



# Work, Wealth & Wellbeing

A Collective Reimagining  
of Social Cohesion



UK Bahá'í  
Office of  
Public Affairs

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# Work, Wealth and Wellbeing: A Collective Reimagining of Social Cohesion

## Prologue

The UK Bahá'í Office of Public Affairs (OPA) represents the Bahá'í community in its relations with government, civil society, and the media, contributing to values-driven national conversations on issues of social importance. This report arises from its most recent initiative — a series of consultative roundtable discussions convened across England and the devolved nations in collaboration with local partners.

The initiative was launched in response to growing concern about the relationship between socio-economic life and social cohesion in the United Kingdom. At a time marked by rising living costs, widening inequality, increasing social fragmentation, and declining trust in institutions, the project sought to explore how prevailing ideas about work, wealth, wellbeing, and human value are shaping both individual experience and collective life. The roundtables created space for deeper reflection on questions that are often treated primarily in economic or political terms: What kind of society are current social and economic arrangements producing? What assumptions about human nature underpin them? And what conditions are necessary for people and communities not only to survive, but to flourish together?

The approach taken in this initiative was informed by Bahá'í principles that shaped both the framing and spirit of the conversations. Central among these is the belief that every person possesses an inherent nobility beyond economic or social status; that material and spiritual progress are inseparable; and that the wellbeing of individuals and society are fundamentally interconnected rather than competing aims. In the context of these discussions, these principles encouraged participants to consider social questions in a holistic way, attentive both to material realities and to the deeper relational and cultural dimensions of collective life.

The process of consultation employed throughout the roundtables sought to cultivate spaces where diverse voices could engage openly and constructively in a shared process of learning. Participants were encouraged to listen attentively, contribute with sincerity, and remain open to the evolution of ideas through collective reflection. Diversity was valued not only as representation, but as a vital source of insight necessary for understanding complex social challenges.

Participants brought a wide range of perspectives, experiences, and convictions, yet often found resonance in one another's reflections despite their differences. The report does not seek to present statistically representative findings; rather, it offers a qualitative contribution to ongoing national conversations about socio-economic life and social cohesion, grounded in lived experience, interdisciplinary dialogue, and participatory reflection. The insights presented are offered not as final conclusions, but as a contribution to a continuing and shared conversation about the kind of society we wish to build together.

# Acknowledgements

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We extend particular thanks to all participants whose insights, experiences, and thoughtful engagement shaped the ideas presented in this report. Their willingness to contribute to open and constructive dialogue was central to the richness of the discussions.

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*This report reflects a collective endeavour, and its insights are the result of many voices, perspectives, and acts of service.*

# Methodology

This report draws on insights generated through a series of consultative roundtables convened by the UK Bahá'í Office of Public Affairs in collaboration with local partners across Belfast, Glasgow, Cambridge, Nottingham, London, and Manchester. Co-hosted with partners including Interfaith Scotland, the Woolf Institute, the Northern Ireland Interfaith Forum, Join the Dots Together, Manchester Metropolitan Bahá'í Society, and the Windsor Hub, the roundtables brought together approximately 120 participants. The roundtables were designed as participatory spaces for collective inquiry, bringing together individuals from academia, local government, faith communities, civil society organisations, and grassroots initiatives to explore contemporary perceptions of work, wealth, wellbeing, and social cohesion within the UK context.

The methodology adopted was qualitative and dialogical in nature, seeking not only to identify shared concerns and emerging social patterns, but also to generate deeper reflection on the assumptions, values, and structures shaping socio-economic life. Rather than approaching participants solely as respondents, the process recognised them as co-contributors to a collective exploration of how more cohesive and flourishing forms of social organisation might emerge.

The roundtables were informed by principles associated with the Bahá'í approach to consultation — a collaborative process oriented towards shared learning, constructive dialogue, and collective problem-solving. This approach emphasises the generation of knowledge through respectful exchange, reflection on diverse experience, and the search for common understanding. Several principles shaped the design and facilitation of the discussions:

- **Diverse participation:** Efforts were made to include participants from a broad range of professional, social, generational, and community backgrounds in order to encourage a plurality of perspectives and lived experiences.
- **Constructive and detached dialogue:** Participants were encouraged to contribute openly while remaining receptive to the evolution of ideas through collective reflection. Contributions were treated as part of a shared process of inquiry rather than expressions of personal ownership or positional debate.
- **Respectful engagement:** Discussions were conducted in an environment characterised by mutual respect, trust, and a willingness to engage thoughtfully with differing perspectives.
- **Orientation towards consensus and learning:** The process sought not unanimity, but increasing levels of shared understanding capable of informing constructive action, future collaboration, and continued learning.

This consultative methodology enabled participants to move beyond adversarial or purely transactional forms of discussion and instead engage in deeper reflection on the relationship between individual wellbeing, economic life, social structures, and collective flourishing. Across the roundtables, recurring themes, tensions, and organising principles were identified through iterative reflection and synthesis of the discussions.

The report does not seek to present statistically representative findings. Rather, it offers a qualitative contribution to ongoing national conversations about social cohesion and socio-economic life, grounded in lived experience, interdisciplinary dialogue, and participatory reflection. The insights presented aim to illuminate emerging patterns of thought and practice that may help inform policy, institutional development, and community action.

# Executive Summary

Across the United Kingdom, there is a growing sense that the current arrangements shaping work, wealth and wellbeing are no longer meeting the needs of individuals or society. For many, the pressures of rising living costs, changing patterns of work, and weakening trust in institutions are not only economic concerns, but are also affecting the quality of relationships in families, communities, and public life. At the same time, there remains a strong desire for a society that is more cohesive, just, and oriented towards the wellbeing of all.

The UK Bahá'í Office of Public Affairs (OPA), in its efforts to contribute to national conversations on issues of social importance, has been exploring how socio-economic life can become an arena for strengthening social cohesion and overcoming the conditions that give rise to division, and social fragmentation. Drawing on insights emerging from grassroots community-building efforts taking place across the country, the Office convened a series of roundtables in collaboration with local partners around the country. These conversations brought together participants from academia, local government, and faith and civil society groups, with particular attention given to youth perspectives and diverse participation.

A consistent theme emerging from these discussions was a sense of disillusionment with a social contract that often defines human worth in narrow economic terms. When value becomes closely tied to income, productivity, or status, it can foster forms of extreme stratification that weaken solidarity and diminish the ways individuals perceive themselves and one another. Yet participants also expressed a strong conviction that every person possesses an inherent capacity to contribute meaningfully to society, and that social cohesion depends on creating the conditions in which this potential can flourish. In this light, social prosperity was understood not as the absolute equalisation of wealth, but as the cultivation of a society in which the inherent dignity and value of every person is recognised, and where all are able to participate, flourish, and contribute to the common good.

From these conversations, four organising principles began to take shape—value, purpose, participation, and collaboration. Together, they offer a way of understanding work not only as a means of livelihood, but as a form of service to society; wealth as extending beyond material accumulation to include the strength of relationships and communities; and wellbeing as something deeply connected to belonging and contribution. They also point to the importance of enabling participation across all stages of life, and of fostering patterns of collaboration between individuals, communities, and institutions.

