



Home Office

New challenges for race equality and community cohesion in the 21st century

A speech by the Rt. Hon. David Blunkett MP, Home Secretary,
to the Institute of Public Policy Research, 7th July 2004

INTRODUCTION

Let's be unequivocal from the outset. I believe that there is great strength in our diversity as a nation. We need to celebrate and value that diversity as an integral part of who we are as a country. That is not to say that diversity does not present us with challenges, it does and that's why I am pleased to contribute to this seminar today on the *Challenges for Race Equality and Community Cohesion in the 21st Century*. I want to talk about some of those challenges: inequality and the impact of exclusion, segregation, racism, xenophobia and extremism, as part of what I want to be an honest and robust debate – the kind that should be had in any progressive democracy. The Government has set this debate going with the consultation paper, *Strength in Diversity*, launched in May and which set out our vision of a successful, integrated society. As that paper makes clear, we don't pretend to have all the answers, but we are moving towards a clearer understanding of the challenges, and of the role Government can play in enabling society to meet them. That's what I want to talk about today.

INSECURITY IN A MODERN WORLD

Instability and insecurity are a feature of the modern world. People are moving across borders more than ever. Partly this is due to the positive aspects of globalisation which are often overlooked – the greater freedom and prosperity – but partly it is also due to people being displaced by conflict or poverty. Taken together with the rise in international terrorism and organised crime, neither of which respect national borders and there is a growing feeling that globalisation is more a threat than an opportunity.

In many ways, local communities are a microcosm of this global phenomenon. People move in and out more frequently. In our inner cities especially, many of us don't know our neighbours as well as we might. Old networks based on a sense of place have given way to new and looser networks. Again, much of this is due to the greater freedom people have and the choices they make.

But in some areas communities feel left behind as technological and industrial change happens around them, and to them, but not with them, destroying the old certainties. We need to acknowledge that change and the sense of instability can create insecurity and fear.

We also need to acknowledge the risk that extremists of every kind – whether political or religious – will try to use this sense of insecurity to promote their objectives. That is what they want: to play on people’s legitimate fears to create division and destroy the mutuality on which our society depends. We saw this only last month in the local and European elections. It’s true that the BNP didn’t do anything like as well as some suggested. But let’s not forget that nearly a million British people voted for a party with racist aims. This is a reminder that for all the progress we have made over the last few decades, the challenges of discrimination and segregation and fractured communities still have to be faced. It is also why reinforcing a sense of belonging and identity is so crucial to strengthening people’s confidence and therefore ability to welcome diversity without fear. I shall return to this theme.

A PROUD HISTORY OF MIGRATION, INTEGRATION AND DIVERSITY

It is important not to be too negative or defensive. Yes, there are episodes which collectively we will feel ashamed of – whether isolated victories for the BNP, or the disturbances in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford in 2001, or the riots in Brixton in 1981, or Nottingham and Notting Hill in the late 1950s. But the background to all of this is an overwhelmingly positive story of migration, integration and diversity, which has been true of Britain for hundreds of years.

Migrants have been coming here throughout our history – French Jews to London, Lincoln, York and Norwich in the 12th century; Huguenot refugees and Dutch traders in the 16th and 17th centuries, bringing energy and flair into commerce and the City. Black Africans from the slave trade; Irish refugees from the potato famine coming to Manchester, Liverpool, London and Glasgow in the

middle of the 19th century; Italians and Germans as part of the great exodus from those countries at the end of the 19th century. And in the 20th century, of course, many migrants from the new commonwealth after the Second World War, invited by Britain to help in its reconstruction and to build the fledgling welfare state.

Of course, there has never been any shortage of people wanting to deny this story and persist in the fiction of a homogeneous Britishness. Three hundred years ago Daniel Defoe was poking gentle fun at them in his poem “The True-Born Englishman”, in which he famously referred to us as “this mongrel race”. Even today, there is a tendency to deny the scale of past migration, and exaggerate the present.

The facts are that eight per cent of our population describe themselves as being from Black and minority ethnic communities. This is more than some countries, like Ireland; and less than others, like the USA, France, or Holland. It is what you would expect of a country whose history is inextricably linked with trade and Empire and international interests. In London, for example, you can hear 300 languages spoken – and thirty nationalities have very sizeable populations of over 10,000 people in London alone.

