

Written submission by interested individual in UK - input for the preparation of Professor Philip Alston
United Nations Special Rapporteur's visit November 2018.

Dear Mr Alston,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit - in a gesture showing support to the 'human rights enterprise'¹ - a contribution to the UK poverty inquiry 2018. I really appreciate that Guardian News/the United Nations invited this public participation.

I have previously taught/learned about the UN organisation with students as a primary teacher, either when working in international schools with the Primary Years programme/International Baccalaureate or when teaching in Rights Respecting Schools in the UK.

But as a currently low-income or unemployed 'out-cast' the UN seemed far away...

Being sign-posted, through the announcement of this inquiry, to the article on human rights by Professor Philip Alston¹ and the extract of the Alex Tiffin diary² helped me to feel less like a salmon drowning in Yemen! It is reassuring to discover fully aware world collaborators are striving to 'take action on issues confronting humanity'³ in these uncertain times.

Encouraging genuine interest in the public voice, whilst perhaps risking 'push-back'¹ response, may lead to increased awareness of the work of the United Nations and further innovation in promoting prosperity and peace for all.

I had been worrying ♪ that in 10 or 20 years I will feel numbly guilty about not speaking up for vulnerable people globally and increasingly annoyed for 'JAMs'⁴ still struggling with wealth discrimination or inequality in the UK. So I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the forum, following some of the thematic issues listed.

¹ ['The Populist Challenge to Human Rights' by Philip Alston - Journal of Human Rights Practice Vol 9 Issue 1 Feb 2017](http://academic.oup.com/jhrp/article/9/1/1/3772736)
academic.oup.com/jhrp/article/9/1/1/3772736

² [Diary by Alex Tiffin www.theguardian.com/society/2018/aug/22/un-poverty-chief-calls-for-evidence-on-effects-of-austerity-in-uk](http://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/aug/22/un-poverty-chief-calls-for-evidence-on-effects-of-austerity-in-uk)

³ [United Nations overview http://www.un.org/en/sections/about-un/overview/](http://www.un.org/en/sections/about-un/overview/)

♪ In the words of Ben Howard/The Fear 'All this apathy you feel will make a fool of us all'

⁴ 'Just about managing' people in UK www.gov.uk/government/speeches/statement-from-the-new-prime-minister-theresa-may

A. General

The Government definition of poverty is measured as :

'People in relative low income – living in households with income below 60% of the median in that year;
People in absolute low income – living in households with income below 60% of (inflation-adjusted) median income in some base year, usually 2010/11'
(Briefing Paper 7096 - House of Commons Library/ Feargal MacGuinness-August 2018)

Perhaps a short-coming of the government's definition of poverty is that it does not refer to quality of life or even to those not living in households ie homeless people. An attempt to compartmentalise low-income poverty, as though households are sectioned neatly on a Monopoly board game, does not recognise the real economic barriers that lead to human rights violations. There is a high probability that a 'just about managing' player of Monopoly UK version 2018 might land a Chance card that reads:

Congratulations
Your family household income is now over
£7400!
(£616 a month)

Free School Meals cut-backs commence - new
2018 reduced earning thresholds!

Please pay your children's school meals now [5](#)

Inequality of life impact? The music instrument lesson cannot be or the parent needs to work extra unplanned hours leading to less time with their children; disadvantage and stigma. But unfortunately there are no Opportunity cards that read:

A New Job!
Collect a sufficient Government Gap Loan
to enable you to take up your job offer ©

The UN definition does not segregate poverty and raises awareness of a poverty definition that 'looks not just at resources but at the capabilities, choices, security and power needed for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other fundamental civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights'. [6](#) Of course, it can be challenging to enjoy an adequate standard of living when aware of inequalities in salary/other economic barriers that impact on life rights for others and yourself/your family as outlined by the UN in the Declaration of Human Rights.[7](#)

[5 http://www.sec-ed.co.uk/news/a-cut-disguised-as-kindness-concerns-over-free-school-meal-reforms/](http://www.sec-ed.co.uk/news/a-cut-disguised-as-kindness-concerns-over-free-school-meal-reforms/) [6](#) United Nations/Office of the High Commissioner OHRC

[7 http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights](http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights)

© A new job offer may involve relocation, housing costs. Any welfare allowance that you may be receiving as an unemployed person will cease on the first day of work. If your salary is paid monthly, this involves a month of receiving no salary, possibly whilst expected to perform according to monthly salary employment expectations, you may have no savings. This would impact negatively on your chances of being able to take up a job.

