

# Grief, anger and re-engagement: post-referendum feelings and action

June—August 2016



---

## Background and summary

This paper has two parts. The first part contains quotations from, and links to, general articles about the referendum that took place in the United Kingdom on 23 June 2016. The second part contains quotations and links specifically concerned with responsibilities and priorities in the field of education.

All the articles express feelings of grief and anger about the referendum's outcome. Also, however, all express determination not to give in to feelings of depression and despair.

---

## PART ONE: GENERAL ARTICLES

1) In therapy, everyone wants to talk about Brexit

by Susie Orbach, The Guardian, 1 July 2016

<https://www.theguardian.com/global/2016/jul/01/susie-orbach-in-therapy-everyone-wants-to-talk-about-brexit>

"We are a week in, and every therapy session has started with Brexit. They've stayed with it, too. The shock, the fear, the dismay, the feelings of shame, of being unsafe, of being misplaced and unwanted. Notions of what the UK has stood for in people's consciousness are being shredded. The vote experienced as an assault on senses of self, of identity and community that people didn't know they carried inside of them and relied upon until the vote shattered it.

“People express anger and despair. The image of where they lived, and what the country has meant to them, is pushing them to consider what kind of fantasy they (and, of course, many of us) have lived with until it came crashing down a week ago. Were they delusional, some ask, to not see the level of alienation and despair that has gripped so much of the country? Were they living in a fairytale in which despite the woes of the last years, it all works out in the end? ... Has Britain become the kind of family in which one side is not talking to the other? ”

2) For the first time in my life, I feel ashamed to be British

by Mathew Parris, The Spectator, 9 July 2016

<http://www.spectator.co.uk/2016/07/for-the-first-time-in-my-life-i-feel-ashamed-to-be-british/>

“I’ve seen a nasty side to our national character, and seen colleagues and friends pander to it in a way I never thought they would.”

2) Brexit blues

by John Lanchester, London Review of Books, 28 July 2016

<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v38/n15/john-lanchester/brexit-blues>

“To be born in many places in Britain is to suffer an irreversible lifelong defeat – a truncation of opportunity, of education, of access to power, of life expectancy. The people who grow up in these places come from a cultural background which equipped them for reasonably well-paid manual labour, un- and semi- and skilled. Children left school as soon as they could and went to work in the same industries that had employed their parents. The academically able kids used to go to grammar school and be educated into the middle class.

“All that has now gone, the jobs and the grammar schools, and the vista instead is a landscape where there is often work ... but it’s unsatisfying, insecure and low-paid. This new work doesn’t do what the old work did: it doesn’t offer a sense of identity or community or self-worth. The word ‘precarious’ has as its underlying sense ‘depending on the favour of another person’. Somebody can take away the things you have whenever they feel like it. The precariat, as the new class is called, might not know the etymology, but it doesn’t need to: the reality is all too familiar.”

3) Five lessons we urgently need to learn from the Remain campaign’s failure

by Adam Wagner, Human Rights News, 27 June 2016

<http://rightsinfo.org/brexit-five-lessons/>

"The UK electorate has decided to leave the European Union. It didn't have to be this way, but it was always likely to happen. Let me explain why, using the human rights debate as an analogy. I will also suggest five key lessons."

4) It is easy to despair of our leaders, but Brexit has exposed Britain's rotten core

By Linda Colley, The Guardian, 10 July 2016

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/10/britain-needs-more-than-theresa-may-to-reshape-democracy>

"Cameron did not ... opt for a referendum on the EU chiefly to cater to democracy. He did what he did to placate his party's Eurosceptic wing and in an attempt to scuttle Ukip. Shouldn't some thought be given as to how, in the future, we might better protect our politics from such partisan, cynical and lazy deployments of this device: a device that by definition reduces the most complex and technical questions to a crude yes or no?"

5) Brexit vote explained: poverty, low skills and lack of opportunities by Matthew Goodwin and Oliver Heath, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 31 August 2016

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/brexit-vote-explained-poverty-low-skills-and-lack-opportunities>

"This report provides unprecedented insight into the dynamics of the 2016 vote to leave the EU, showing how a lack of opportunity across the country led to Brexit. Devoting specific attention to data on the roles of poverty, place and individual characteristics driving the leave vote, the report shows how Britain was divided along economic, educational and social lines."

6) The aftermath of the Brexit vote – the verdict from a derided expert by John van Reenan, London School of Economics, 2 August 2016

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/the-aftermath-of-the-brexit-vote-a-verdict-from-those-of-those-experts-were-not-supposed-to-listen-to/>

"There are multiple reasons for the Brexit vote, but by far the most important one can be summarised in a single word: immigration. In the last few weeks before the vote, the Leave campaign was ruthless in focusing on our fears of foreigners. Sadly, with the exception of London, this has been shown time and time again to be a great vote winner all over the world."

