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NEW BRITISH SOCIAL ATTITUDES REPORT PUBLISHED TODAY

The British Social Attitudes 23rd Report – *Perspectives on a changing society*, is published today, Wednesday 24 January 2007.

The latest Report assesses the consequences for public attitudes of a number of recent, fundamental social changes – including the emergence of radical Islamic terrorism; an ageing society; the huge growth of the internet; globalisation and increasingly competitive labour markets; and a change of government.

The report covers social identities, euthanasia, work-life balance, personal care, political respect, turnout, civil liberties, trade unions, prejudice against disabled people and the internet and social ties.

Among the findings:

- Overwhelming majorities of the public are willing to give up various freedoms to tackle the threat of terrorism – eight in ten think that following people suspected of involvement with terrorism, tapping their phones and opening their mail is 'a price worth paying'.

- Commitment to civil liberties is in decline: in 1990, 40% disagreed that 'every adult in Britain should have to carry an identity card'; this figure has nearly halved to 22%.

- The current law that prohibits assisted dying is at odds with public opinion – four out of five people in Britain say that the law should allow a doctor to end someone's life at the person's request if they have an incurable and painful illness from which they will die.

- 'Britishness' is in decline – fewer people say that 'British' is the best way of describing themselves now than 10 years ago, and this is partly due to an increase in feelings of 'Englishness'.

- Compared with the 1960s, there has been no decline in the proportion of people identifying with a social class. There has, however, been a decline in the proportion of people saying they are working class.

A brief summary of each chapter follows.

ENDS

CLASS IDENTITY IN BRITAIN REMAINS STRONG; RELIGIOUS AND 'BRITISH' IDENTITY DECLINE

Class identity is as important to people in Britain today as it was in the 1960s – yet it is no longer related to a distinctive set of values. At the same time, while religion as a social identity has declined significantly, it continues to be strongly related to the views of the minority who attend religious services or feel they belong to a religion.

These are among the findings on people's self-described religious, political and social identities in the latest British Social Attitudes Report. The Report from NatCen also finds that fewer people in England now say 'British' is the best way of describing themselves than in the early 1990s: this is in part because 'English' is an increasingly popular choice.

Religion – there has been a major decline over time in religious identity, defined as belonging to a religion or attending religious services:

- In 1964, a quarter (26%) either did not belong to a religion or never attended a religious service. Now the same is true for over two-thirds (69%).

- Even people who belong to a religion are less likely to attend services regularly, down from around three-quarters in 1964 to half now.

Class – there has been no decline in the overall proportion of people identifying themselves as belonging to a particular social class:

- There has been an increase in the proportion of people identifying themselves as middle class, and a decline in those saying they are working class. This reflects real changes in the balance of manual and non-manual jobs in Britain.

- But despite this shift, a working-class identity is still much more common than a middle-class identity: 37% of people now identify themselves as middle class, compared with 57% identifying as working class.

Britishness – the proportion of the British public who say that 'British' is the best or only way to describe themselves has declined from 52% to 44% in just a decade (1996 compared with now). The decline is seen particularly for those living in England:

- In 1992, 63% of people living in England said that 'British' was the best or only way of describing their national identity; now just 48% of people say this.

- This is partly explained by an increase in 'Englishness': 31% of people in England chose this as their best or only identity in 1992 compared with 40% in 2005.

Social attitudes – the impact of these identities on people's social attitudes is not necessarily what might be expected. Religious identity, despite declining over time, is closely related to a person's views on relevant topics today – while the influence of a person's subjective social class on their attitudes appears to have diminished.

Although fewer people now identify with a religion, this group has markedly different attitudes towards pre-marital sex and abortion than people who do not have a religious identity – and the difference between the two groups has actually widened over time:

- In 1984, two-thirds (67%) of religious identifiers who attended services said that sexual relations before marriage are wrong, compared with just over a third (36%) of people with no religious identity. This difference of 31 percentage points in 1984 currently stands at 36 points.

Although overall subjective class identity has not declined over time, the views of middle- and working-class people are now less distinctive than they used to be on classic 'class' topics such as redistributing income:

- In 1987, half (49%) of all working-class identifiers agreed that government should redistribute income whereas a third (34%) of middle-class identifiers did so. Now that 15 percentage point gap has come down to just three points.