With 24/7 data accessibility it is possible to learn that a UK radio presenter famously earns £2 200 000 per annum.⁸ Or that a 'gig economy' worker could be earning £2 an hour - it was reported that 20% of workers at Deliveroo earned this - less than the minimum wage of £7.73 an hour.⁹ This pay inequality leads to discord and intersects with human rights of security, choice, capability.¹⁰ A government commissioned review in 2010 suggested 'promoting pay fairness by tackling disparities in public sector organisations'¹¹ and suggested adopting pay ratios of 20:1. Teachers employed by the public sector have finally received a pay rise of 3.5% in 2018/19 following frozen salaries for 7 years. As a primary class teacher with more than 12 years experience my salary would be £35 008 per year; in Inner London £40 371. There has been no pay rise for public sector Headteachers this academic year, whose pay varies depending on factors such as size of school, but I think generally range from £45 000 to £110 000. Unusually, a School Academy Trust CEO (responsible for education in 44 schools) received a pay increase of £40 000 - to earn an estimated annual salary of £370 000 per year in 2015.¹² Which possibly does align to the 20:1 pay ratio implementation! In UK education structured pay scales equal transparency regarding salaries which supports trust. There was much publicising of 'fat cat' salaries earned by University leaders or Academy Heads in the media last year. But maybe the 20:1 ratio move to more equality in pay could also be adopted in the private sector. The CEO of Persimmon earned a £47 million salary in 2017.¹³ Of course teachers don't choose to be in education to be zillionaires and there is wisely said to be a salary that equates to happiness that is far below £2 million. But educating future generations requires further resources that could perhaps be derived from paying a few less nonsensical salaries, and educators deserve more status - which is partly measured in relative financial terms currently.

As public sector school budgets are being cut due to austerity in 2018/19, paying for more experienced teachers (even those who do not receive additional threshold award payments) will present difficulties for each school. Other public sectors - the National Health Service, Police force, Prisons etc will also need to be creative to maximise resources for the unfreezing pay increases and coping with recruitment/retention perhaps due to training bursary cuts (eg for mid-wife training). In teacher shortage areas eg London (due to housing/transport costs) perhaps a government loan could be set up to support teachers with relocation costs to solve recruitment difficulties.

Some CEOs or other high profile generously paid professionals who feel there may be pay inequalities are taking responsibility by leading the way in voluntarily taking pay cuts or capping pay, as reported on by Channel 4 News.¹⁴ Also in the private sector, the Co-op supermarket shares an alliance of principles and perhaps this approach could be advanced in other supermarkets, to include more even pay distribution. As one of the few locations that a diverse cross-section of the community visits regularly supermarkets could afford to be leaders in community involvement initiatives.

⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-40653383>

⁹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/deliveroo-workers-national-living-wage-employee-rights-a8461781.html>

¹⁰ <https://academic.oup.com/hrlr/article-abstract/18/3/411/5086067?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

¹¹ <https://www.e-reward.co.uk/news/hutton-calls-for-20-1-pay-ratios-in-the-public-sector>

¹² <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news> (A TV co-presenter also earned £450 00 this year for shared responsibility of a 1 hour entertainment prog each evening to put this unusual salary in context..)

¹³ <http://uk.businessinsider.com/persimmon-ceo-jeff-fairburn-earned-47-million-in-2017-2018> ¹⁴ Female CEOs discuss capping their own pay www.channel4.com/news/sacha-romanovitch-grant-thornton-ceo-i-capped-my-salary

The importance of ensuring due emphasis and close attention to the 'nitty gritty' scrutiny of data - of organisations/companies/government/councils related to funding has been noted. Public service human rights champions can ensure people are not marginalised due to low income by highlighting missed opportunities to sustain profitability ethically.

Inequality challenges can be shared globally with other nations that have already met or are now experiencing these world-wide financial patterns. Through real collaboration rather than competition for wealth or blaming of others, countries can develop new approaches to sustainable growth of all lands and more even resource distribution so people experience the security, choices, capabilities and power ⁶ that they are seeking in the countries they may be fleeing. The UK is a strong contributor to the United Nations, which is especially vital - in facilitating a coalition to develop fair, compassionate policies; understanding forward planning and strength in eradicating inequalities - if the UK ceases to be a part of the European Union.