Different parts of the country have different levels of ethnic and cultural diversity. Sometimes the hardest job is persuading people, in areas of the country which are not very diverse, who don't see the positive contributions either of established ethnic minorities or new migrants, but only read scare stories about ‘waves’ of immigration, to see the other side of the story.

The fact is that migration and the successful integration of migrants have enriched every aspect of life in Britain. We know that migrants make a huge contribution to our economic success, but economics is only part of the story. Migrants and their children and grandchildren have contributed massively to the arts, music, sport, education and science. Musicians from Alfred Brendel to Ms Dynamite; writers from Joseph Conrad to Monica Ali; sportsmen and sportswomen who can unite and inspire the whole of society, like Linford Christie's gold medal in Barcelona in 1992, or Sol Campbell at the heart of England's defence in the European

Championship over the last few weeks. Politics has been a little slower to catch up, but I am proud that our democratic institutions are now beginning to reflect the diversity of the people they serve, increasing their legitimacy and connection to all parts of society.

We recognise, however, that we need to be able to offer people reassurance and security in the face of change. This cannot be a matter of lecturing to people, if we want them to feel it, positively to embrace an appreciation of diversity, their own sense of nationhood and identity has got to be strengthened in the same way we accept automatically with English, Scottish and Welsh all being at the same time British.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND DIVERSITY

The positive effects of diversity go beyond the contributions of individuals from ethnic minorities. Business, the arts, music, the academic and teaching community, all benefit from the introduction of new and different perspectives. Few would deny that Britain is a more interesting and vibrant place as a result of the many influences which have shaped it over the centuries.

At the same time, there is a lively debate among social scientists about whether increasing diversity can, in the short term, have a negative effect on what is termed ‘social capital’ – the glue which holds society together. Qualities like respect, readiness to help others, trust, sensitivity to others’ feelings, and so on. Research carried out by Professor Robert Putnam of Harvard University, and by MORI in Britain, has shown that in relation to one particular indicator of social capital – trust – there is evidence that the more diverse an area is in racial terms, the less likely its residents are to feel that they trust each other. This is an important argument and it is important that we examine it.

There are also other possible explanations. Our most ethnically diverse communities tend to be urban areas which have experienced the most rapid change and mobility, with people moving on very quickly, they are often also amongst the most deprived neighbourhoods. Change and mobility make it harder for people to

build trust with their neighbours, and can increase their sense of insecurity. All of this can in turn lower their readiness, in the short term, to trust those who appear to be different.

The real question is what we can do to help communities deal with rapid change. Government has a role here – just as it has a role in enabling people to deal with rapid economic change, it has a role in helping them deal with the social effects of change as well. Most of the changes we are talking about are not just inevitable but overwhelmingly positive, driven as they are by people’s voluntary choices. But it would be wrong to deny that there can be damaging side effects. The challenge is to manage these, and at the same time to enable people to take the new opportunities which change presents. Only those who are inherently against getting to know people of other races and cultures would object to the opening up of opportunities for bringing people together to enrich their understanding of each other. All public institutions, central and local government, the voluntary sector and business, have a role to play in breaking down barriers and false perceptions and helping people of different races and backgrounds to talk to each other and to work with each other.

Where communities do embrace diversity, and combine diversity with integration, social capital is strengthened rather than undermined. Diversity opens up our experiences to a wider range of human contacts and offers the potential to extend and deepen our understanding and appreciation of other people, and our willingness to work with them in pursuit of common goals. Results from the Home Office’s Citizenship Survey show that people who form bonds across the whole community, who have friends from different ethnic groups, are more likely to engage in voluntary activities.

This doesn’t mean we underestimate the challenge diversity can bring. There are barriers to people building relationships across ethnic or cultural or religious divides, especially against a backdrop of rapid change. But in working to break down these barriers we must not lose sight of the benefits. Our strength as a country has always come from our confidence in our sense of identity and

belonging, and from our acceptance of our interdependence and mutuality. Meeting the challenge of diversity is a natural extension of this. By building on this sense of belonging for everyone, we will ensure that diversity continues to be a positive force in strengthening our social bonds, and adds to the long term health and well being of the community in which we live.

IDENTITY AND BELONGING

Integration in Britain does not mean assimilation into a common culture so that original identities are lost. Our approach is pragmatic, based on common sense, allowing people to express their identity within a common framework of rights and responsibilities.