The discussions also highlighted the importance of strengthening relationships, trust, and spaces for ongoing consultation within communities, workplaces, and institutions. Participants emphasised that social cohesion depends not only on economic security, but also on people feeling heard, valued, and able to participate meaningfully in shaping the life of society. Case studies and community initiatives explored throughout the report demonstrate how collaborative, values-based approaches can foster belonging, agency, and resilience in practical ways. Particular attention was also given to the experiences of young people, the importance of purpose and identity in shaping participation, and the often overlooked social and economic value of unpaid care and community contribution.

The insights presented in this report suggest that efforts to strengthen social cohesion will require complementary shifts in both structures and culture. Policies, institutions, and community initiatives all have a role to play in creating environments where people are able to develop their capacities, contribute in diverse ways, and experience a sense of purpose and belonging. In this light, the reimagining of work, wealth and wellbeing is not a purely economic exercise, but a broader process of aligning the organisation of society with a more expansive understanding of human potential and collective life.



# Introduction

Across the UK today, there is a profound reckoning regarding the kind of society we wish to inhabit. Current social and economic pressures have prompted renewed reflection about what constitutes a flourishing society. Beneath the surface of civic unrest and institutional distrust lies a deeper disillusionment with existing social arrangements and the assumptions on which they rest. Economic systems are not merely mechanisms for generating and distributing wealth — they shape the quality of relationships between individuals, within communities, and between communities and the institutions that structure shared life. When these systems are grounded in narrow assumptions about human beings — emphasising excessive individualism, competition, and material accumulation as primary drivers of progress — they can gradually erode trust, deepen inequality, and weaken the social bonds that sustain cohesive societies.

This points to deeper systemic challenges that policy reform alone has struggled to resolve. Governments change, policies shift, and economic models evolve, yet many of the same hardships endure. This invites a more profound reflection: perhaps the difficulty lies not only in policy, but in the assumptions underpinning our economic theories themselves. To what extent do they truly reflect the fuller reality of human nature — not merely self-interest, but also humanity’s capacity for cooperation, contribution, and collective flourishing?

Multiple interlocking crises have demonstrated that social cohesion is deeply tied to these socio-economic realities. As of November 2025, the cost of living remained the greatest concern for the UK public<sup>1</sup>. As more of people’s time and energy is consumed by work required to meet basic needs, less remains for community engagement, volunteering, and the relationships that sustain trust and belonging.

Importantly, these pressures do not affect all people equally. Socio-economic inequality intersects with factors such as race, gender, age, disability, and religion to shape who is able to participate fully in social and economic life, whose contributions are recognised, and whose remain overlooked. The result is not only economic exclusion, but also forms of social marginalisation that limit meaningful participation in collective life.

These dynamics further entrench division and diminish trust in public institutions<sup>2</sup>, aligning the UK with broader global trends<sup>3</sup>. Together, they reinforce an atmosphere of disconnection and disengagement, deepening isolation and weakening both social cohesion and long-term economic resilience. Social fragmentation is therefore not solely a cultural or political challenge; it is also a reflection of socio-economic structures that leave many feeling excluded, insecure, and unable to contribute meaningfully to society.

Due to the interconnected nature of these challenges, increasing socio-economic equality emerges as a critical component in strengthening social cohesion. Socio-economic justice can be understood as a normative indicator of a society’s underlying framework, reflecting the extent to which principles of fairness, human dignity, and collective empowerment are embedded within both institutions and culture<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The Office of National Statistics, (18 December 2025). *Public opinions and social trends* <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/publicopinionsandsocialtrendsgreatbritain/november2025#:~:text=We%20have%20asked%20respondents%20what,the%20UK%20since%20October%202022>

<sup>2</sup> The Office of National Statistics (1 March 2024). *Trust in government, UK*. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/trustinggovernmentuk/2023#trust-in-government-and-institutions>

<sup>3</sup> OECD (2025). *Government at a Glance 2025*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/0efd0bcd-en> [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/government-at-a-glance-2025\\_0efd0bcd-en/full-report/levels-of-trust-in-public-institutions\\_62a3b94e.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/government-at-a-glance-2025_0efd0bcd-en/full-report/levels-of-trust-in-public-institutions_62a3b94e.html)

<sup>4</sup> Folami, O. (2014). *Social and economic justice*. In *Encyclopedia of human services and diversity* (Vol. 3, pp. 1202-1204). SAGE Publications, Inc., <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483346663.n513>

Studies<sup>5</sup> suggest that societies with higher levels of socio-economic equality tend to exhibit stronger social trust, higher civic participation, and greater cohesion, whereas persistent and extreme inequality can deepen stratification, weaken solidarity, and erode confidence in shared institutions. Economic frameworks that recognise humanity’s interdependence — balancing individual initiative with collective wellbeing — are therefore more likely to cultivate resilient, united, and flourishing communities.

A vision of a socially cohesive society becomes clearer when viewed through the lens of collective flourishing. This is characterised by a deep sense of personal value and belonging, the conviction that everyone has something meaningful to contribute, and the importance of participation in a shared endeavour. Achieving this requires intentional efforts to strengthen healthy relationships across all levels of society — from the grassroots to the national, and from the interpersonal to the institutional. True social cohesion emerges not simply from stability or prosperity alone, but from nurturing trust, mutual responsibility, participation, and a shared sense of purpose.



Inspired by this emerging vision of a more just, cohesive, and flourishing society, the UK Bahá’í Office of Public Affairs (OPA) launched a nationwide roundtable initiative aimed at fostering meaningful, future-oriented conversations. Bringing together a wide cross-section of society — including academia, local government, faith groups, and civil society — these consultative gatherings explored the relationship between social cohesion and socio-economic justice through several guiding questions:

*What are the current perceptions of work, wealth, and wellbeing in the UK, and what do they reveal about how we understand human nature?*

*How do work, identity, and purpose interact — and how are these shaped by prevailing conceptions of wealth and wellbeing?*

*What role do communities and institutions play in reshaping the culture around work, wealth, and wellbeing?*

5 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) (2025) *World Social Report 2025: A New Policy Consensus to Accelerate Social Progress*. New York: United Nations.

A shared conviction emerged from these discussions: for true social cohesion to be realised, there must be a complementary shift in both policy and structure alongside a transformation in attitudes and culture.

Participants noted that the value of work in both individual and collective life cannot be overstated. Ideally, work serves as a space for the expression of talents and passions in service of the common good — a site of contribution, belonging, and the means through which individuals support themselves and others. However, this vision often sits uneasily alongside current workplace cultures and structures, which frequently frame individuals as isolated economic units primarily concerned with their own material advancement.



From this disconnect, rich discussions emerged that ultimately identified four organising principles for reimagining work (both paid and unpaid), wealth, and wellbeing:

## ***Value***

Value is intrinsic to every person, found in their innate potential for meaningful contribution to society. Recognizing value in a broader sense allows institutions to invest not only in outputs, but in the underlying conditions that enable people and communities to thrive.

## ***Purpose***

Purpose is value expressed through action. It emerges when individuals and communities experience their efforts as contributing to something larger than themselves. Purpose is therefore a two-fold process of individual development and collective betterment, taking shape through shared aspirations, mutual responsibility, and organic collaboration.

## ***Participation and Contribution***

By creating inclusive and accessible spaces for diverse participation, meaningful contribution from everyone is enabled. Everyone has the capacity to contribute, though this takes different forms across a person's lifespan and depending on their circumstances. This positive cycle of participation and contribution strengthens belonging and affirms human agency as a vital driver of social progress.