B. Austerity Austerity and Mental Health

Possibly linked to income inequalities and the demands of trying to plug the gap in under-funded high pressurised environments, there is a rise in individuals needing support for mental health conditions such as stress, anxiety and depression in the UK. Vulnerable groups may include the unemployed, young people/school children, ex-military professionals, homeless people, those experiencing addiction, sufferers of long-term illnesses or disabilities, any individual that is employed but is still struggling financially such as an NHS employee that has had to visit a food-bank or any individual that is struggling with bullying/harassment.

Further media reports seem to suggest that there has been a long term lack of investment in access to quality Mental Health services for all:

Young 'failed' on Mental Health - 20 June 2006 BBC news

England's mental health services 'in crisis' - 16 October 2013 BBC news

Mental health services a "car crash" - 24 June 2014 BBC news

An NHS study of 2017 found that there was a 68% rise of self-harm in girls aged 13-16 since 2011; that wasn't seen in boys ¹³ and in 2018 'nearly a quarter ..(of girls).. were reported as self-harming' as reported by the NHS and Good Childhood report. In the UK there were 177 suicides amongst the age group of 15-19s in 2017, compared with 110 in 2010. ¹⁴ The reports further showed that the incidences reflected inequality of opportunity. Further to self-harm, there has been a shocking rise in incidences in the UK such as 'knife crime' deaths of young people which may be sometimes 'gang' related or poverty linked in complex ways eg to drugs. ¹⁵ Inequality can impact on access to quality mental health services to prevent and treat - some regions have a holistic approach that includes talking therapies with qualified specialised counsellors, exercise therapy, and referral to helpful literature/community groups in addition to medication; where other areas may have a 3 month waiting list to access far more limited medication biased service. To have a mental health condition in the UK you are fortunate to be quickly prescribed medication to help, but a more integrated approach is not as equally accessible. Doctors recognise the 'sh**t life syndrome' and it's

¹⁴ <https://www.nhs.uk/news/mental-health/worrying-rise-reports-self-harm-among-teenage-girls-uk/> ¹⁵ www.theguardian.com/uk/knifecrime and most likely linked to self expression deficit as mentioned earlier.

probable that regions with a large proportion of patients suffering may receive less high quality 'mental health' provision as the services may be in high demand. As the World Health Organisation states 'Responsibility for promoting mental health and preventing mental disorders extends across all sectors and all government departments. This is because poor mental health is strongly influenced by a range of social and economic determinants including income level, employment status, education level, material standard of living.....' (*World Health Organisation Action Plan 2013 -2020 Global Target Goal 2, para 70*) Ensuring less income equality and less obstruction to welfare allowance payment (eg 5 weeks wait for a Universal Credit claim payment due to new government policy) would lead to less mental health conditions.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists stated this year that Mental Health Trusts have less money to spend than 5 years ago. ¹⁶ Alongside this Government has pledged a Gringotts ¹⁷ stack of money to progressing Mental health services. Improvement of mental health could include a focus on *Why* are so many young people (and others) suffering such mental stress that they are resorting to self-harm/suicide or attacks on others? During the last 2 years the density of physical aggression, co-ordinated verbal bullying/harassment or micro-aggressions I have witnessed in the news or personally has been shocking and depressing. Ignorance or an attempt to trivialise leads in the long term to greater expense in treating mental health conditions.

The mother of a 16 year old boy from Worcester, who took his life, has written an open letter urging others not to leave bullying unreported, her son had been bullied since the age of 10. She reported that he was being bullied by people he didn't even know (www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hereford-worcester-37574528).

On the ITV news website, a horrified mum has shared a video of her daughter being bullied (www.itv.com/news/meridian/2018-09-11/horrified-mum-shares-video-of-daughter-being-bullied/)

UK University student suicide rates have also increased (www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-44583922)

A long-serving Member of Parliament resigned recently due to bullying within their own party, and a Queen's Counsel has complained of judicial bullying in court of female lawyers. Around the time of the referendum an MP actually died after being targeted and killed in her own constituency...

It seems that society has become de-sensitised to 'hate crime' - either as an uncertainty reaction to Brexit changes or division, or as a coping mechanism to deal with the stresses of managing social media or because of working in under-funded environments, or fear about how they relate to others and their place in a group - maybe just a simple opportunity by some to exploit and widen divides and degrade people. Blessed be the fruit! To prevent bullying/harassment related life chances being damaged in schools, government is promising a qualified mental health professional in each school/college. This could be invaluable if resourced decently, but one practitioner will possibly not be able to deliver prevention or early intervention support for a whole secondary school (depending on identified need in an area), especially if the designated person is a teacher with other exam related work-load commitments.