Professor Anthony Heath, one of the authors, comments:

'Our analysis demonstrates the need to distinguish between the incidence of an identity and the impact of it. The incidence of class identity has not declined, but it is no longer related to a distinctive set of values.'

'In contrast, the incidence of religious identity has declined, but it nonetheless remains highly significant for the minority who continue to belong.'

ENDS

This summarises 'Who do we think we are? The decline of traditional social identities' by Anthony Heath, Jean Martin and Gabriella Elgenius, in *British Social Attitudes: the 23rd Report – Perspectives on a changing society*, published by Sage for NatCen.

'QUICKENING DEATH': OVERWHELMING PUBLIC SUPPORT
FOR EUTHANASIA FOR THE TERMINALLY ILL

Four out of five people in Britain say that the law should 'definitely' or 'probably' allow a doctor to end someone's life *at the person's request* if they have an incurable and painful illness from which they will die, such as cancer. That is one of the findings in the latest British Social Attitudes Report from NatCen.

But levels of public support for euthanasia drop when the patient has an illness that is not terminal: under a half (45%) would support a law allowing it for a person who has an incurable and painful illness *from which they will not die*; and 43% would support a law allowing it for a person who is permanently and completely dependent on relatives for all their needs (but is not in much pain nor in danger of death).

Researcher Elizabeth Clery, one of the authors of the report, comments:

> 'The current law that prohibits assisted dying is at odds with public opinion – most people accept that a doctor should be allowed to end the life of someone who is painfully and terminally ill.'

> 'But the same cannot be said when the person is not terminally ill – in these cases, slightly less than half support assisted dying.'

Attitudes towards euthanasia vary greatly depending on *who* is involved and *how* assisted dying is administered. There are two main forms of assisted dying: voluntary euthanasia – ending a person's life at their request; and assisted suicide – doctors giving someone lethal medication that allows them to take their own life.

In the case of someone with an incurable and painful illness from which they will die, such as cancer, the majority are in favour of allowing a doctor to be involved, whereas only a minority support a relative being involved:

- Four out of five people (80%) say the law should allow a doctor to end the person's life at their request.

- Three out of five people (60%) say the law should allow a doctor to assist the person to take their own life.

- Just over two out of five people (44%) say the law should allow a relative to end the person's life at their request.

Attitudes to euthanasia are rooted in a wider set of values. These findings compare levels of support for euthanasia by summing support for five different scenarios and producing an average 'score' for each group of interest:

- Religion makes a difference: people who regularly attend a religious service are far less likely to support euthanasia than people who never attend. People who attend once a week or more support euthanasia in an average of 1.4 out of 5 scenarios; the equivalent figure for those who never or practically never attend is 2.8.

- People who believe in the 'sanctity of life' (those opposed to abortion, suicide and the death penalty) are more likely to be opposed to euthanasia. For example, those who 'agree strongly' that 'suicide is never justified' support euthanasia in 1.9 out of 5 scenarios, compared to 3.3 for those who 'disagree strongly'.

- People who value individual autonomy are more likely to be supportive: those who think a patient who is dying should have 'a great deal' of say in their medical treatment support euthanasia in 2.8 out of 5 scenarios, compared to 1.6 for those who say they should have no say.

ENDS

This summarises 'Quickening death: the euthanasia debate' by Elizabeth Clery, Sheila McLean and Miranda Phillips in *British Social Attitudes: the 23rd Report – Perspectives on a changing society*, published by Sage for NatCen.

GREATER STRESS AT WORK MAKES ACHIEVING 'WORK-LIFE BALANCE' MORE DIFFICULT

Both full-time and part-time employees are finding it increasingly difficult to achieve what they regard as a satisfactory balance between work and life outside work according to the latest British Social Attitudes Report from NatCen. Although working hours have fallen for men, an increase in the hours worked by women means that longer hours are being worked in two-earner families. Furthermore, both men and women appear to be expected to work harder. Certainly, reported levels of stress at work are increasing.