## ***Collaboration***

Collaboration is a process of collectively responding to the needs of the community and society, reinforced by supportive attitudes and structures found in spaces ranging from the home to the workplace. It must become a central organizing principle for the relationships between individuals, communities, and institutions to enable true collective flourishing.

## ***The Intrinsic Value of the Individual***

Throughout the roundtables it was widely understood that current perceptions of value have been shaped by many historical and cultural forces, reinforced and solidified by socio-economic structures.

In the UK, perceptions of value have been shaped by historical class hierarchies, industrial capitalism, imperial legacies, post-war meritocratic ideals, and neoliberal economic reforms. These cultural and historical forces have been reinforced through educational stratification, labour market structures, and media narratives that prioritise productivity, economic success, and social status.

How value is measured has often been through a material lens, such that a person's value becomes synonymous with their direct economic output, wealth and cultural status. This view of human worth limits not only the way individuals see themselves and others but also leads to a stratification of society according to hierarchies of perceived value. As this stratification continues, divisions between people become more entrenched, and countless permutations of “us” and “them” define group identity ever more narrowly and in contrast to one another<sup>6</sup>.

Perceptions of value are also shaped by how socio-economic systems interact with protected characteristics such as race, gender, age, disability, and religion. These dimensions often mediate access to opportunity and recognition, with historical and ongoing inequalities influencing whose contributions are visible, rewarded, or undervalued. As a result, stratification is not only economic but also social and identity-based, reinforcing unequal experiences of worth and belonging across different groups in society.

These dynamics contribute to weakening social trust and cohesion. When individuals and groups experience persistent marginalisation or undervaluation, confidence in shared social frameworks erodes, and the conditions for misunderstanding, resentment, and instability become more likely to emerge.

When crises arise, these underlying fractures are further exposed. Relationships are weakened, and communities and individuals can become more vulnerable to narratives of blame, alienation, and division—contributing to unrest and disunity.

These conditions, shaped by history, do not have to define the future. While current approaches have carried society to this point, participants at the roundtables agreed that continued social progress will require a more expansive understanding of value—one that recognises every person's innate potential and supports the strong relationships that act as a bulwark against negative social forces.

While recognising that people need secure, dignified ways to support themselves and their families, as well as a certain level of material comfort, a person's value in society extends beyond material conditions to include their wider contributions, relationships, and inherent worth.



A further theme emerging from the discussions was the need to broaden society's understanding of value — both in relation to unpaid work and the dignity inherent in all forms of paid labour.

Responsibilities such as raising children, caring for family members, supporting neighbours, volunteering, and contributing to community life are often overlooked within conventional economic measures, despite being essential to the wellbeing and stability of society. Participants also reflected on the importance of recognising the dignity and value present in every kind of work, whether highly specialised or more humble in nature. Every role contributes to the functioning and wellbeing of the whole, and all forms of honest contribution deserve respect and appreciation. A more expansive understanding of work therefore recognises that service to society — whether paid or unpaid — is fundamental to social cohesion, human development, and collective flourishing.

One participant reflected:

“You get the feeling that people are what they do. If someone is not the breadwinner in their family, they are inferior. This conversation made me have a wider appreciation for people, not just their economic output.”

*One example shared during the roundtables illustrated how a broader understanding of value can reshape relationships and patterns of participation within everyday life.*

*In a London neighbourhood, an initiative for building stronger communities has been bringing families together to strengthen bonds of trust, mutual support, and collective responsibility. As part of this process, a group of mothers began meeting regularly to explore themes related to parenting, childcare, and family life. Their conversations drew on materials centred on spiritual and moral qualities — such as truthfulness, generosity, and justice — and how these qualities can find expression through service to others and contribution to the community.*

*Over time, children and fathers also became part of the conversation alongside the mothers, gradually fostering a deeper culture of reflection and unity within the family itself. Through these conversations, participants began to reconsider assumptions surrounding household responsibilities and rigid gender roles. Family members increasingly came to see one another not through the lens of fixed expectations, but as individuals each possessing unique capacities and valuable contributions to offer. Tasks within the home — often overlooked or undervalued — began to be viewed as meaningful acts of service essential to the wellbeing of the family as a whole, rather than responsibilities attached to gender alone.*

***Continued...***

*This shift in perspective cultivated a stronger sense of shared responsibility, cooperation, and agency within the home and family as the building blocks of society. More broadly, it demonstrated how recognising the inherent dignity and value of every form of contribution — whether paid or unpaid, public or private — can strengthen participation and deepen social cohesion.*

*Small transformations within families and neighbourhoods can, over time, contribute to broader cultural change — fostering societies in which every person feels valued, where all forms of work are recognised as meaningful contributions to the common good, and where individuals are connected through a shared sense of collective flourishing.*

We cannot shy away from the fact that many of the structural economic pressures facing the UK—including workforce shortages in care sectors, child poverty, low productivity linked to unpaid caregiving burdens, and financial insecurity among households—cannot be fully understood without examining their disproportionate impact on women.

Several interconnected economic dilemmas affecting women in the UK present major policy challenges for the government. These issues prove difficult to overcome because they involve tensions between economic growth, public spending, labour market structures, and social expectations around care and family life.

Underlying many of these dilemmas is a broader question about how societies value work, contribution, and wellbeing. Much of the work disproportionately carried out by women—raising children, caring for relatives, sustaining households and communities—is socially indispensable but economically undervalued. This creates persistent tensions between market-based measures of productivity and the realities of human interdependence and social cohesion.

Such approaches, as illustrated in the case study above, could gradually create greater freedom for individuals — particularly women, who often carry a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic responsibilities — to participate more fully in wider forms of social, professional, and community life.

There exists a mutually reinforcing relationship between a person's sense of self-worth and their ability to contribute meaningfully to society through work, whether paid or unpaid. Contrary to economic theories that portray human beings as primarily selfish, competitive, and motivated chiefly by personal gain, there is growing recognition that human beings are also deeply motivated by meaning, contribution, and connection to others.

“I've had jobs where I've worked through the night, because I loved it and I was providing a service.”

“How to make work worthwhile, interesting and valuable so one feels one is contributing is a huge question.”

“I used to work a 76 hour a week job and not for one moment did I think about “not working” - I was always thinking about the service I was providing my community.”

Every individual has an innate desire to contribute to the wellbeing of others and the advancement of society. When this desire is nurtured and cultivated, it can become a powerful source of motivation, creativity, and collective flourishing. This potential can be released in different ways in every social space, from the home to the workplace and the community.

Purposeful effort directed toward both personal growth and the betterment of society therefore releases forms of energy and motivation that purely material incentives alone cannot sustain. Studies in psychology and behavioral economics have shown that turning a voluntary act into a paid activity can, in some cases, reduce the very intrinsic motivation that originally sustained it.

Recognising this broader dimension of human nature challenges reductionist assumptions embedded within many prevailing economic models and opens the possibility for socio-economic systems that are more just, participatory, and conducive to collective flourishing.

The case study below highlights that when workplaces, communities, and institutions create environments in which individuals feel valued, supported, and able to make meaningful contributions, remarkable levels of commitment, innovation, and accomplishment can emerge. In such settings, work transcends economic transaction and becomes a source of dignity, belonging, and shared purpose. This capacity for contribution may be understood as a form of “altruistic capital”<sup>7</sup> — a reservoir of human potential that reflects the desire to participate in something larger than oneself.

