual salaries.

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28 Young people growing up in a stable environment with a strong support network of private teachers, doctors and tutors can cope with the world, and often thrive. However, those without this find the transition to adulthood to be very difficult, and often experience stress and anxiety.

29 A large proportion of the child population has a standard of living which cuts them off from many of the opportunities enjoyed by their wealthier peers. Those children and young people facing multiple disadvantages feel fatalistic about their life chances.



**Extract from The President of the ADCS,
inaugural speech, June 2035**

Fifteen years ago we faced a crisis in this country. Academics and commentators point to 2020 as a crossroads in the history of children's services in England.

At that time I remember taking up my first social work post in a Children and Families Team. I was 25. I remember thinking:

God, I'm not sure we like children very much!

Activism

Today in 2035, the world has moved on, and our profession has too, in so many ways. Perhaps it was the lack of money in the system back then, maybe it was because services were being cut to the bone, perhaps it was a point in time when tired and frustrated workers finally said enough is enough and spoke out with a righteous anger about the way our most vulnerable children were being treated. Perhaps it was all of those underlying issues, but by 2021 youth-led protests in towns and cities across England - dubbed the 'summer of millennial discontent' by the media - pierced the conscience of the establishment and something changed.

From a place of near despair and crisis, there came defiance and strength of voice from our

2035

sector that I am so proud of, which changed our attitudes to children and young people, and the families we worked with.

From the top to the bottom of children's services, we started really listening to children, young people and their families. We listened, and over a long and bumpy decade, we changed our practices and re-designed our systems to respond to their needs, to ensure every single thing professionals did showed each and every child that they were loved, that they were safe and they were being listened to.

That mantra changed everything. Not just in our profession, but in all areas of society. It has spread in all sorts of ways to all sorts of

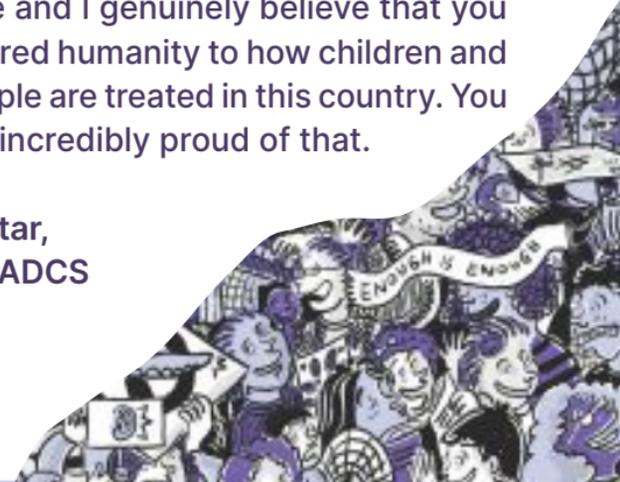
communities, both rich and poor. Over the last fifteen years you have been instrumental in supporting many adults to recognise that the way in which they exercise their role - to parent, support and nurture children and young people - is central. You have given them, and the wider community confidence, to act.

Colleagues, you have helped bring about profound change in a time of extreme turbulence and I genuinely believe that you have restored humanity to how children and young people are treated in this country. You should be incredibly proud of that.

Samira Antar,
President ADCS

Activism

2035





**Extract from The President of the ADCS,
inaugural speech, June 2035**

Colleagues, we have failed! We have fundamentally failed to understand the difference between a protection system and a care system. I came into this profession to uphold the latter, but my whole professional life has seen me work in the former. We, and many others, have failed to listen to our children and young people, many of whom feel unsafe, anxious and unhappy. We are not alone in our failure. Politicians for over

thirty years have chosen not to invest in a care system that supports, loves and listens to the most vulnerable people.

Today we see the impact of chronic underinvestment with the latest research showing that one in every two children in England are now living in poverty, with half a million children requiring an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC) - which represents an increase of one third since 2022. Latest figures show that for 2034, 350,000 Section 47 child protection enquiries have been undertaken.

Most worryingly, over 65% of children and young people are now seeking support for mental health conditions, and the suicide

rate amongst teenagers has doubled in the last five years, The situation has spiralled out of control and I would argue that this is, in part, because we have been forced as a sector to dismantle some of the hard-won advancements we were able to make to child services prior to 2019, and instead, since then, to retrench into the basic role of maintaining a child protection system for the state. Colleagues, we have moved backwards, and we continue to regress. We need new ideas for new times. How are we to address this calamitous state of affairs. I am pleading with you: as a sector we must respond. Will you answer this call for leadership and work together to stand up and fight against these chronic, system-wide problems?

Abka Salatian,
President ADCS

Left Behind

2035





**Extract from The President of the ADCS,
inaugural speech, June 2035**

Building on the Association's important research in 2019, the Government's seminal report of 2022 'England, a country that works for every child' set out a bold vision for the sector, written from a whole-systems perspective to sit alongside the NHS long-term plan to 2030.

At that time, the government pledged £2 billion to meet the funding shortfall in

children's services with a further commitment of £4 billion to local authorities, up to 2035, to specifically support professionals to work together more effectively when working with children and young people. A decade on, what difference has that investment made? How are we getting on? What would our report card say?

The vision and strategy document 'England, a country that works for every child' was based on realigning children's services in a number of progressive ways. Several key principles guided the journey:

- ✓ moving from cost to value
- ✓ from process to outcomes
- ✓ from exclusion to inclusion

- ✓ from reaction to prevention
- ✓ from risk to trust and permission

The Government's clarity of vision and investment in children's services, coupled with strong, collaborative leadership and management, has enabled the sector to develop new ways of working that connects professionals, allows systems to talk to each other, and encourages collaborative practice.

There is always room for improvement but I would say our report card would read 'surpassed expectations'.

Jessica Wilson,
President ADCS

Networked

2035





**Extract from The President of the ADCS,
inaugural speech, June 2035**

*The Chairman of the Artificial Intelligence
Confederation was quoted last month at the
London Stock Exchange.*

He said the net effect of AI on the labour
market has meant more jobs for the highly
skilled for the fifth consecutive year. It is
some consolation to live in England in which
many people can prosper, not just survive.
Our society has probably never been more

competitive or territorial, even if this has been
achieved at some cost to social cohesion
and morale.

Colleagues, as I reflected on that statement, I
have come to realise that as a society we now
seem quite at ease openly expressing the view
that prosperity for some is more important
than social cohesion. Being “competitive and
territorial” is to be celebrated?!

Our society is fractured as consecutive
governments have allowed the markets
to commodify everything from education,
services and even health and social care.
We are living through a time when half the
country is living with poor health and poor
housing with low expectations and half the

country is living a life of comfort, high levels of wellbeing and wealth. As a sector, we have realigned children and family services over the last five years, directing the little resources we have to those who cannot afford to pay for it. This week I have written to the Minister for Children and Families restating my belief and fear that serious risk exists to many vulnerable children and young people within our communities. Vulnerable young people who are at risk of manipulative gangs, organised crime and sexual exploitation.

Lack of investment over many years has meant that services are still forced to focus on crisis resolution in these areas rather than tackling root causes. We have squandered chances over many years with successive

governments failing to accept that it has a role in managing markets, particularly those 'markets' where the state is the only purchaser of provision.

Colleagues, I call on government, as my predecessors before me, to prevent private profiteering off the backs of vulnerable children.

**Michael Sloan,
President ADCS**