- Only 8% – fewer than 1 in 10 – of full-time employees, both male and female, say that they 'hardly ever' or 'never' find their work stressful. This is half the level reported in 1989. Even among women who work only part-time, just a quarter say that their work is hardly ever or never stressful, down from more than a third in 1989.

- No less than 84% of full-time women and 82% of full-time men would like to spend more time with their family. In 1989, only 75% and 70% respectively felt that way. Among part-time women, 68% would like to spend more time with their family compared with 59% in 1989.

- Equally, 77% of full-time women and 67% of full-time men would like to be able to spend more time with friends. In 1989, only 62% and 49% did so. 55% of part-time women would like to spend more time with friends, up from 44% in 1989.

- Meanwhile, 69% of full-time men and 58% of full-time women say that the demands of their job interfere with their family life at least sometimes. Only 29% of full-time men and 19% of full-time women say that the demands of family life sometimes interfere with their work.

Professor Rosemary Crompton, co-author, comments:

'Recent government policies have emphasised flexible working as the best means of improving "work-life balance". But on its own, this will not improve things if work itself is becoming more stressful.'

'There needs to be more focus on reducing stress and pressure at work rather than simply promoting "flexibility". Increases in levels of staffing, as well as reducing hours of work for men and women, could both contribute to the reduction of stress at work. Such policies might be rejected as threatening profitability, and in the future, some difficult choices might have to be made.'

ENDS

This summarises 'Are we all working too hard? Women, men, and changing attitudes to employment' by Rosemary Crompton and Clare Lyonette, in *British Social Attitudes: the 23rd Report – Perspectives on a changing society*, published by Sage for NatCen.

WHEN I'M 64: SCOTLAND AND ENGLAND DISAGREE ON FUNDING PERSONAL CARE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

A majority of people in Scotland back the Scottish Executive's controversial policy of providing 'free' personal care for older people. In contrast people in England and Wales back the UK Government's policy that how much help a person gets with the costs of care should depend on how much money they have.

According to the latest British Social Attitudes Report, published today from NatCen, 57% of people in Scotland take the view that personal care – help with things like getting dressed, shopping, cooking and cleaning (though not medical or nursing care) – should be available regardless of how much money an individual has. However, in England and Wales the equivalent figure is 43%, while 53% think that government help with the costs of care should be means-tested.

The research also finds that there is less of a 'class divide' on attitudes to 'free' personal care than there is on attitudes to pensions:

- Across Britain as a whole, 47% of managers and professionals say that the government should be mainly responsible for people's incomes in retirement, but 66% of people in routine and semi-routine occupations do so – a gap of 19 percentage points.

- Meanwhile 35% of managers and professionals support 'free' personal care, compared with 47% of people in routine and semi-routine occupations – a gap of only 12 points.

- Equally, middle class people in Scotland are 15 points more likely than their working class counterparts to say that an individual should save for a decent pension. However, there is virtually no difference between the two classes on whether individuals should save for personal care. Just 19% of managers and professionals and 16% of those in routine and semi-routine occupations say it is people's own responsibility to save for personal care.

Overall, just one in six people in Scotland (16%) say that it is people's own responsibility to save so that they can pay for care they may need in old age, whereas half (50%) say it is their responsibility to save to fund a decent pension.

A widespread concern about having to pay for care in later life is that it may mean that people have to sell their homes. This is clearly unpopular: three-quarters (76%) of people in Scotland agree that nobody should have to sell or re-mortgage their home, however valuable it is, in order to pay for personal care when they are elderly.

Even though a majority of people in Scotland support 'free' personal care, most still say they would want to provide care for their parents. Asked about the possibility of providing 10 hours of care a week for their parents:

- Two-fifths (41%) say they would want to provide most or all of this care – or are already doing so.
- A third (36%) say that they could provide some care, but not be mainly responsible.
- Just one in five (20%) could not or would not want to provide care for their parents themselves.

Researcher and co-author Rachel Ormston comments:

> 'The difference in policy across Britain appears to reflect real differences in public opinion - with the balance tilted in favour of means-testing in England & Wales, but in favour of free personal care in Scotland.'

> 'Certainly, forcing people to sell their homes in order to pay for care is a step too far for a majority of the population.'