*One case study shared during the roundtables came from a member of EBBF (Ethical Business Building the Future), a Baha’i-inspired global learning community that accompanies mindful individuals and groups through daily work and discourse to transform business and the economy through values-based approaches in organisational life. It showed how, when a person’s worth is valued beyond productivity alone and institutions recognise the inherent dignity and potential of every individual, new levels of achievement can emerge. Through a consultative and collaborative approach, organisations can foster both prosperity and wellbeing by creating environments where people feel seen, valued, and supported.*

*In one hotel chain, management discovered that some staff were engaged in dishonest practices. Rather than responding with punitive measures, the CEO chose a different path. Representatives from across the organisation — including IT, communications, housekeeping, reception, management, and the CEO — were invited into regular dialogue to explore how to improve the hotel. Notably, the issue of dishonest activities was never directly addressed.*

*What emerged was not simply a solution to a workplace problem, but a deeper transformation.*

*Through open dialogue and shared ownership, creativity and compassion began to flourish. Staff proposed a range of human-centred initiatives, including:*

- *establishing a care centre within the hotel so employees could stay close to their young children during working hours.*
- *allowing staff to sleep in vacant rooms after late shifts, particularly to support the safety of women travelling long distances at night.*
- *redesigning the hotel layout by moving the reception closer to the entrance to ensure guests were warmly welcomed.*

*Over time, staff began to see themselves not merely as employees, but as valued contributors with shared responsibility for the wellbeing of the organisation. Collectively, they reframed the purpose of their work — not only to generate profit, but to support the wellbeing of all.*

*The CEO later reflected that once people felt seen, valued, and able to contribute meaningfully, the theft stopped entirely and the business began to thrive.*

This example illustrates how environments in which individuals feel genuinely valued can give rise to levels of commitment, creativity, and accomplishment that surpass expectations. In this case, staff felt valued because they were included in processes of consultation, and encouraged to take responsibility and contribute meaningfully. Grounded in trust, consultation, and recognition of human dignity, such environments can unlock both individual and collective potential, enabling prosperity and wellbeing to flourish together.

## ***Policy Recommendations***

### **Develop multidimensional measures of societal progress**

Complement GDP and labour market indicators with national and local metrics that capture wellbeing, belonging, civic contribution, and capacity development, guiding funding and policy evaluation.

### **Prioritise capacity development within public services**

Design services (especially welfare and employment support) to focus on enabling individuals' long-term potential and social contribution, rather than solely rapid labour market entry or economic activation. This can be strengthened through collaboration with various social actors that have experience with capacity building at the grassroots, to release human potential.

### **Recognise and value unpaid and relational contribution**

Formally acknowledge care work, volunteering, and community participation through policy incentives that reflect their social and economic importance.

## ***Sense of Purpose and Agency***

There are two facets to purpose: discovering and nurturing individual talents and capacities, and putting them to use in service to collective flourishing. Intrinsic human value finds expression through contributing to something larger than oneself — through work, service, creativity, caregiving, and participation in the life of society. At the same time, any meaningful conception of purpose must also recognise the material realities of life and the legitimate need for individuals and families to earn a livelihood, achieve economic security, and meet their basic needs with dignity. The challenge, therefore, is not to create false dichotomies by separating economic activity from higher purpose, but to foster social and economic systems in which the pursuit of livelihood and the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to society reinforce one another rather than stand in tension.

If value is found within the individual, then “purpose” can be understood as the widening of that circle to encompass the relationship between the individual and the collective. Acting with this twofold sense of purpose allows individuals to better understand themselves while also uncovering and developing their abilities and interests.

When individuals are supported in identifying and applying their strengths in ways that benefit others, their sense of agency and societal participation is enhanced. This, in turn, fosters a clearer sense of purpose, increasing the likelihood of constructive engagement in both the workforce and civic life, thereby contributing to more cohesive and productive communities and workplaces.

Youth, especially, are at a formative juncture where the exploration of purpose is vital — because it shapes their future. In the UK today, over 12% of 16–24-year-olds are not in education, employment or training (NEET)<sup>8</sup>, a figure that reflects not only economic exclusion but also a broader crisis of aspiration, belonging, and purpose.

Policy initiatives such as the Employment Rights Act and programmes like Get Britain Working attempt to address these challenges through structural reform and labour-market activation. However, the dominant policy language of “productivity” and “labour market participation” risks overlooking the deeper moral and social questions many young people are grappling with around meaning, identity, and belonging. Developing a sense of direction and purpose can profoundly influence long-term outcomes and engagement in society.

Environments that support this exploration are therefore critical. In the context of youth unemployment, one parent reflected:

“[Young] people feel like they don’t contribute to society and feel society doesn’t contribute to them. How you break that cycle becomes an important question. I think, if you can contribute to society in any way that benefits others then it’s a positive feedback loop.”

Another youth participant added:

“You have self-esteem in three areas: a sense of agency, having activities that give you a sense of meaning and excellence, and social recognition from peers — not in an egotistical way but where you’re part of a group with a sense of shared purpose and meaning in a common endeavour.”

When individual efforts are aligned with collective aspirations, personal ambitions and day-to-day activities can be understood within a wider social context, contributing to a stronger and more durable sense of meaning and purpose.

*One participant in Glasgow reflected that her experience working as a young person in a local fish factory represented some of the most meaningful and joyful periods of her working life. Rather than being defined solely by labour or economic necessity, the work was experienced as a form of participation in collective wellbeing. She described a strong sense of contributing to her community by helping to “feed the people around her,” where the value of her work was directly linked with its social purpose.*

*This connection between individual effort and collective outcome gave rise to a deeper sense of agency. Her role in the factory was not only a site for developing practical skills, but also a context in which she could understand herself as a contributor to something larger than herself. In this way, personal capability and communal benefit were mutually reinforcing: her sense of identity and competence grew alongside her awareness of social contribution.*

*The workplace itself functioned as a united community, where relationships were shaped by shared endeavour and mutual reliance. The friendships that formed extended beyond the factory, linking employees to one another as neighbours and members of the same local community. This blurred the boundary between economic activity and social life, reinforcing a broader ecology of belonging.*

In this account, work, in this framing, is not an isolated transaction but an arena where purpose is both discovered and enacted — where individual talents are realised through contribution to shared goods, and where meaning emerges through participation in reciprocal social relationships.

The factory, in this sense, exemplifies how aligned individual and collective purpose can generate not only productivity, but also identity, belonging, and sustained engagement in both work and community life.

This relationship between individual agency and collective flourishing is not only emergent but can also be intentionally cultivated.



*A Bahá'í-inspired initiative in London brought together a group of young people aged 18–25 to reflect on their aspirations and their relationship with work. While actively engaged in service projects for the wider community, many participants also faced barriers in accessing meaningful employment and relevant experience. In response, they co-created an internship model that integrated professional development with character-building and sustained community contribution.*

*Participants approached local organisations with this proposal, offering a model that valued both workplace learning and civic engagement. The resulting internships combined professional experience with service activities such as children's classes and community projects, recognising these not as peripheral activities but as integral to personal and professional development.*

*Employers responded positively, noting the energy, values, and collaborative spirit the young people brought into the workplace. Participants, in turn, gained skills, confidence, and a renewed sense of purpose. The initiative demonstrated how work can be reimaged as a space of coherence — where service, learning, and employment reinforce one another — and points to scalable approaches that support youth transitions while strengthening organisational culture and social cohesion.*

In many societies today, individuals, especially young people, struggle to find spaces in which they feel genuinely needed, valued, and connected to a larger purpose. Institutions often engage people primarily as consumers, employees, or recipients of services, rather than as active contributors to the wellbeing and advancement of their communities. As a result, social bonds can weaken, civic participation can decline, and feelings of isolation or disconnection can intensify.