7) How the EU referendum exposed how toxic 'British Values' really are by Kieran Yates, The Fader

<http://www.thefader.com/2016/06/30/eu-referendum-british-values-essay>

" ... This line, 'We want our country back', has been heard for years, in pubs across small towns, on EDL marches and on Twitter, but it was inescapable in the weeks leading up to June 23's EU referendum. It was heard from politicians' mouths across the political spectrum, displayed on placards at political rallies from racist political organisations such as Britain First, and shouted down megaphones by the likes of far-right party UKIP's leader Nigel Farage while on a chartered flotilla sailing down the River Thames. It ended up becoming the unofficial slogan for a campaign spearheaded by Conservative politician Boris Johnson to leave the E.U., which scraped a win with 52 per cent of the vote last week.

"The idea that a very distinct notion of British identity needs to be reclaimed, and the reassertion of an abstract notion of 'lost' sovereignty, has been key to the Leave campaign. As any one of the U.K.'s 7.5 million foreign-born residents knows, what 'We want our country back' ultimately translates to is the promise of Britain without immigrants. By manipulating the idea of leaving the EU to fit into people's own pre-existing fears and prejudices, the Leave campaign neatly provided an explanation that Britain's problems stemmed from immigration, and that stopping it was the remedy.

"For many white working class communities, still living with the crippling economic policies of Margaret Thatcher, the fear and lived experience of unwelcome change is a real one. The Leave campaign plainly spoke to those uncertainties, trading on fear-mongering about the numbers of migrants in the country, and offering the solution of tighter border controls. To much of the country, who might have previously felt voiceless, it was a rousing argument, and one that led them to articulate their experiences through the vote. In the same way that Trump is finally speaking to the common man (a byword for white, working class Americans), the hard right has spoken to the U.K."

8) How Brexiteers appealed to voters' nostalgia  
by Elliott Green, London School of Economics, 30 August

"Now the dust has settled a bit on last month's vote, we should reflect on the deep conflicts it revealed about what sort of nation the UK's people would like it to be. One little-noted fact is that the referendum asked voters about leaving or retreating from a political project. Most referendums do the opposite. The vast majority of modern national referendums are about undertaking a new project, whether joining the EU, approving a new constitution or constitutional amendments, becoming a republic or an independent state. In these cases, the referendums invited countries to take a step forward into a new future – one in which life would be better than it had been before."

## PART TWO: ISSUES AND TASKS IN SCHOOLS

9) Brexit stress is filtering down to children: adults must talk to them  
by Diane Taylor, The Guardian, 30 June 2016

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/30/brexit-stress-children-adults-referendum-positive-messages>

"It is vital that we talk to children honestly about the referendum and its implications. With both sides campaigning with such negative language and imagery, children will have picked up on this and it is urgent to offer some positive messages. Irrespective of the political tumult raging beyond the school gates, educational establishments should be at the forefront of proactively reinforcing values of belonging, respect and equality – all different, all equal. Schools are ideally placed to provide a safe space for students who are scared and confused to ask any questions they want answers to.

"As the days go by, the recriminations increase. Leave campaigners are accused of having been at best economical with the truth, while the remain campaign stands accused of concentrating on scaremongering ahead of emphasising the positives of EU membership. Children deserve some honest explanations as this unfolds. If we seize this window of opportunity to have open and honest discussions with them about the referendum and its implications, we might be able to avoid the next generation being swept up in the fears and uncertainties that have fuelled the racism and anti-migrant sentiment that came to a head last week."

9) Supporting young people in post-referendum Britain  
by Sarah Soyei

<http://www.equaliteach.co.uk/blog/4582780646/>

"... In a time of fear and uncertainty such as this, it is important that young people are provided with the opportunity to explore their feelings; that they are given opportunities to talk about the referendum and what it means for them and others. Pupils need to be equipped with skills to think critically about information, reject prejudice and hate, and feel confident to speak up and ask for help and support if they need it.

"Equaliteach has worked with the teaching union NASUWT over the past year to produce an educational resource called Universal Values. The resource was produced in response to the duty to promote Fundamental British Values, which has been interpreted by some schools as a requirement to espouse stereotypes about Britain and hang Union Jacks throughout the school. This approach can

further increase alienation amongst those who feel that they don't fit into this vision of Britain.

"However, the Fundamental British Values are defined as: democracy, individual liberty, rule of law, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. All of these values underpin the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and rethinking the values as universal prevents any conflation between British stereotypes and history and values education, and helps us to consider this duty in an inclusive fashion.

"Whilst promoting these values is not explicitly about Britishness, giving young people the opportunity to explore, understand and celebrate their own personal and social identity and the identities of others can be really valuable. In undertaking this work, pupils can recognise that we all have multiple layers to our identities and that there is not just one way to belong to Britain, which can support pupils to express their own, individual identity and help pupils to develop mutual respect and understanding of others."