Since long before the Windrush we have been one state, but with four nationalities. Right now there is a resurgence of interest in Englishness as distinct from Britishness. The English seem to be catching up with the Scots and Welsh and Northern Irish who have long combined these two kinds of national identity and self-definition. There is no reason why this should not be a positive move. George Orwell once said that England is the only great country where intellectuals and left-wingers are ashamed of their own nationality. In fact, recognising that a sense of Englishness can be a positive thing is the best way to avoid it being hijacked by those who want to define it in terms of hostility to outsiders rather than shared values and goals.

But our common identity as British citizens, our common allegiance to the laws, to parliamentary government and to the practices of free citizenship, will always be vital. The role of government is to ensure the framework of law and order within which diverse expressions of our identity can flourish free from the fear of racism or discrimination. It is this commonality which allows cultural diversity within an institutional unity symbolised in the Crown.

This isn't about harking back to any mythological British identity, but rather the recognition that almost all people define their identity in different, overlapping ways that often cut across each other –

whether by nation or region, political belief, ethnic background, religious belief or the absence of it. People describe themselves as Scottish and British, Welsh and British, Black British, British Jewish, or Muslim, Pakistani and British.

EXPRESSIONS OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

Young people in particular will often express their identities by reference to their cultural preferences, the music they like or the clothes they wear. We have no intention of banning the expression of identity through religious symbols in public institutions like schools, as they have in France. As Home Secretary, I am proud to see the adaptation of uniforms in the police service to allow people to wear Sikh turbans or Muslim hijabs. As Education Secretary, I was proud to allow equal entry of Muslim schools into the state system as with schools for other faiths and denominations.

As with all areas of policy this is about balancing rights and responsibilities. The recent case of the young woman who wanted to wear a jilbab – a long gown – to school illustrates the challenges of allowing expressions of religious belief, within a framework of rules that apply equally to all and which don't lead to misunderstanding and segregation.

AN INCLUSIVE NOTION OF “ACTIVE” BRITISH CITIZENSHIP

We want people from all backgrounds to feel confident about their identity and to have respect for other people's identity, within a positive, inclusive sense of Britishness, underpinned by values that we all share. My friend and colleague the Chancellor is speaking on this theme today, articulating the core values that define this broad concept of Britishness. As he will be saying, this has to go beyond the legal definition of nationality to a wider concept of active citizenship, articulating a sense of pride in being British and the rights and responsibilities we share.

There are strong indications that this is what the vast majority of people in Britain believe too – with 86% of the population agreeing with the statement that you do not need to be white to British. In my Social Market Foundation speech two years ago, I said “the union and St George’s flags have actually been seen during the Jubilee celebrations and the World Cup as a unifying force ... [enabling] people to come together in a non-racist, non-jingoistic fashion.” We have seen this again in the support for the English football team this summer; with Black and Asian newspapers carrying front page pictures and stories of Black and Asian Britains being proud to wear the St George flag. The reclaiming of our national flags from the racists, the BNP and the National Front is an important part of our journey as an integrated society that values diversity.

Government can support this by encouraging a positive and active notion of British citizenship. This is already firmly on the government’s agenda, through the DfES national curriculum, the work we have led from the Home Office increasing the opportunities and appetite for volunteering, and through promoting what I have called civil renewal, the wider process of re-engaging our communities in defining and solving their problems, with the help of government.

One important challenge in this area is how to ensure that new migrants engage with the communities in which they live and become active and involved citizens. The way forward here has been charted for us by the important report produced last autumn by the Independent Advisory Group headed by my friend and mentor from Sheffield University, Bernard Crick. The guiding principle of that report was that acquiring British Nationality shouldn’t be just a bureaucratic process: it should mean something; it should be a real achievement; and it should be an occasion for pride and celebration.

In line with this principle, we brought in the first ever ceremonies for new citizens, in March this year. I attended the first ever ceremony, in Brent, and like all those who were present I came away with a real sense that this was a powerful way of boosting

personal, civic and national pride, challenging society to offer a welcome to those who have positively chosen to take our nationality.

It is important that we underpin this by providing practical support for new arrivals to integrate and to become active citizens, helping all migrants to a better knowledge of our language and our way of life. But the symbolic and celebratory aspect of acquiring British Citizenship must also be underpinned with practical support for new citizens to integrate. The requirement to have an adequate understanding of English needs to mean something, and needs to be supplemented by a level of knowledge of what it means to be a citizen of modern, democratic Britain. And this is where the report of the advisory group has been so valuable. It has offered us not only a well judged analysis of what those core British values are, which I would commend to anyone who hasn't already seen it; it also sets out in practical terms how these new requirements can best be made to work.