A conception of purpose rooted in contribution offers an alternative framework. It recognizes that human beings flourish not only through personal achievement or material gain, but also through meaningful participation in collective life. When individuals are trusted, consulted, and given opportunities to exercise responsibility and contribute according to their capacities, a stronger sense of agency, belonging, and commitment can emerge. This is particularly significant for young people, many of whom seek forms of engagement that align personal aspirations with social meaning and moral coherence.

From this perspective, the apparent tension between fulfilling individual needs and advancing collective interests begins to dissolve. Individual wellbeing and social wellbeing are not competing aims, but mutually reinforcing dimensions of human flourishing. Economic security, personal development, and self-expression remain important, yet they acquire deeper significance when connected to service, solidarity, and shared progress. Purpose therefore becomes both personally meaningful and socially generative — enriching the life of the individual while simultaneously strengthening the relationships, institutions, and communities upon which collective prosperity depends.

One participant reflected:

“Wellbeing is much bigger than just me. When my family is well, people I love are well, and my community is safe and flourishing — I am well.”

An innate desire for service to society and excellence is strengthened when purpose is both individual and collective. When one’s work and social participation align with a community, sector, or organisation where they feel a sense of belonging, personal aspiration becomes more deeply connected to collective wellbeing, enabling individuals to see their contributions as part of a broader social fabric.

Another participant expressed this more expansively:

“All work, if done in a particular spirit [of service], is actually purposeful. It is possible to consider everything we do as a contribution — to our families, to our own fulfillment, and to society.”

This perspective offers a constructive way of addressing contemporary institutional questions — particularly how to strengthen belonging and shared identity, increase youth engagement, and reduce alienation and fragmentation. The apparent tension between fulfilling individual needs and meeting collective interests gives way to a more integrated model of flourishing, where purpose is both personally meaningful and socially generative.

As people engage in activities oriented towards collective wellbeing, patterns of cooperation, trust, and reciprocity begin to take shape. Over time, these patterns contribute to stronger relationships and more resilient social networks. In such contexts, when individuals face challenges, they are more likely to experience support not only through formal systems but also through the presence of a community in which they are meaningfully embedded.

## Policy Recommendations

### **Integrate purpose-driven pathways into education and youth transition systems**

Introduce structured opportunities within schools, colleges, and youth services for purpose exploration, mentorship, and community engagement alongside academic and vocational pathways. These should support young people not only in developing skills, but in reflecting on identity, contribution, and direction.

### **Reframe employment policy around meaningful contribution**

Encourage employers and employment programmes to articulate and design roles in ways that foreground social purpose, contribution, and identity-building, alongside productivity and output. Workplaces can become sites not only of economic participation but of meaning-making and belonging.

### **Expand civic and community-based pathways into work and address youth disengagement through belonging-focused programmes**

Support structured pathways such as community service, social action initiatives, and project-based civic learning as recognised routes into employment. Youth NEET and inactivity strategies should move beyond labour-market activation alone, and explicitly incorporate belonging, identity, and agency as foundational conditions for sustained economic participation.

## Diverse Participation Yields Meaningful Contributions

Encouraging participation across all segments of society enables diverse contributions—economic, social, and relational—that strengthen the fabric of communities. Homes, schools, workplaces, and community spaces are all enriched by the distinct capacities of their members.

Accordingly, a society's wealth should not be assessed solely through GDP, but also through the quality of its relationships, and the creativity, resilience, and culture of its people. Recent research published within the Nature Portfolio (2024) underscores this shift, highlighting the importance of multidimensional frameworks that integrate wellbeing, inclusion, and sustainability alongside economic output<sup>9</sup>.

This broader understanding rests on recognising the essential interconnectedness of society. People's choices as consumers, producers and employers leave a trace, gradually shaping norms and solidifying into the structures that organise collective life.



From this perspective, work can be understood as service to society as a whole. Contributions made through work enrich society at different levels. Workplaces can also be understood as communities in which a multiplicity of skills are developed—from technical and social skills to values. Human values such as honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, and generosity are not peripheral virtues but guiding forces that direct social progress.

An example of how this broader understanding of participation is reflected in practice can be seen in Apax, a values-driven non-profit social enterprise providing supported housing and assisted living services for vulnerable adults experiencing homelessness, mental health challenges, and social exclusion. The organisation demonstrates how wellbeing, inclusion, sustainability, and economic productivity can be integrated into everyday workplace practice rather than treated as separate priorities.

*Apax has a mission to create a workplace culture centred on human values such as kindness, unity, integrity, compassion, and service. These principles shape recruitment, staff development, leadership, and relationships with residents. Employees are encouraged to see their work not simply as employment, but as meaningful social contribution, creating stronger motivation, engagement, and job satisfaction.*

*The organisation promotes staff wellbeing through reflective practices, virtues training, and resident-led activities which create spaces where technical, interpersonal, and emotional skills are developed collectively. Company Reflection Meetings encourage teams to share challenges, successes, and ideas collectively, helping to build trust, reduce workplace competition, and strengthen a sense of belonging. Staff wellbeing initiatives, including wellness activities and supportive leadership structures, contribute to a positive and psychologically safe environment.*

*The organisation intentionally combines operational excellence with values-based practice. Staff are trained not only in technical responsibilities related to housing and recovery support, but also in virtues such as patience, truthfulness, humility, compassion, and integrity. These values guide interactions with colleagues and residents and are treated as essential workplace capacities rather than optional personal traits.*

*Inclusion is embedded through Apax's emphasis on equality, shared ownership, and participation. Hierarchies are intentionally reduced, enabling staff across all levels to contribute to decision-making and organisational improvement. Residents are supported to take active roles in community life and service-related activities, reinforcing dignity, confidence, and social inclusion within the services they receive.*

*Sustainability at Apax is reflected in its long-term investment in people, relationships, and community impact. Rather than focusing solely on financial outcomes, the organisation reinvests resources into staff, residents, innovation, and local communities. This values-led approach supports organisational effectiveness by improving staff retention, strengthening collaboration, and delivering meaningful social outcomes alongside operational productivity.*

An understanding of participation, guided by an orientation towards the development of human values alongside productivity, can transform people's relationship with the socio-economic system from a dichotomous one—"consumers" and "producers," "the haves" and "have nots"—to an organic and interdependent one.

This organic relationship acknowledges that everyone contributes to the system, though the degree and nature of that contribution changes across age, personal circumstances, and different phases of life. Individuals can thus see their lives as a natural interplay of giving and receiving. Such an approach allows all members of society—children, youth, working-age adults, those outside formal employment, and older people—to be recognised as valuable contributors.

Community-level initiatives demonstrate how inclusive participation can strengthen social cohesion while fostering a shared sense of responsibility for collective well-being. For instance, this can be seen through the example of a local initiative in Glasgow where participation in neighbourhood litter-picks, and community-based educational initiatives, is giving individuals of all ages a sense that they are contributing to the betterment of a collective, whether that is a family, community or locality.

