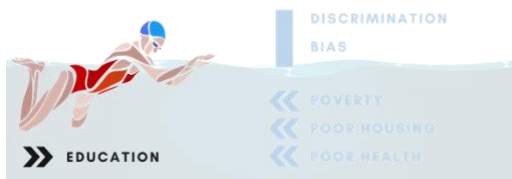


What is deep opportunity?



A society of **shallow opportunity** provides a decent level of education for all and ensures that no one has to overcome overt discrimination or bias, but does not tackle underlying systemic barriers to maximising their potential, such as growing up in poverty, in poor housing or in poor health.



A society of **deep opportunity** provides a decent level of education for all and ensures that no one has to overcome overt discrimination or bias, but also ensures that no one faces underlying systemic barriers to maximising their potential, as everyone has access to the 'fair necessities'.

Why is deep opportunity important?

1: The moral case

The philosopher John Rawls distinguishes 'fair equality of opportunity' from 'formal equality of opportunity' (what we call 'deep' and 'shallow' opportunity respectively). As US President Lyndon B Johnson said in 1965: "It is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates".

2: The political case

More than three in four people in Britain are concerned about a lack of fair opportunities, and want action by government to invest and legislate so that everyone has a genuinely equal opportunity to thrive. Failure to deliver real progress on this area in the next parliament would present a genuine threat to democracy in the UK in this decade.

3: The policy case

A society in which everyone has a genuinely equal opportunity to thrive builds an economy in which everyone can contribute, in which fewer people need support from the state, and in which less money is needed to tackle a wide range of expensive and unnecessary social problems. Fairer societies are more productive, efficient and cohesive.

How far are we from achieving deep opportunity?

As a society, we have some way to go before we even achieve shallow opportunity in the UK, as many people still face bias and discrimination, and not everyone has the benefit of a good education throughout their childhood and adolescence. But we have even further to go before we achieve deep opportunity, because of the increasing severity and range of underlying structural barriers. The [Fairness Index](#) provides some examples:

22% of people in the UK (14.9 million people) live in poverty

Social Metrics Commission, 2023

15% of occupied homes (3.7 million homes) do not meet basic standards of comfort, repair, facilities and safety

English Housing Survey, 2023

The richest 10% in the UK enjoy an average of 18.5 more years of healthy life than the poorest 10%

Office for National Statistics, 2020

There are many ways in which deprivation degrades cognitive development and performance, which means that economic inequality inevitably leads to educational inequality, and would do so even if the education system was perfect.

So it is no surprise that in Britain today, educational outcomes and career opportunities are severely unequal:

Disadvantaged children are 18.8 months behind their peers by the time they take their GCSEs

Education Policy Institute, 2023

29% of disadvantaged pupils go to university, compared to 49% of non-disadvantaged pupils

Department for Education, 2023

22% of disadvantaged graduates become top quintile earners, compared to 46% of privately educated graduates

Sutton Trust / Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2021

What are the barriers to deep opportunity?

Of course education and skills are vital, but we also need to look at the *social determinants* of education - the barriers that hold some children back from achieving their best in the classroom, even with the best possible educational support, such as poverty, poor housing and poor health. These barriers in turn have deeper structural causes, such as inadequate social security, a dysfunctional labour market and housing system, crumbling public services and unequal access to justice. Each of these are interwoven with inequalities of class, race, gender, region, disability and so on. But we want to focus on three really deep structural causes of these barriers to opportunity, each linked to one of the [Fair Necessities](#), which do not get enough attention in the debate about how to promote opportunity: wealth inequality, the tax system, and our political system.

Wealth inequality



Our economy is structured so that [wealth inequality](#) runs rampant – and it will get much worse over the coming decades. Wealth inequality entrenches advantage, reduces the role of merit as opposed to luck, exacerbates poverty, forces up house prices, undermines health outcomes, damages social cohesion and trust, and distorts our democracy.

Links to [fair essentials](#): Everyone should have their basic needs met so that no one lives in poverty, and everyone can play a constructive role in society

Tax system



To tackle the barriers to deep opportunity (poverty, poor housing, poor health), we need to invest in public services, social housing and social security, and better regulate housing and employment. But our unfair and ineffective [tax system](#) fails to tax wealth properly, has plenty of unnecessary reliefs and loopholes, and doesn't raise enough revenue.

Links to [fair exchange](#): Everyone should contribute to society by paying the taxes they owe, and in return be supported by society when they need it

Political system



Our [political system](#) is structurally skewed towards short term interests and rewards. And our system is too vulnerable to influence from entrenched interests, including the very wealthy. None of this is helped by a media that is largely owned by oligarchs. This leads to policies that further entrench wealth inequality, and blocks reform.

Links to [fair treatment](#): Everyone should be treated according to need, enjoying equal respect and equal influence on decisions made in their name

The richest 20% own 63% of the country's wealth, while the poorest 20% own just 0.6%

Office for National Statistics, 2020

Some people earning £10 million pay a 21% tax rate, similar to the rate paid by a median earner on £30,000

University of Warwick, 2020

69% of people say they do not have any say in what the government does

Office for National Statistics, 2023

How can we achieve deep opportunity?

We want to test our hypothesis that there is a broad public and expert consensus in support of a range of policy solutions that can help to deliver deep opportunity by the end of the decade, and without significantly raising taxes on working people. We will be carrying out polling in the coming weeks and months on a range of policy areas that have the potential to meet these criteria, and publishing the results on our website, starting in late February with a [report based on new polling on tax](#), and a [broader summary of public attitudes to tax reforms](#).