¹⁶ The Royal College of Psychiatrists 'Mental Health Trust income lower' <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mediacentre/pressreleases2018/sammh...>

¹⁷ (to coin a phrase - Gringotts is the Wizarding bank operated by goblins; Harry Potter books by JK Rowling)

We teach Growth Mindset in schools mostly linked to academic resilience, but there is less emphasis on, and few tangible rewards gained by teaching and learning of skills such as being caring and commitment to standing up for others who may be coping with pernicious bullying. Cyber bullying (in all its various forms) for example may not have been recognised by others. Education can ensure development of meta-cognitive belief skills - to have awareness that it is normal to dislike feeling unaccepted by others but actually it doesn't matter how many Facebook likes or followers you have. Or that feeling cool and the gang may not be so cool if you are being influenced by people you don't really want to emulate or that others may have their undetected problems. A popular solution to bullying of all types seems to be 'being part of a team' for protection against being a victim. Perhaps we should also be re-educating that respect for others that may be 'different' at all life stages is even more important. An unintended result of not respecting diversity and independence can erode the human right of expressing personality. Perhaps we should also be teaching emotional self regulation more - to manage feeling not strong or unpopular so that we can support ourselves and others who may be experiencing difficulties.

Articles 3 and 5 of the Human Rights Acts refer to rights upholding not experiencing 'degrading treatment' and having 'security' - to maintain these rights new laws may be required as harassment results in a reduction of those that are vulnerable not having equal accessibility to security, choices, power, capability⁶ enjoyed by those not in poverty). A new law in June 2018 proposed a new 'up-skirting' law which would make it illegal to photograph up-skirts of females without their authorisation. Unfortunately current government officials blocked this law from progressing through parliament, the prime minister has responded by saying she hoped the bill would pass soon with government support. The government has in November 2017 promised to take steps to protect the vulnerable online, they have published a Green paper. No changes have been made to pass a cyber bullying law - so the UK is not yet the 'safest place to be on-line'. In the meantime, government has also revised its Respect policy regarding Parliament bullying. Presently it seems that incidences/patterns and impacts of bullying are more recognised but legislation is lacking to prevent and protect. In cases of school bullying, obligation is mostly placed on schools, instead of on the bully or the bully's parents. Could inertia to act on anti-bullying legislation in society in general be due to a lack of police support because of austerity measures?

Important education for mental health support for prevention and early intervention that is occurring includes Place2Be, a leading mental health charity, that provides in-school counselling support for children and their families and runs group-work activities. If there had not been so many long term austerity cuts, this type of talking therapy support could have reached out to even more schools, including rural coastal areas to ensure there is more regional equality of access to quality mental health services.

A truly inspiring example of an early intervention project organised by a charity in the community was captured by Channel 4 news. The news report demonstrates how a young victim of knife crime - through mistaken identity - and his family and friends reached out to support others and help each other with community action team-work. This story can restore your faith in people's abilities to really recognise symptoms and causes and make a strong positive difference! This intervention overcame various stresses to still respond empathetically. (www.channel4.com/news/the-stabbing-victim-on-a-mission-to-end-violence-in-london) Numerous voluntary charitable organisations in UK work hard to support vulnerable groups: Sport/Comic Relief; BBC DIY SOS programme which

supported victims of the Grenfell tower disaster etc A new on-line mental health gateway- Heads Together - Mental Health gateway <https://www.headstogether.org.uk/> is being initiated to support companies, employers and employees which can address the geographical location barrier to accessing mental health services. The government seems to have responded well to earlier crises in Emergency MH services, taking action to support services and providing funding. It has also devoted money to perinatal mental health care to support mothers and babies.

Perhaps 'lessons learned'¹ could be the government reaching out more to involve those 'hard to reach' people at the forming proposals/action plan stage and further consultation with people of varying regions in UK when planning policies and spending. A mentoring approach with other health trusts who are especially successful could work in mental health (and in all other inequalities). At this stage I feel cautious about the huge sum of Mental Health money pledged by the government - for fear that it will all evaporate in a chemical reaction without delivering any sustainable progress on addressing causes of mental health conditions - when as one of the wealthier countries UK could be a leader in this still developing area of health.