When individuals see their contributions as meaningful and connected to a wider whole, a stronger sense of belonging emerges. This, in turn, encourages sustained participation and collaboration. Over time, such patterns can support more coordinated engagement between communities and institutions, enhancing the capacity for inclusive and sustainable development.

## ***Policy Recommendations***

### **Establish inclusive participation across the life course**

Design systems that recognise people as contributors at all life stages—childhood, youth, working age, caregiving periods, and older age—not solely as workers or dependents.

### **Enable flexible and plural forms of participation**

Adapt welfare and employment systems to support non-linear participation patterns, including part-time work, care responsibilities, volunteering, and community leadership.

### **Strengthen recognition of informal contribution**

Create mechanisms such as community contribution frameworks and accreditation systems that recognise skills and development gained outside formal employment, including human values and soft skills.

### **Invest in community participation infrastructure**

Provide sustained investment in local infrastructure that enables participation, skills development, and grassroots innovation.

# ***Collaboration as an Organising Principle of Society***



Collaboration is the process of collectively responding to the needs and aspirations of the communities and societies to which we belong. In this light, the workplace can be understood not merely as a site of economic production, but as a form of community in which relationships of trust, cooperation, and shared purpose are cultivated. Seen through the lens of the relationship between the individual, the community, and institutions, the workplace becomes a vital space in which these three protagonists interact and support one another. Individuals contribute their talents, creativity, and labour; workplace communities create environments that nurture participation, mutual support, and meaningful contribution; and institutions — including governments and public bodies — help establish the social, legal, and economic conditions that enable such communities to flourish.

From this perspective, institutions are not concerned solely with regulating markets or maximising productivity, but also with fostering conditions that strengthen social cohesion and collective wellbeing. Policies related to economic security, childcare, family support, worker participation, education, and social protection all shape whether workplaces become environments marked by dignity, belonging, and contribution, or by alienation and insecurity. When individuals feel genuinely valued, trusted, and able to participate responsibly in a shared endeavour, work can become a source not only of livelihood, but also of purpose, identity, and social connection.

Such an understanding offers a constructive response to contemporary challenges including fragmentation, declining trust, social isolation, and disengagement, particularly among younger generations. The apparent tension between fulfilling individual needs and advancing collective interests begins to give way to a more integrated model of flourishing, in which personal development and social contribution reinforce one another.



As one participant observed, meaningful collaboration requires practical structures of support and shared responsibility:

“[What is needed is not] just talking about community development but making it happen practically. But you need groups, and institutions to help, individuals can’t carry it alone.”

The three protagonists of society — the individual, the community, and institutions — each play complementary roles in fostering collaboration and social cohesion. Individuals contribute initiative, talent, and responsibility. Communities create spaces of support, participation, and mutual learning where capacities can be developed and applied. Institutions provide vision, coordination, and the policies and structures needed to sustain collective wellbeing over time. Progress depends not on the isolated action of any one actor, but on the strength of their relationship and their shared commitment to the common good.

*The Bahá’í Institute for Community Building (BICB) is a grassroots initiative that supports the material and moral development of individuals and communities through a structured sequence of educational courses. In Sheffield, the programme has engaged around 200 individuals within a predominantly Roma-Slovak community over a two-year period, helping to generate locally driven responses to community needs, particularly in the area of health and wellbeing. Through regular spaces for consultation, young people identified a need to improve health awareness and quality of life, leading them to organise workshops on healthy lifestyles and informed decision-making. These efforts, developed in collaboration with medical students connected to the community, have expanded to include activities such as running clubs and nutrition workshops.*

*A significant outcome of the process has been the development of participants’ ability to “read reality” — to identify challenges within their community and apply practical, collaborative solutions. Young people are increasingly taking ownership of activities by facilitating and coordinating programmes themselves, contributing to the initiative’s sustainability and growth. The process is characterised by an outward-looking and inclusive approach, with participants continually asking how they can work with others to strengthen the wider community.*

*As a result, the initiative has fostered stronger relationships, increased trust and greater community cohesion alongside measurable health benefits. Interest in collaboration has grown across the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector, as well as with local health services and schools, which have recognised the positive impact on young people’s engagement and sense of responsibility. More broadly, the initiative demonstrates how collaboration and collective learning can strengthen a community’s capacity to respond to its own challenges and contribute to social wellbeing.*

The practical collaboration between the three key actors can occur through dynamic, iterative cycles of consultation, action and reflection. When consultative spaces are created where groups of people come together to discuss needs and aspirations, new insights and creative solutions emerge. Collective action can then be taken as an organic next step. In natural moments of pause, spaces for reflection are created, the quality and utility of which are measured by the purposeful action that follows from them.



It has proved useful for these consultation spaces to be characterised by a range of qualities and convictions. They encourage diverse participation where individuals feel free to offer thoughts and experiences. Detached contributions are made where participants allow the conversation to flow organically without insisting on ownership of particular ideas. The group does not conflate a contribution with the person who offered it, creating an open environment for sharing.

Consultation is conducted in a respectful and friendly way, even as ideas and perspectives differ. The group strives towards consensus, with the belief that united decisions can be reached and both individual and collective action taken. This approach enables a richness of perspectives while maintaining the integrity of the discussion and a focus on shared conclusions and actionable ideas. While consultation remains a vital instrument for collaboration, it requires enabling structures in which it can consistently occur if it is to support the broader process of social cohesion. This includes community-level decision-making spaces where people can meet and consult, and where local institutions are actively engaged participants.

Processes of consultation from the local to the national level also strengthen the flow of information, enabling an ecosystem of learning to emerge. In this way, communities can be inspired by initiatives in other parts of the UK, drawing insights from a wider network of practice to strengthen their own efforts. This also fosters a sense that all actors are engaged in a shared endeavour, encouraging participation, collective action, and stronger social bonds.

Collaboration across these key actors is therefore essential for coherent decision-making and implementation integrity. This framing can also serve as an analytical lens for policy coherence across departments and thematic areas, including youth employment strategies, reducing barriers to women's participation in the labour market, and broader social cohesion strategies.



# Policy Recommendations

## **Strengthen collaboration between individuals, communities, and institutions**

Develop and reinforce mechanisms that enable coordinated action across individuals, community groups, and institutions, ensuring each actor can contribute effectively to shared societal goals and that efforts are mutually reinforcing rather than fragmented.

## **Embed participatory and deliberative processes in decision-making**

Institutionalise inclusive consultation and deliberation processes within both local and national governance structures, ensuring diverse voices are systematically included in identifying needs, generating solutions, and shaping policy outcomes.

## **Strengthen vertical integration and knowledge-sharing across governance levels**

Create and resource mechanisms that connect local, regional, and national levels of decision-making, ensuring that insights flow effectively across systems and that communities can learn from one another through structured knowledge-sharing networks.



## Conclusion

There is growing recognition that current socio-economic arrangements are not fully delivering a cohesive and flourishing society. While economic growth remains important, it is increasingly clear that how value is defined, how work is structured, and who is able to participate meaningfully in economic life are equally critical.

At its core, social cohesion is rooted in the quality of relationships—between individuals, within communities, and between communities and institutions. Where these relationships are characterised by trust, reciprocity, and a shared sense of purpose, more inclusive and resilient forms of socio-economic life can emerge. Strengthening such relationships is therefore central to both social cohesion and socio-economic justice.