ENDS

This summarises 'Who should pay for my care – when I'm 64?' by Rachel Ormston, John Curtice and Helen Fawcett, in *British Social Attitudes: the 23rd Report – Perspectives on a changing society*, published by Sage for NatCen.

TV NEWS BREEDS RESPECT FOR POLITICAL OPPONENTS

Britain's often adversarial style of news broadcasting appears to increase the level of respect that people have for others with different political convictions. And private conversations about politics with people with different views seem to have an even more positive effect on people's respect for their political opponents. These are among the findings in the latest British Social Attitudes Report.

Looking at the impact that the broadcast media have on people's attitudes towards their political opponents, the Report from NatCen finds that:

- The more often someone watches news on TV, the higher tends to be the level of respect they have for people who support the political party they oppose. This finding does not simply reflect differences in levels of education and political interest.

- A third of people who watch TV news 'a few days a week' or more have 'high' levels of respect for people with different political views. In contrast, fewer than 1 in 5 (17%) people who watch TV news less frequently have 'high' levels of respect.

The Report also examines the impact of newspapers and private conversations about politics on people's attitudes to their political opponents.

Neither the political affiliation of newspapers nor the frequency at which they are read influences people's levels of political respect for opponents:

- Just under a third (31%) of people who read a newspaper that has the same political affiliation as themselves have high respect for their political opponents. This is virtually identical to the 30% of those who read a newspaper that has a different political affiliation to themselves.

- 28% of those who never read a newspaper have high levels of respect for their political opponents. This is almost identical to the 31% of those who read a paper almost every day or every day.

But talking about politics with people who have different views increases respect for political opponents:

- Nearly half (47%) of people who discuss politics with friends who support a party they themselves oppose have a high level of respect for their political opponents. This compares with just a quarter (26%) of people who only discuss politics with friends who do not support a party that they oppose.

- But discussing politics is better than not discussing it at all: only 19% of people who never discuss politics with friends have a high level of respect.

The lowest levels of respect are found among people who are disengaged from the political process – those with little interest in politics, with no party identification, low exposure to media information and who avoid discussing politics with anyone.

Co-author Katrin Voltmer comments:

> 'Despite the media's pervasive presence in modern politics and its indispensable role in providing political information, it is interpersonal communication that appears to be the more effective source of respect for political opponents.'

> 'But it only does so if it involves people who have different political convictions. Political conversations with like-minded folk simply perpetuate and may even increase negative attitudes towards supporters of a different party.'

ENDS

This summarises 'Agree to disagree: respect for political opponents' by Katrin Voltmer and Mansur Lalljee, in *British Social Attitudes: the 23rd Report – Perspectives on a changing society*, published by Sage for NatCen.

INEQUALITIES IN TURNOUT GREATER
UNDER FIRST-PAST-THE-POST

Voters with less knowledge of and interest in politics are less likely to vote under 'first-past-the-post' than they are under proportional representation. According to an analysis of voting in 25 countries published in the latest British Social Attitudes Report from NatCen:

- People who are knowledgeable about politics tend to vote no matter what electoral system is in use. 81% of those who have a 'very high' level of knowledge and who live in a country that uses some form of proportional representation turn out to vote. But so equally do 78% of knowledgeable voters who live in first-past-the-post countries.

- But the electoral system in place does affect whether the less knowledgeable vote or not. Where proportional representation is used, 55% of those with a 'very low' level of knowledge turn out to vote. However, where first-past-the-post is in place only 38% do so.

This means that the 'inequality in turnout' between the more and less politically knowledgeable is greater under first-past-the-post than proportional representation.

One reason is that first-past-the-post encourages parties to chase the 'centre ground' in the hope of winning an overall majority. The consequence of this is that less knowledgeable voters in first-past-the-post countries are particularly unlikely to feel there is much difference between the parties – and to stay at home as a result.

The new Report also shows that in the 2005 election in Britain, fewer people thought there was a great deal of difference between the Conservatives and Labour than at any time over the last forty years:

- Just 13% thought there was a 'great' difference between the Conservatives and Labour in 2005. In contrast, at the time of the 1983 contest between the then Margaret Thatcher and Michael Foot, no less than 88% thought there was a great difference.