10) How to make pupils feel safer post-EU referendum

by Diane Leedham, Schools Week, 27 June

<http://schoolsweek.co.uk/how-to-make-eal-pupils-feel-safe-post-eu-referendum/>

"There is a vital role for leaders and governors to demonstrate in practical ways, such as assemblies, displays and imaginative activities, that all of our pupils are welcome and everyone belongs to the school and local community. You can ensure your school makes visible the global contribution to our shared history and includes global languages and literature, community narratives/history and multilingual creativity.

"... Bear in mind that a child who has just been abused in the street may balk at 'tolerance' presented as a Fundamental British Value. However they may fear to say this in case that shows them to be 'radicalised'. There has never been a better opportunity to ensure critical thinking approaches are embedded.

"... Leaders should also carefully monitor any spike in prejudice-related incidents in school, including 'banter' and make sure there are clear systems in place for reporting these and responding which all staff and children understand ... New DfE Census requirements to report place of birth and nationality will need sensitive mediation in the current context and whatever the future may bring, children and families should be reassured that at present we are still in the EU and there will be no immediate changes to their status. Going forward, proactive

provision of reliable sources of information and help with translation if necessary will be crucial."

11) An open letter to the secretary of state for education  
by David Lundie and many others, c/o Liverpool Hope University, 27 July 2016  
<http://www.hope.ac.uk/news/newsitems/expertswriteopenlettertosecretaryofstateforeducation.html>

"... We acknowledge that the referendum has raised deep questions about identity and belonging for many young people, for which an increasingly narrow academic curriculum has left them ill-equipped. In addition to acquiring knowledge, young people need to successfully develop conflict resolution, decision making skills, self-regulation, self-respect, negotiation and respect for those with different beliefs and values.

"We join with the many voices from faith and political leaders in condemning the rise of xenophobic and racist attacks. Schools provide an important space for dialogue, where opinions can be expressed, respected and evaluated. While we are aware of the many pressing matters for your attention, we ask you to make time to listen to existing good practice in spiritual, moral, social and cultural education from the religious education, citizenship and personal, social, health and economic education professional communities.

"We call on government to enable teachers to continue the good work of asking challenging questions, acknowledging the discomfiting nature of some of the answers, and promoting a vision of our young people as global and European citizens.

"Now is the time to commit to a renewed conversation about our shared national values, ensuring that young people's voices are heard. In particular, we are aware of the dangers of some schools misinterpreting the need to promote fundamental British values in ways which close down, rather than open up, meaningful discussions. Religious Education and assemblies are often the areas of school life where local and community concerns can most effectively be addressed, but we also recognise the fragility of these areas of the curriculum, which are increasingly being squeezed out by time pressures for 'core' academic subjects.

"This space for learning and for dialogue needs to permeate the whole curriculum and culture of schools, and not be seen as the preserve of any one curriculum subject. We also stress the need for democratic, moral and citizenship education to be experiential, something in which students participate, and not something which is done 'to' them. We encourage school leaders to

include both local and global perspectives across the curriculum and to draw hope from the continuing good practice of teachers in this area."

12) Citizenship in the aftermath of Brexit

by Russell Hobby, National Association of Head Teachers,

<http://www.naht.org.uk/welcome/news-and-media/blogs/russell-hobby-general-secretary/citizenship-in-the-aftermath-of-brexit/>

"Every leader faces a choice. They can speak to the part of us that is angry and fearful, or they can speak to the part which is optimistic and generous. All too often it is easier to exploit anger than hope. This is a dangerous game though. It licences a more aggressive and intolerant society.

"How do we help young people navigate this terrain? What does it mean to teach citizenship in the aftermath of Brexit?

"The first thing to note is that the facts matter. Citizenship is, at least in part, about informed decision-making, of weighing arguments and choosing amongst them, spotting the fudges and misdirections. We can rely on warm feelings and gut instincts or we can bring the facts to bear.

"This means that knowledge is the foundation of citizenship. History, geography, economics, science. These matter as the raw material of an informed and sceptical citizenry. Numeracy matters - if only because it might help people calculate a rebate properly. We cannot counter a post-fact, post-modern politics with a post-fact, post-modern curriculum. The results of the referendum should be a wake-up call to all progressives who oppose a knowledge rich curriculum.

"But knowledge is insufficient. It must be motivated by a vision and by values. It must be used. This means helping to nurture a generation who are not merely there to implement the goals of others, to do the tasks set for them, with their hard won expertise, as good little technocrats. It needs a generation who will ask why as well as how. Who will pose difficult questions, dissent, mobilise and lead. There is too often a strain within our education debates that sounds like the objective is creating good workers, rather than awkward citizens.

"This shouldn't be a selfish demand for their rights and privileges. It should be about responsibility and the interconnections that help us all thrive. Increasingly I see the importance of debating clubs, adventure activities and community service as components of a rounded education. They will help mobilise and direct the vital knowledge gained in the classroom. And we need to cultivate scientific mindsets that see challenge and critique as the best way to reduce errors.



"There is much for school leaders to reflect upon within our current turmoil. And much they can do to prevent a repeat."

---

