

Remember the importance of the skills they don't teach you at school

Adapted from an article from *The Independent*, 15 June 2000, by Hamish McRae

In human terms the poverty of the bottom 15 per cent of our population is surely a more pressing issue than the privileges of the top 1 __0__ cent – all the more in that many of our poor are children. That is a profoundly worrying fact in itself; but it is all the more alarming because the path to adult poverty seems to start early: children who are __1__ up poor are the most likely to remain so throughout their lives. Is there much __2__ can be done now to reduce inequalities 20 years hence? Well, I don't think we know the answers, but at least we can see the importance of the question – it is the core of a new and ambitious project __3__ *Incomes and Inequalities 2021*. The group had its first __4__ 10 days ago, so it is still at the stage of framing lines of inquiry __5__ than coming to any conclusions. But already a couple of themes have emerged that deserve a wider airing.

For demographic reasons alone, governments a generation from now are likely to be __6__ enormous financial pressure. There will be tremendous demand for services for the elderly and a gradually decreasing __7__ of the people of working age who will have to pay for them. So how do we attack those root causes? One potentially fruitful line is the idea of teaching young people life skills – the things you really need to know, rather than the things they __8__ you on in examinations. Great idea and not really a new one at all – for this is what many young people learnt a generation ago.

If you had to try to set out the things that young people need to know in the 21st century, what __9__ they be? I suggest they might __10__ into three broad categories: basic "looking after yourself" skills, interpersonal skills and handling money. To suggest the first of these may almost seem patronising, but there is so much evidence that many people don't look after __11__ very well that it may be the best place to start. Under this head would come things such as eating a balanced diet – look at the evidence of rising obesity. It would include how to recognise that you are not __12__ and what to do about it, the need to take some form of exercise and so on.

Interpersonal skills are now being recognised __13__ enormously important in the workplace, but that is only half the issue, maybe the less important half. People have to have these skills outside the workplace, too. Non-work interpersonal skills might include: how to pick friends, the importance of being __14__ time for social events

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