- People with little interest in politics were particularly unlikely to think there was much difference between the parties. As a result, they were particularly likely to stay at home. Only 31% of those with no interest in politics voted in 2005, compared with 81% of those with a great deal of interest.

- Since 1997 turnout has fallen by no less than 28 percentage points amongst those least interested in politics, but by only 6 points amongst the most interested. Thus not only has the overall level of turnout in Britain fallen, as fewer and fewer voters have seen much difference between the parties, but also inequalities in turnout have increased.

Professor John Curtice, one of the authors of the study, comments:

'Turnout is only likely to increase significantly once more in Britain if voters feel they are being offered a real choice. But even if that happens the use of first-past-the-post in elections to the House of Commons means it is always more likely that the less interested and knowledgeable will stay at home.'

'If we want to reduce inequalities in turnout, there is reason to question the continued use of first-past-the-post.'

ENDS

This summarises 'Proportional representation and the disappearing voter' by John Curtice, Stephen Fisher and Laurence Lessard-Phillips, in *British Social Attitudes: the 23*rd *Report – Perspectives on a changing society*, published by Sage for NatCen.

'A PRICE WORTH PAYING': CHANGING PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO CIVIL LIBERTIES UNDER THE THREAT OF TERRORISM

The British public's traditionally strong commitment to civil liberties is in decline. According to the latest British Social Attitudes Report, an overwhelming majority of people are willing to give up various freedoms to help tackle the threat of terrorism:

- 81% think that following people suspected of involvement with terrorism, tapping their phones and opening their mail is 'a price worth paying'.

- 80% think that putting people suspected of involvement with terrorism under special rules – which would mean that they could be electronically tagged, prevented from going to certain places or prevented from leaving their homes at certain times – is 'a price worth paying'.

- 79% think that allowing the police to detain people for more than a week or so without charge if the police suspect them of involvement in terrorism is 'a price worth paying'.

- 71% think that having compulsory identity cards for all adults is 'a price worth paying'.

But the Report from NatCen also finds that some freedoms are apparently too valuable for the public to be prepared to give up, although a minority do think they are 'a price worth paying':

- 76% think that torturing terror suspects in British jails to get information is unacceptable, even if it is that the only way the information can be obtained; 22% think this is 'a price worth paying'.

- 63% think that banning certain peaceful protests and demonstrations is unacceptable; 35% think this is 'a price worth paying'.

- 50% think that denying the right to a trial by jury to people charged with a terrorist-related crime is unacceptable; 45% think this is 'a price worth paying'.

Professor Conor Gearty, one of the authors of the study, comments:

> 'Our survey shows a general public that remains on the whole committed to civil liberties, albeit with less enthusiasm than in the past and with a greater susceptibility to be persuaded to dispense with them.'

> 'The very mention of something being a counter-terrorism measure makes people more willing to contemplate the giving up of their freedoms. It is as though society is in the process of forgetting why past generations thought these freedoms to be so very important.'

The proportion of people in Britain who take the most civil libertarian view across a range of issues has fallen over time:

- In 1990, 9% agreed that 'the police should be allowed to question suspects for up to a week without letting them see a solicitor'; this figure has nearly trebled to 25%.

- In 1990, 40% disagreed that 'every adult in Britain should have to carry an identity card'; this figure has nearly halved to 22%.

Why is commitment to civil liberties declining? The Report finds that:

- Fear of terrorism is *not* the primary cause of these changes as the largest part of the declines occurred in the early 1990s (before the threat of radical Islamic terrorism became apparent) with relatively little change since then.

- Changes in political rhetoric are much more likely to be the drivers. For example, on identity cards, the proportion of Labour supporters who disagree that every adult should have to carry an identity card has fallen from 45% in 1990 to 15% in 2005 as the party has changed its stance.

