



COMMITTED TO EQUALITY

Government action on equality and the role of the National Equality Panel

The benefits of equality

Equality is important because:

- Individuals have the right to be free from prejudice and discrimination.
- An equal society is more at ease with itself and more cohesive.
- It benefits the economy, with employers able to access a wider labour pool, and more opportunities available for potentially marginalised groups. A nationally diverse workforce also helps us compete in the global economy.
- Introduced new rights for working families to request flexible working. Currently, 14 million employees in the UK are working flexibly.
- Introduced over 2,900 Sure Start children's centres offering services to over two million young children, many of them from low income families.
- Helped to tackle health inequalities by banning smoking in public places. Smoking is more prevalent in poorer communities and the ban has contributed to a 22% increase in the number of people who successfully quit, with the health benefits this brings.
- Extended the employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. This means that seven million more jobs are now available to disabled people, giving them more opportunities than ever before.

Making progress

Since 1997 the Government has taken the following action to reduce inequality in society:

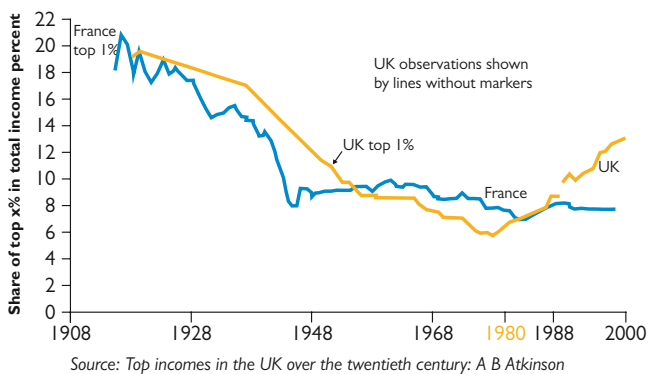
- Introduced the National Minimum Wage which has contributed to a reduction of nearly 5% in the pay gap between men and women.



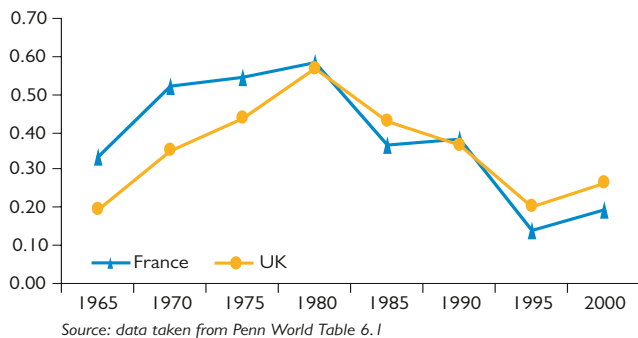
But challenges remain

Growth in income at the top

- In the UK and France the trends are very similar until 1980. But from then on the gap between the top and the bottom widened in the UK in a way that it did not in France, while GDP grew at a similar rate over that period.

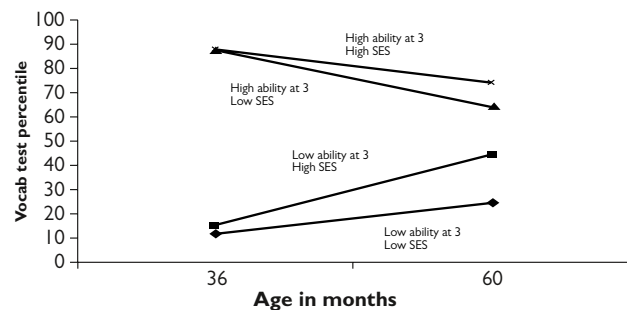


GDP Growth rates: UK and France



Educational attainment

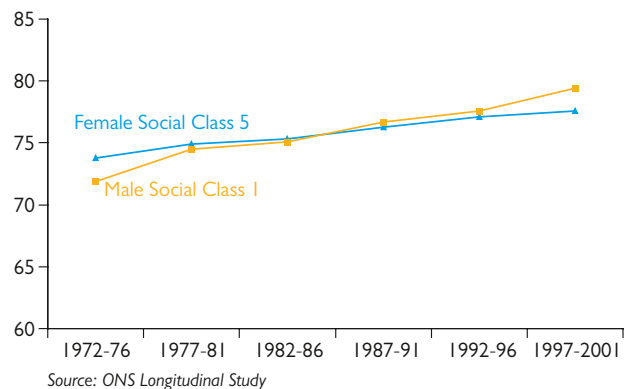
- If trends continue, children who are more affluent will overtake poor, but more able, children by the age of six.



Source: GEO's elaboration on Feinstein, L. (2003), Inequality in the Early Cognitive Development of British Children in the 1970 Cohort, *Economica*

Life expectancy

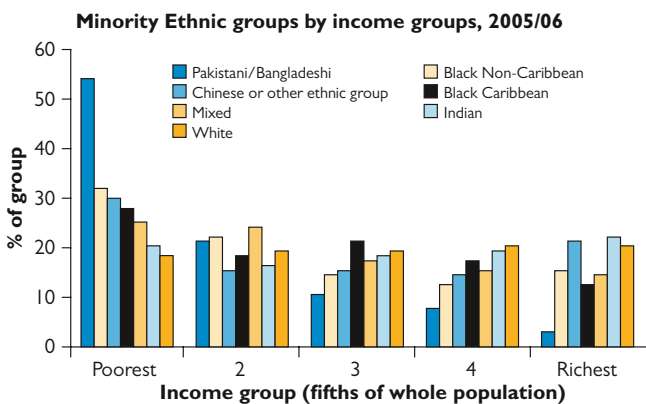
- Men who are more affluent are now expected to live longer than poorer women.





Income levels among ethnic minority groups

- Income levels are lower amongst certain ethnic minority groups compared to the rest of society.



Source: Family Resources Survey 2005 to 2006

- Maximise job opportunities and narrow the gap in employment rates for disadvantaged groups such as disabled people, lone parents, ethnic minorities, people over 50, those with no qualifications and those living in the most deprived local authority wards.
- Tackle the disadvantage that people experience because of their gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, and religion or belief.

A changing world

- Changes in the economy, demography, in technology, and in family structures pose different challenges to the creation of a more equal society.
- To continue to make progress it is important to understand those challenges and how they interlink.
- The Government will consider what the best available evidence shows, and what it says about how to tackle both the different, and the most entrenched, aspects of inequality.
- That is why the National Equality Panel has been established.

More to do

The Government intends to:

- Reduce health inequalities by 10% by 2010.
- Narrow the gap in educational achievement between children from low income and disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers.



The work of the National Equality Panel

- The Panel will be chaired by Professor John Hills of the London School of Economics and Political Science. It will analyse the factors that contribute to inequality, as well as the links between them, and will fill the gaps in our understanding of inequality in a changing world.
- The Panel will provide the evidence to show how your chances in life are influenced not only by your gender, ethnic background, age, and whether or not you have a disability, but also by:
 - your family background
 - your educational attainment
 - where you live
 - what kind of work you do
 - how much money you have
- A fuller understanding of how different kinds of inequality interact and how they affect the well being, choices, and quality of life of different individuals will enable the Government to tackle the problem.
- The Panel has been asked to present its independent report to the Minister by the end of November 2009.

Further information

- For further information on the work of the Panel or the Government Equalities Office please visit www.equalities.gov.uk. You can contact the Government Equalities Office direct by sending an email to enquiries@geo.gsi.gov.uk or calling 020 7944 0601.