A key implication is the need to intentionally create and sustain spaces where these relationships can develop. These spaces—whether at community, local authority, or national levels—must be accessible, representative, and consistent. They should enable regular patterns of consultation, where individuals, communities, and institutions engage in ongoing dialogue rather than one-off exchanges. Over time, such processes build trust, generate shared understanding, and support more responsive policymaking. Ensuring strong links between local consultative spaces and national decision-making is essential for coherence and impact.

This project convened by the UK Bahá'í Office of Public Affairs points toward a framework for this shift, centred on the role of values in redefining purpose, participation, and collaboration within socio-economic life. The distinctive contribution of this report lies in its emphasis on values as foundational to the functioning of society and the economy. Values that widen the circle of participation, foster inclusion, and empower individuals to contribute meaningfully to collective wellbeing. Values such as honesty, trustworthiness, compassion, and justice cultivate trust, strengthen relationships, and nurture a shared sense of responsibility. Far from being abstract ideals, such values shape how individuals act, how institutions function, and how relationships are formed and sustained. When embedded in policy, organisational culture, and everyday practice, they can help create systems that are more inclusive, cohesive, effective, and worthy of public trust.



This perspective also invites institutions to reconsider their role — not only as providers of services or regulators of markets, but as actors that help cultivate the conditions in which values such as trust, justice, participation, and mutual responsibility can flourish, strengthening both human development and collective wellbeing.

A more cohesive society will not emerge from economic reform alone, but from aligning structures, policies, and culture with a shared set of values.

By grounding socio-economic life in these values, fostering healthy relationships, and enabling meaningful participation through sustained dialogue, the UK can move towards a model of development that is more inclusive, more trusted, and more reflective of the common good.

Ultimately, the vision that emerges is not one of returning to a previous state of cohesion, but of consciously building new foundations for it — rooted in a more integrated understanding of human beings as inherently capable of contributing to the common good. In this vision, work becomes more than a means of economic survival; wealth is understood in more than material terms; and wellbeing is seen as inseparable from participation in the life of society. These are not merely the conclusions of the roundtables this report documents — they are an invitation to continued action.

If sustained, this reimagining offers the possibility of a more resilient and cohesive society — one in which individuals and institutions alike are oriented towards a shared endeavour of collective flourishing, and where social progress is measured not only by what is produced, but by the quality of what is built together.



# Appendix

## Extended Case Studies

### **Community-Led Health and Wellbeing in Sheffield**

The Bahá'í Institute for Community Building (BICB) is a grassroots initiative that supports the material and moral development of individuals and communities. Through a structured sequence of educational courses, it strengthens participants' capacity to serve their neighbourhoods and contribute to collective wellbeing.

In Sheffield, this approach has been implemented within a predominantly Roma-Slovak community and now engages around 200 participants. Over time, it has enabled locally driven responses to community needs, particularly in health and wellbeing.

A key feature of this progress has been the creation of ongoing spaces for consultation within the institute's learning process. In these spaces, participants—especially young people—identified a shared concern: the need to improve health awareness and overall quality of life. In response, youth began facilitating workshops on healthy lifestyles and informed decision-making, creating safe, informal environments for learning and discussion.

These efforts have been strengthened through collaboration with medical students connected to the community, who co-design and support session content with young facilitators. More recently, young volunteers have taken increasing ownership of the initiative, formalising and expanding activities to include a regular running club and interactive nutrition workshops.

A distinctive element of this work has been the development of a practical capacity often not explicitly taught in formal education: the ability to “read reality” within one's community and respond with relevant, constructive action. This emerging skill has enabled participants to identify needs, design responses, and adapt over time.

The initiative is rooted in a Bahá'í-inspired educational process that emphasises service, community cohesion, and holistic development. Participation is open to people of all faiths and none, and discussions often include respectful reflection on the role of faith in daily life. For some participants, spiritual beliefs provide motivation for healthier living. One young person, for example, described maintaining good health as an expression of faith and a way of living out the teachings of Christ. Such perspectives illustrate how spiritual motivation can reinforce positive health behaviours.

This approach promotes a holistic understanding of health, encompassing physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions. At the same time, a growing number of young people are developing the skills to facilitate and coordinate activities, strengthening the initiative's sustainability and growth.

An outward-looking orientation is a defining feature of the institute process, with participants continually asking, “How do we work with everyone?” This mindset supports inclusion and expansion. In line with Bahá’í principles, success is understood broadly: increased trust, stronger relationships, and enhanced community cohesion are valued alongside measurable health outcomes. There is growing interest in collaboration across the voluntary, community, faith, and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector, as well as with health services.

This case demonstrates how community-led, faith-inspired approaches can contribute meaningfully to health and wellbeing. By combining grassroots engagement, youth leadership, and a holistic vision of health, the initiative has supported tangible and lasting change at both individual and community levels.

### **Youth Internship Scheme, London**

Learning how to raise up vibrant and socially cohesive communities is a primary concern of Bahá’ís across the globe. To this end, one Bahá’í-inspired initiative in London brought together a community thinking about how to recast their relationship with the socio-economic system. It began with a group of youth aged 18–25 who were meeting regularly to discuss their hopes and aspirations. Within this space, a common challenge identified was around work—how to find it, how to stay in it, and how to make it meaningful. Although the youth were actively involved in volunteering in their community, they struggled to find appropriate work experience in their fields. Drawing on their involvement in Baha’i-inspired community-building activities, the young people invited community members and professionals from different sectors into conversation. Through this collective process of exploration and creative problem-solving, they devised an internship experience that harmonised professional skills with character development, approaching local businesses and organisations with this proposal.

The internship experience combined learning, service and action, seeing everyone as a whole human being, coherent in their work and lives. Time spent in service to the community such as holding summer classes for children, hosting spaces for community consultation and social action projects all counted towards the overall internship. Companies and organisations were inspired by young people who wanted to give back to the local community and so were happy to give the youth time to continue their community activities. There was also recognition that the skills developed in service are the same as those which make one an enthusiastic, collaborative and dedicated member of a work team.

One major learning was that individuals can be coherent wholes at work. By the end of the internships, employers commented on changes felt in workplace culture; the youth brought energy and dynamism, sharing about their volunteering activities and even getting some colleagues to join in. This drew colleagues together in the spirit of service. The youth, in turn, gained many skills that would support them in both their future careers and community endeavours. One participant reflected, “I used to think service was something you did on the side—now I see it as part of who I am and how I work.”

## **Apax**

Apax is a values-driven, non-profit social enterprise providing supported housing and assisted living services for adults experiencing homelessness, mental health challenges, and social exclusion. Its organisational approach demonstrates how wellbeing, inclusion, sustainability, and economic effectiveness can be integrated into a single coherent culture rather than treated as separate or competing priorities.

At the heart of Apax's model is a commitment to building an organisational culture grounded in universal human values such as kindness, unity, integrity, compassion, and service. These values are not treated as abstract ideals but are actively embedded into recruitment, staff development, leadership practice, and daily interactions between staff and residents. Staff are encouraged to see their work as meaningful social contribution, strengthening motivation, purpose, and engagement beyond traditional employment frameworks.

A defining feature of Apax is its emphasis on reflective practice and continuous learning. Staff participate in Company Reflection Meetings, where teams come together to share experiences, discuss challenges, and collectively identify improvements. This structured reflection fosters trust, reduces workplace fragmentation, and strengthens a sense of shared ownership over organisational development. Alongside this, virtues-based training supports staff in developing both technical competencies and interpersonal capabilities, ensuring that professional skills are complemented by ethical and relational capacities.