Neither fear of terrorism nor the 7 July 2005 suicide bombings in London influenced public views on banning peaceful protests; denying the right to a trial by jury to people charged with a terrorist-related crime; or following terror suspects, tapping their phones and opening their mail. But the more fearful people are about terrorism, the more likely they are to be prepared to give up the following freedoms:

- When it comes to allowing the police to detain terror suspects for more than a week or so without charge, 34% of those who are least fearful about terrorism think it is unacceptable, compared to only 12% of those who are most fearful about terrorism.

- Twice as many of the least fearful about terrorism think that compulsory identity cards are unacceptable (41%) than the most fearful (21%).

Despite the willingness of the public to relinquish a number of freedoms to tackle terrorism, the public is strongly committed to international human rights law, and views on these are not contingent on fear of terrorism:

- 84% agree that 'when a country is at war it must always abide by international human rights law'.
- 78% disagree that 'during war it is acceptable for the armed forces to torture people'.

ENDS

This summarises 'Civil liberties and the challenge of terrorism' by Mark Johnson and Conor Gearty, in *British Social Attitudes: the 23rd Report – Perspectives on a changing society*, published by Sage for NatCen.

UNIONS FAIL TO DELIVER, ACCORDING TO
A MAJORITY OF THEIR MEMBERS

Fewer than a third of trade union members think that they are getting good value from their union membership. And certainly in terms of their pay, the majority of union members are making an increasingly accurate judgement: over the past seven or eight years, unions seem to have lost their ability to secure higher wages for their members.

These are among the findings published in the latest British Social Attitudes Report from NatCen.

Despite the election of the Labour government in 1997, union membership continues to fall – down from 33% of employees in 1998 to 29% in 2005 – although the rate of decline has slowed compared with the years under Conservative governments.

New legislation, such as the statutory right to be recognised for pay bargaining where a majority of workers wish for this, could have provided an opportunity for unions to raise their profile and appear more modern and efficient. But they have largely failed to do so:

- Between 1998 and 2005, the proportion of employees who think that a union makes – or would make – their workplace a better place to work has remained effectively unchanged: 56% in unionised workplaces and 18% in non-unionised workplaces in 2005.

- The proportion of unionised workers who can identify their workplace representative has also remained effectively unchanged since 1998: 63% in 2005.

- Despite encouragement from the Labour government for management-union partnerships, the climate of employment relations seems not to have improved to any significant degree in the unionised sector. The proportion of employees in this sector who say that employment relations are 'very good' at their workplace stands at just 22% in 2005 - compared with 43% in non-unionised workplaces.

- The employment relations' climate is particularly bad where management oppose unions – where management is thought to encourage unions the industrial relations climate is, in fact, at its very best. Indeed, the message from government on management-union partnerships appears to have gone largely unheeded, as only a minority of unionised workers perceive management as being supportive of the union.

- Unions seem even to have lost the ability to secure higher wages for their members. In 1998, union members earned on average 8% more than non-members, after taking account of their type of jobs and other factors. By 2005, this difference had evaporated.

- Only 31% of union members think that the services they receive from their union represent good value for money.

Author Alex Bryson comments:

'The Labour government has presented new opportunities for the trade union movement by promoting a closer, more modern partnership between the two sides of industry. But so far, neither the unions nor the employers have been able to "up their game" to take advantage of this.'

ENDS

This summarises 'New Labour, New unions?' by Alex Bryson, in *British Social Attitudes: the 23rd Report – Perspectives on a changing society*, published by Sage for NatCen.

SURVEY REVEALS WIDESPREAD
PREJUDICE AGAINST DISABLED PEOPLE

Most people (75%) think that there is prejudice against disabled people in Britain today – but according to the latest British Social Attitudes Report, only 25% think that there is a lot of prejudice. At the same time, the survey respondents actually express views which indicate quite widespread prejudice.

What's more, there is considerable confusion about what constitutes disability: more than a half of respondents don't think of schizophrenia as a disability; and nearly a third think that someone who is temporarily on crutches with a broken leg is disabled. The latter does not fall under the definition used in the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

The Report from NatCen finds that there is widespread unease at the prospect of coming into contact with some types of disabled people:

- Only 29% of respondents say that they would feel very comfortable if someone with schizophrenia moved in next door (even if they knew that the condition had been successfully managed for several years).

- Only 19% say that they would feel very comfortable were a person with schizophrenia to marry a close relative of theirs.