As a result, we are developing new types of courses specially suited to the needs of migrants: English language courses which use teaching materials based on the concept of citizenship; and courses specifically about citizenship for people who already have adequate English but need to know more about what it means to live in this country and contribute to the community. Also a handbook or compendium of useful information about this country, compiled by the Advisory Group, will soon be offered to all new immigrants and those taking classes.

The Crick Group made a detailed set of recommendations about the level of proficiency in English which it is reasonable to expect. Not everyone can attain fluency. But at the very least we can ask people to make an effort and to enhance their existing knowledge of English to a workable level and to know what it means to be a British citizen. I am announcing today that, as part of our commitment to enhance the meaning and value of British citizenship and as a first step in the measured and gradual implementation of the Report's recommendations, we are bringing in new arrangements for testing the English language attainment of

people applying for British citizenship, for spouses as well as the principal applicants. The test will be set at ESOL entry 3, or recognised equivalent qualifications.

In the autumn we will bring in new English language courses which use teaching materials based on the concept of citizenship. From that point, people applying to become British citizens will have the choice between either satisfying ESOL level 3, or attending one of these courses which combine language with citizenship. Between now and then I will be working with my colleague the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to build up the market for both kinds of provision, to ensure that people have the opportunities to improve their language and citizenship skills, and to ensure that the vulnerable and disadvantaged are able to access these opportunities.

And while I'm on the subject of integration of new arrivals in our country, later this month I intend to launch, for consultation, the new national Refugee Integration Strategy. Taking over from the plan of action we presented in *Full and Equal Citizens* three years ago, the new strategy will offer a fuller analysis of the challenges, based on everything we've learned in the last three years, a clear set of actions to meet those challenges, and a set of measures by which we will be able to monitor how well we are doing in promoting and supporting the integration of refugees. I hope that many of you will take the time to read the document and send us your comments and ideas so that the definitive version will emerge later this year all the stronger.

CITIZENSHIP FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Support for new arrivals to become full and active citizens is vital. But we want to go further, promoting inclusive notions of active citizenship for all, particularly among young people – through the national curriculum, through the reform of volunteering opportunities which the Russell Commission has embarked on, and through supporting community organisations who help engage young people in their communities.

Young people already volunteer to the same extent as the rest of the population – but they are more likely to engage in what we might call ‘informal’ volunteering, and less likely to engage in civic participation, including voting or working with local government or other public bodies. We are working closely with DfES in developing citizenship education, to make young people aware of the opportunities for getting involved and to give them the chance to talk through with each other the reasons for doing so. This builds on the introduction of the issues of citizenship and democracy into the national curriculum in 2002.

Already, through our consultation we are hearing support for the idea of promoting the symbolic value of citizenship for young people, finding a way to both celebrate the rite of passage that marks the change to young adults and to help prepare them for life in a diverse, integrated society. It’s easy to be cynical about this, which is why I want to know what young people think: they are often less cynical than us adults. I saw a really good example of this when I visited Oldham with Trevor Phillips. The Peacemaker project brings young people from different backgrounds together to foster citizenship and social responsibility and provides a mentoring arena where positive cross community relationships are established.

Today, as part of our wider consultation on cohesion and race equality, I am launching a version of the *Strength in Diversity* pamphlet aimed specifically at engaging young people in how we should respond to the challenges we face as a diverse, integrated society. Alongside this, we are developing a programme of events across the country, as part of the wider consultation I set out earlier, to engage young people in this important debate.

ERADICATING EXTREMISM AND RACISM

We cannot hope to promote a positive, inclusive sense of British identity and citizenship – which newcomers feel welcome to commit to and which established communities feel proud to be part of – unless we face down extremism and racism in all their forms. We have come a long way since racism was openly displayed and

tolerated in public. But for too many people, racist abuse, harassment and crime motivated by racism and xenophobia is still a reality. The recent examples in Nottingham of the shooting of a witness to a racial attack and just a couple of weeks ago in London, a woman bus driver who was shot with a nailgun by a racist attacker whilst she was doing her job, provide stark reminders of this. We also continue to see acts of anti-semitism, rising to 375 last year and unacceptable levels of homophobic crime. These forms of hate crime are particularly pernicious. They undermine the wellbeing of a community as well as the victim.