Importantly, Apax integrates operational effectiveness with values-based practice. Staff working in housing and recovery support are trained not only in practical service delivery but also in virtues such as patience, truthfulness, humility, and integrity. These virtues are understood as essential workplace capacities that shape decision-making, communication, and relationships. This dual focus enables the organisation to maintain high-quality service delivery while fostering a positive and supportive working environment.

Inclusion is central to Apax's organisational identity. Hierarchical barriers are intentionally reduced to promote equality, shared ownership, and open participation in decision-making processes. Staff at all levels are encouraged to contribute ideas and improvements, reinforcing a culture of collaboration rather than competition. Residents, too, are actively included in community life and supported to engage in structured activities and service-related initiatives. This involvement enhances dignity, builds confidence, and strengthens social inclusion by positioning residents as active participants in their own recovery journeys.

Wellbeing is supported through a culture of psychological safety, reflective dialogue, and relational trust. Staff wellbeing is strengthened by open communication, supportive leadership, and opportunities for shared learning. This environment allows individuals to navigate emotionally demanding work while maintaining a sense of balance, purpose, and connection to others.

Sustainability at Apax is reflected in its long-term investment in people, relationships, and community impact. Rather than prioritising financial outcomes alone, the organisation reinvests resources into staff development, resident support, innovation, and local partnerships. This approach contributes to organisational resilience by improving staff retention, strengthening collaboration, and ensuring that social impact remains central to its mission.

Overall, Apax demonstrates how workplaces can function as communities of learning and service, where both skills and values are developed in tandem. Its model shows that when organisations intentionally integrate human values into everyday practice, they can enhance wellbeing, inclusion, and productivity simultaneously, while contributing to broader social progress.

## Roundtables Concept Note

### Work, Wealth and Wellbeing: *Building Social Cohesion*

#### **Where have we been and where are we now?**

Socio-economic equality has emerged as a critical area of focus for all in the UK, from individuals to policy makers, particularly in light of contemporary challenges such as unemployment, political polarisation, demographic shifts, and rapid technological change. All these challenges, in their own way, undermine efforts towards social cohesion. Historically, the UK has been divided across economic lines and this has over time driven groups of people further apart. Endless permutations of “us” and “them” have perpetuated, defining groups ever more narrowly and in contrast to each other.

Social and economic justice touches all aspects of life in the UK, from the family, to community, work and education. This highlights its importance for the progress of society. We have seen what it means for the fraying of social bonds to worsen but we have also seen what can be achieved in pockets of society where friends, neighbours and colleagues see themselves as contributing to one common purpose. Times of crisis,

Cultivating socio-economic equality in society must go beyond the individual satisfaction of material needs, to creating holistic transformation at the level of thought, attitude and relationships which lead to human flourishing. This wholesale transformation must take place at the level of the individual, the community and the institution if we are to have sustainable change. Human flourishing depends on more than income; it relies on people feeling valued, respected, and capable of contributing meaningfully to society.

This transformation must occur on three levels:

- **Individual:** Every person must be empowered to see themselves as a moral agent capable of shaping society through noble action, not just economic consumption.
- 
- **Community:** Local networks must inspire individuals to see their lives as interdependent with those around them.
- 
- **Institutional:** Public institutions must earn and maintain the trust of citizens by acting with integrity, transparency, and purpose.

Policy plays an important role in the realisation of a bigger vision of what UK society could be like. Looking beyond applying punitive measures or increasing access to services, it has the potential to lay out a unified framework to which everyone can contribute in their respective contexts. It can transform the way people view their role in society, the impact they can have and the ways in which they interact with each other and their institutions.

A strong foundation of trust necessary for concerted, national efforts is cultivated through each social actor demonstrating their commitment to a common vision. Individually, citizens must take on their roles as responsible and caring community members, voters and people. Communities must create spaces to inspire individuals to recognise their common humanity and put their unique talents and capacities to use within a wider context than just their individual lives. Institutions must regain the trust of the people under their aegis through coherent words and deeds which aspire to a lofty vision of justice and equality.

### **Where do we want to go?**

This concept note hopes to be the starting point for the exploration of transformative approaches to socio-economic equality under five thematic areas – work, community, service and youth – and how each is connected to an overarching vision of a more socio-economically equitable UK society. All are invited to take part in this ongoing conversation, to envision a future UK society embodied by safety, flourishing for all and vibrant, outward-looking communities. At this critical juncture, we have an opportunity to help shape the direction of progress. The questions below can guide this collective undertaking:

What would it look like in your neighbourhood and community if there was lasting social coherence? What kinds of transformation would you see? What is the role of youth and young people in this process?

What is the role of institutions in creating a more stable social environment? If you were a policy maker, how would you go about achieving this?

How do we bring people across the socio-economic spectrum closer together? What progress has been made in this area and what obstacles still exist?

What is true wealth? How do we go beyond measuring wealth and value in purely monetary terms?

What is the role of work in the lives of individuals and communities? How do we learn to value work but not allow it to become our whole identities on an individual and collective level?

### **Bahá'í Quotations**

“Humanity is gripped by a crisis of identity, as various peoples and groups struggle to define themselves, their place in the world, and how they should act. Without a vision of shared identity and common purpose, they fall into competing ideologies and power struggles. Seemingly countless permutations of “us” and “them” define group identities ever more narrowly and in contrast to one another. Over time, this splintering into divergent interest groups has weakened the cohesion of society itself. Rival conceptions about the primacy of a particular people are peddled to the exclusion of the truth that humanity is on a common journey in which all are protagonists. Consider how radically different such a fragmented conception of human identity is from the one that follows from a recognition of the oneness of humanity. In this perspective, the diversity that characterizes the human family, far from contradicting its oneness, endows it with richness. Unity, in its Bahá'í expression, contains the essential concept of diversity, distinguishing it from uniformity. It is through love for all people, and by subordinating lesser loyalties to the best interests of humankind, that the unity of the world can be realized and the infinite expressions of human diversity find their highest fulfilment.”

“Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy. If, however, a few have inordinate riches while the rest are impoverished, and no fruit or benefit accrues from that wealth, then it is only a liability to its possessor.”

“The welfare of any segment of humanity is inextricably bound up with the welfare of the whole. Humanity's collective life suffers when any one group thinks of its own well-being in isolation from that of its neighbours or pursues economic gain without regard for how the natural environment, which provides sustenance for all, is affected. A stubborn obstruction, then, stands in the way of meaningful social progress: time and again, avarice and self-interest prevail at the expense of the common good.”

### **Bahá'í Quotations on Consultation**

“The truth is, of a certainty, too evident to be enshrouded in a veil, the way too clear to be obscured by darkness, and certitude too manifest to be eclipsed by any fleeting whim.”

Consultation is an approach to decision-making and is a tool which helps guide the collective investigation of truth. To use it, a group will gather, sharing their thoughts liberally and listening attentively to the inputs of others. Once an opinion is shared, it becomes detached from the person who shared it. Over time, these different inputs will cohere into one harmonised conclusion.

“The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions.”

“All are seeking truth, and there are many roads leading thereto. Truth has many aspects, but it remains always and forever one. Do not allow difference of opinion, or diversity of thought to separate you from your fellow-men, or to be the cause of dispute, hatred and strife in your hearts. Rather search diligently for the truth and make all men your friends.”

“No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation.”

“Take counsel together on all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding.”