- While this sort of prejudice is most pronounced for mental health impairments, it is also evident for other impairments: for example only 21% of respondents say that they would be very comfortable if a close relative married someone with a long-term health condition like MS or severe arthritis, and only around half (51%) would be very comfortable with their relative marrying a blind person.

Knowing disabled people has a consistent impact in reducing prejudice. People who have first or second hand experience of disability tend to perceive prejudice to be more widespread and to hold less negative attitudes towards disabled people.

For example, 82% of people who don't know anyone who is disabled say that they would not feel very comfortable with someone with schizophrenia moving in next door, compared with 71% of people who know someone who is disabled and 62% of people who are themselves disabled.

Author John Rigg comments:

> 'Policies aimed at integrating disabled people more closely into society not only help disabled people themselves, but serve to reduce prejudice in the long term by fostering greater contact between disabled and non-disabled people.'

The legal definition of disability in the DDA is any person who has a physical or mental impairment or long-term health condition, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

But the Report shows that the general public has a narrower view of what constitutes 'a disabled person', one that is focused on physical impairments:

- Only 48% of respondents think someone with schizophrenia is disabled; just 44% think that someone with cancer or an older person who requires a hearing aid is disabled; and only 25% think that someone with a severe facial disfigurement is disabled. All of these conditions are likely to fall under the legal definition.

- In contrast, 31% of respondents think that a person with a broken leg who uses crutches while it heals is disabled – a temporary condition that is not covered by the DDA.

Government and campaigning organisations need to be aware that simply referring to 'disabled people' will not necessarily mean the same to the general public as the legal definition.

ENDS

This summarises 'Disabling attitudes? Public perspectives on disabled people' by John Rigg, in *British Social Attitudes: the 23rd Report – Perspectives on a changing society*, published by Sage for NatCen.

INTERNET USERS KEEP UP THEIR SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Fears that the internet is reducing the time people spend socialising with family and friends are misplaced. According to the latest British Social Attitudes Report from NatCen, those who have used the internet longest are at least as likely as non-users to say that they spend time with friends and family at least once a week.

Equally misplaced are fears that internet users - bombarded with 'phishing', 'spam' and offers to access pornography – are less trusting of their fellow citizens.

- Nearly two-thirds (62%) of people who have used the internet for five or more years spend time with friends at least once a week; only just over a half (54%) of non-internet users do so.

- Two-thirds (66%) of long-term internet users belong to at least one club or organisation; well under a half (43%) of non-users do so.

- More than a half (53%) of long-term internet users feel that most people can be trusted; only 38% of non-users feel that way.

- While fewer long-term users spend time once a week with other family members than do non-users (53% compared with 65%), this is simply because internet users are less likely to live close to other family members.

Professor John Curtice, one of the authors of the study, comments:

'The internet has not been responsible for any significant erosion of social ties in Britain. If anything, internet users are more likely to be socially connected, not less.'

'Indeed, rather than being something that changes or diminishes people's social lives, the internet is a tool they can use to stay connected – if that is what they want to do.'

ENDS

This summarises 'Isolates or socialites? The social ties of internet users' by John Curtice and Pippa Norris, in *British Social Attitudes: the 23rd Report – Perspectives on a changing society*, published by Sage for NatCen.

Notes to Editors

1. NatCen is Britain's largest independent social research organisation which aims to promote a better informed society through high quality social research.

2. **British Social Attitudes: the 23rd Report – Perspectives on a changing society** is published on Wednesday 24th January, 2007 by Sage, price £45.00. It is edited by Alison Park, John Curtice, Katarina Thomson, Miranda Phillips and Mark Johnson. Sage is at www.sagepub.co.uk

3. The British Social Attitudes survey series has been conducted annually since 1983. Each survey consists of more than 3,000 interviews with a representative, random sample of people in Britain. The survey is funded by charitable and government sources; funders of the questions in this Report include the Gatsby Charitable Foundation, the Economic and Social Research Council, the Nuffield Foundation, the Disability Rights Commission, the Hera Trust and the Departments for Education and Skills, Health, Transport, Trade and Industry, and Work and Pensions.

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