Since 1997 the Government has introduced tougher penalties for racial and religious hate crime and the Crown Prosecution Service has reaffirmed its policy of prosecuting these crimes vigorously. In 2001 we tried unsuccessfully to introduce an offence of incitement to religious hatred. One of the main arguments against introducing this legislation was a concern that it would prevent people debating each other's religions. This just isn't the case and people's rights to debate matters of religion and proselytise would be protected, but we cannot allow people to use religious differences to create hate. If anything the arguments for this extension of the law have grown stronger since 2001. I hope to fill this gap in the legal protection for faith communities as soon as the legislative opportunity arises.

We all recognise as well that sometimes the drivers of religious tensions come from within the communities themselves – or at least they purport to. Like political extremists, religious extremists do not in fact represent the communities they claim to speak for, and there is a responsibility on all of us to challenge the myths and stereotypes that they use to turn fear and insecurity into resentment and prejudice. This is difficult. Often the media are more interested in the extremists than in moderates on all sides who are working for a solution, but we owe it to the people we represent to keep at it. The Muslim Council of Britain, under the leadership of Iqbal Sacranie, has demonstrated the value and importance of this in recent weeks.

Religious extremists who argue for support for acts of terrorism in the name of Islam present an even greater threat to British Muslim

communities than they do to others. The false perceptions of Islam they promote fuel misunderstanding and xenophobia, potentially undermining cohesion and alienating British Muslims from mainstream society.

Despite the efforts of extremists, faith of whatever kind remains a force for good in society – and a central part of individual lives. Engaging faith communities was a commitment in our manifesto and the Home Office recently launched Working Together, which provides a framework for more effective engagement with faith communities. The census has shown how many people choose to define themselves in part by faith. Christianity remains the dominant faith, but there are many other large and thriving faiths – 1.6 million Muslims, half a million Hindus, over 300,000 Sikhs, and a quarter of a million Jews. The Home Office Citizenship Survey confirms that faith is central to the way many members of our minority communities define themselves.

This is why ministers of religion have such a vital role in strengthening community cohesion and guiding people away from extremism. Those who teach, who have positions of responsibility and who Minister to others, particularly the young, must have the means to help their flock through the challenges of diversity and modernity in an integrated society.

As many of you know, we have been in discussions with faith groups on the issue of the preparedness of those coming into the country who have a ministering role. This has focused on their familiarity with the English language and with the modern, hi-tech society to which they will be contributing. In parallel, we will be working with the British Council to examine how we can help in the countries of origin towards this goal and to examine the particular level of English that it might be appropriate to reach. We will make a further announcement when we have concluded our consultation and are confident about how best to support Ministers in this country as well as those applying from abroad.

RACISM IN PUBLIC SERVICES

We do not have the same scar of segregation that has defined the US experience of race issues. But we do have our own scars, some more recent and which haven't healed: the murder of Stephen Lawrence and the inquiry into the circumstances surrounding his death and the racist murder of Zahid Mubarek while in custody. From these and other tragedies, we know that racism isn't always overt: it might be easier to eliminate if it was.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

As Home Secretary, I know that the challenges are particularly acute, and vital, in the police and criminal justice system. These are part of the framework I referred to earlier, which should protect and encompass our different identities. But they cannot play this role unless all parts of the community have faith in them. The Commission for Racial Equality's investigation into police forces has provided a recent reminder of just how far we have to go, despite all of the progress we have made.

Last week we published the latest statistics, which show that people from Black and minority ethnic communities continue to have a different experience of the Criminal Justice System. They are still more likely to be victims of personal crime - people from a mixed race background, for example, are almost twice as likely to be a victim as white people and people from Black and minority ethnic communities are disproportionately represented at almost every stage of the criminal justice system. We all find these statistics frustrating because they continue to show this kind of disproportionality whilst at the same time providing little information on practical steps to take. I am therefore pleased that we are undertaking a fundamental review of the Race and the CJS statistics aimed at developing statistics that are more informative, accessible and powerful at driving change.

But better statistics are not enough; just as it is no good having, in the Race Relations Amendment Act, the most advanced and

comprehensive race relations legislation in Europe if it does not deliver change. That is why, as part of the Spending Review, I have been working with my colleague the Chief Secretary, to set the criminal justice system as a whole the goal of improving the confidence that Black and minority ethnic communities have that the criminal justice system will treat them fairly.

