



Good Things Foundation

Our response to Government's Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper

Community integration is crucial to a strong society for all, and we believe communities should be places everyone can exist together in harmony. However, there are an increasing number of barriers to truly integrated communities, including a lack of English language skills, a civil society which is being squeezed, and lack of opportunity for people to come together.

Good Things Foundation has submitted a response to the Government's Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, published in March 2018. This paper summarises our response.

Our response was developed based on our significant experience of working in communities to support people to connect with others and integrate, not least through our English My Way programme. Since 2014, the highly successful programme has helped over 20,000 people to develop their English language skills, supporting them to better integrate in their local communities.

To develop this response, we held a focus group, attended by over 25 organisations in the Online Centres Network, as well as collecting additional responses through a survey.

The key themes we presented were:

The important role of community organisations

Community organisations, working on the front line and with a real understanding of the challenges their individual communities present, are a real asset in realising integrated communities. The Online Centres Network - made up of 5,000 hyperlocal organisations and brought together by Good Things Foundation - supports people with multiple complex needs. These community partners are experts in knowing how to negotiate the challenging systems in which people have to operate. They support people in a holistic and creative way and take a person-centred approach, starting with what matters to people and their families. They make up the social infrastructure of communities and are perfectly placed to help the government realise its vision for integrated communities.

Local activity, national coordination

Through the Green Paper, the Government has presented a vision for tailored local plans and interventions in order to tackle the unique challenges and barriers presented by each community. Although we agree that tailored local interventions are required, we also recognise the value of light-touch national coordination in ensuring consistency in delivery and economies of scale. Good Things Foundation adopts a 'nationally coordinated, locally delivered' approach which has proven highly effective in the delivery of quality programmes such as English My Way, our pre entry level ESOL programme.

We know that local funding - including funding at a local authority level - does not always reach the hyperlocal level where it can really have an impact, reaching people who are very excluded. Hyperlocal community groups providing unique and valuable support are struggling with financial sustainability, and these organisations are vital to the success of the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper.

But we believe it goes deeper than locality. Plans and interventions need to be person centred and tailored at an individual level, by trusted organisations who have a deep understanding of the barriers people face.

Support for English language learning

For integration to truly happen, it is crucial that the Integrated Communities Strategy puts measures in place to support people to improve their English language skills. We welcome the proposal for an ESOL strategy for England and would like to see this accompanied by a framework and/or guide to help Government and practitioners understand what the characteristics of community integration are, what the benefits for individuals can be and how these can be measured at a local level through community support. Good Things Foundation has developed this [playbook](#) as a first step towards this.

Through our English My Way programme, we have seen first hand the huge impacts improved English language skills have on individuals and communities. In the last year of the programme, 72% of learners improved their level of English (speaking and listening), 81% of learners had increased confidence using their English with neighbours and acquaintances and 79% of learners had increased confidence using their English with teachers, doctors and other professionals.

However, we recognise that people are not always ready to engage with ESOL learning, and so emotional wellbeing often needs to be addressed first to ensure people understand the benefits of learning English, and to overcome barriers such as lack of confidence.

How digital technology can play a role

Digital technology is a vital part of a strong civil society, and we know it can play a huge role in driving integrated communities. It has been a key tool in enabling consistency in the English My Way programme, helping us to share a common curriculum, and to evaluate this in a consistent way.

Progression to learning and employment

There is huge potential for improvements in the way we build the skills of individuals, helping them to either move into work, to progress at work, or to move on to further learning. A lack of English language skills is a significant barrier to people entering the labour market, and by addressing this skills gap, we can increase economic opportunity. In the last year of the English My Way programme, 59% learners progressed to an Entry Level 1 ESOL course, 46% did further digital skills training, and 38% progressed to other community learning. On top of this, 17% progressed to employment and 15% progressed to volunteering

A lack of digital skills can compound these issues. There is a large and untapped opportunity, as part of the Integrated Communities strategy, to build support for digital and other basic skills alongside ESOL provision.

Through delivering a range of programmes that have a significant economic impact, including the Department for Education funded Future Digital Inclusion programme to support 1 million people to improve their digital skills, we have seen a range of knock-on effects on skills development, not least in supporting people to improve their confidence by giving them a clear sense of achievement which helps to build a positive outlook for the future, and a greater sense of aspiration.

However, progression can be challenging. For example, moving from a community setting to a college is a big step and might never happen, so it is important this isn't a prerequisite of community integration programmes. We also know that not everyone will be ready, or in a position, to gain employment. Online Centres spend a number of months building up trust and supporting individuals to feel confident about themselves and to gain a sense of self worth. For many people, they are far away from even considering accepting further help, such as employment support, so it is crucial that the importance of informal learning and emotional support, as well as access to education and training, is recognised.

Measuring impact

We have launched our [Community Integration Playbook](#), based on a number of years, after identifying a lack of soft outcomes relating to Community Integration. The playbook begins this process, bringing together learnings from many of our community social inclusion projects and starting to define what we mean by community integration

- that it differs from person to person - and what organisations and policy makers can do to build an inclusive society.

We think that our playbook is a useful addition to the integration measures outlined in the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, adding another layer of detail and acting as a practical toolkit to help deliver against and support the measure.

Our recommendations

We are broadly supportive of the measures recommended in the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, but want to add some further recommendations we believe Government should consider:

- Lead on developing a **cross-government integration strategy** which holds other departments and local authorities, including Mayoral Combined Authorities to account for delivering change in their communities
- **Focusing resources where they are most needed**, as identified by communities
- Encouraging leaders to **talk regularly to people in their community** - facilitated through civil society organisations such as Online Centres - and to co-design solutions to barriers to community integration with those most affected. Successful leadership is about designing services with, not for, local people.
- **Investigate integrated funding** bringing together digital, ESOL, civic participation, financial literacy and housing, with a focus on providing holistic support that can be tailored to the individual
- **Develop a consistent outcomes framework**, which defines what we mean by community integration, and which recognises the broad range of outcomes that can contribute to it.

Thank you to all of our partners who contributed to this response.

To discuss further, please get in touch by emailing us on hello@goodthingsfoundation.org or tweeting us [@goodthingsfdn](https://twitter.com/goodthingsfdn)