Austerity and Brexit and the Digital Divide

The digital divide can be experienced in simplest terms as having:

a) A £10 Alcatel phone (other brands of saver phones are available). Top up with poverty premium pay-as-you-go credit 20p a minute for a call, 20p per text. No data. Has both call and stop call buttons and FM radio. Beat phone fatigue! No email, maps, whatsapp, internet connection etc

as opposed to

b) 'The new generation of' i-phone X (other brands of smart phones are available). Unlimited minutes and texts. 4GB data. Free anti-virus protection and spotify. Has a bionic chip for augmented reality and gaming; charges wirelessly and can display multiple languages on its liquid retina HD screen. Dust and water resistant. Effortless cashless payment. #'Brilliant. In every way'! £53 a month on contract or buy the phone for reduced prices.

If on the wrong side of austerity, your digital world may be restricted to phone A and no wifi - a 'Pay as you go' Top Up Dongle that gives 2GB for £15 on your lap-top. Not advisable to play videos or send messenger messages as this eats data and you will suddenly have no internet connection (if you are waiting 5 weeks for a Universal Credit algorithm to decide whether you will have £71 a week, you may choose to eat instead of going to the phone shop to put more credit on the dongle). You may be feeling eternally grateful to those that publicised and campaigned against the previous premium phone rates (45p a minute from a mobile in 2016 as implemented by the Government) required to call the Department for work and pensions to find out what was happening to your claim money as calls are now free. But you may have chosen to buy into the new 'smart' meters for electricity that are aimed by the government at those on an electricity budget but have been proven to be a more expensive way of buying electricity.

More significantly, austerity can affect your ability to be safe online - you probably have to rely on a cheaper reconditioned phone or laptop; if you are lucky to have one! You cannot afford cyber security for your devices or know how to use encryption/buy the necessary products to be able to

send in this report for the inquiry in full confidentiality.

A Parliament Briefing Paper 5 July 2018 introduces 'CCTV surveillance by your neighbour'. Being on low income does not cover costs of counter-surveillance if you were interested. Being marginalised by low income could lead to being cyber stalked - others may try to gather information about you or monitor your on-line activity ²¹ and use it to harass you and persuade others to do so, possibly using social media. You do not have the resources to prevent this or intervene (see link to harassment/mental health).

There has been recent concern in UK regarding access to pupil school records and patient medical records such as for purposes of gathering sensitive immigration data and requests for a firewall to prevent excessive sharing of data between civil service departments. ²² As Edward Snowden said 'The people are still powerless, but now they're aware'.²³ This year Government has been condemned by the European Court of Human Rights over 'mass surveillance' in the UK as they have 'intercepted online communications on a mass scale'²⁴ The charity Amnesty International also had its data intercepted.²⁵

Such a power-imbalance, caused by illegally intruding on the privacy of others is coming from a place of poverty (of capabilities) and could lead to further poverty (of security, power) and social exclusion. Article 8 of the Human Rights convention states a 'right to respect for one's private and family life, his home and his correspondence in accordance with the law' and if the leading government are not abiding by this law, it does not discourage other hackers from snooping and using the information in pernicious bullying. Technology allows cyber bullying to follow everywhere and may not be recognised by others in the community.

Brexit may allow controversial²⁶ government spying or other cyber stalking within the UK to continue unchecked if alternative laws are not developed as there will not be collaboration to extend understanding with the European Courts.

²¹ <https://legaldictionary.net/cyberstalking/> ²² [the register.co.uk/2018/09/07/surveillance](https://www.theregister.co.uk/2018/09/07/surveillance)

²³ Edward Snowden www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jun/04

²⁴ Channel 4 news <https://www.channel4.com/news/uk-government-condemned-over-mass-surveillance-programme>

²⁵ <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/issues/Mass-surveillance>

²⁶ controversial as such anonymous, secretive accessing of the data of others is said to be to prevent terrorism - but it has been evidenced that having such data has not prevented criminal attacks.

Conclusion

Economic inequalities and all the other inequalities spiralling from these a subject that can bring a person down! The work of the United Nations and other organisations that persevere to speak the language of human rights and 'fight the good fight' for all is invaluable and I really appreciate that through this inquiry and the Guardian news publicising this, my awareness and interest in this area has been raised. Such recognition of and discussion of human rights is part of educating for solutions. I apologise for 'it's all been said before' made at great length.....