Changing people's confidence means targeting those concerns that erode trust in the system – including the gross disproportionality in the use of stop and search. The latest data on the use of the powers of stop and search under s44 of the Terrorism Act show large increases in the use of the powers, but significantly higher increases in the rates of stop and search of people from Asian and Black communities. This is a cause for concern. Powers under section 44 of the Terrorism Act are a vital component of the fight against terrorism, but we have to ensure that we exercise those powers in a way that engenders the support of all communities and so that no-one feels singled out. That is why I have established the Stop and Search Action Team, to ensure that stop and search as a police power is used fairly and as effectively as possible in the prevention and eradication of crime, but with the support of all communities.

For Black and minority ethnic people to have confidence and trust in public services, those services must have workforces that reflect the population they serve. Failing to achieve representation, including at the most senior levels of public organisations, puts the legitimacy of those services at risk. I am pleased that the introduction of targets for the services that I am responsible for has led to substantial progress. The Home Office, Immigration and Nationality Department and the Probation service are already meeting their targets and the Prison Service is on track to meet them. Whilst the police service has some way to go, last year saw the highest ever number of Black and minority ethnic recruits. Of course, recruitment is only part of the story, we have to ensure that we create public services where people are treated fairly, feel valued and have equality of access to promotion opportunities.

INEQUALITY AND DISCRIMINATION

Race inequalities affect life chances all the way down the line: your chances of getting good qualifications, of getting a job, how much you get paid when you have a job, and your chances of accessing high quality public services which meet your needs. It isn't a simple picture of white advantage and black and minority ethnic disadvantage, and a crude analysis would hide the wide variations in achievement both between and within ethnic groups, significant regional variations and the enduring differences in the experiences of men and women. And this is being reflected in the direction that Trevor Phillips is taking the CRE, ensuring that it has relevance for all communities and not just Black and minority ethnic ones.

But we know that disadvantage affects some ethnic groups more profoundly, and that this can compound the sense of alienation and exclusion. 67% of people from black and minority ethnic communities live in the most deprived 88 neighbourhoods in England, compared to 37% of the white population. The Strategy Unit's 2002 study of ethnic minorities in the Labour Market provided us with stark evidence of a persistent wage gap, a so-called "ethnic penalty". Even after key factors such as age, education, recency of migration, economic environment and family structure are taken into account, ethnic minority groups are disadvantaged relative to their White counterparts.

While the latest statistics from the DfES show an increase in educational attainment for children from all ethnic groups, there is still a gap in levels of attainment on the basis of ethnic origin. Of course, the picture is more complex than some of the headlines suggest. Indian and Chinese pupils now outperform White pupils at GCSE. And while the performance of Bangladeshi and Pakistani youth remains disappointing, if you adjust the statistics for the effects of poverty - for example by comparing those receiving free school meals - Bangladeshi pupils are now outperforming their white counterparts.

FOCUSING ON OUTCOMES

The public sector can play a role in addressing this – strengthened by the positive duty on public bodies to promote race equality enshrined in the 2000 Race Relations Amendment Act. The introduction of the new Commission on Equality and Human Rights demonstrates the government’s commitment to putting equality and human rights at the heart of society. Building on the achievements of the CRE and EOC and DRC, it will create a single authoritative champion for equality and human rights, working across the piece to tackle discrimination and providing a single point of access for business and the public. In the meantime, the CRE will continue to play a crucial role supporting public and private sector organisations to tackle inequalities and enforcing the Race Relations (Amendment) Act.

The real challenge is how we take the legislation and the institutions beyond an elaborate box-ticking exercise and use the tools we now have to produce real outcomes that change people’s lives. We know that the legislation we introduced in 2000 has only just started to make a difference, but we can’t just wait and hope for the legislation to have an impact – we have to set ourselves clear goals.

In addition to the new goal to improve Black and minority ethnic communities’ confidence in the criminal justice system that I set out earlier, we are working with the Treasury and other departments, to put reducing race inequalities at the heart of delivery right across Government. As part of our wider targets on education, housing , employment, and health, we will be bearing down on race inequalities wherever they exist, with a clear commitment to public accountability for the progress we make. The Home Office will retain the overarching responsibility to reduce racial discrimination across society and to build community cohesion.

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

To achieve real progress in race equality we will need to look beyond the public sector and engage with the private sector on how

they can help to deliver change. Not just as employers, but as providers of critical services and active members of the communities in which they operate.

Yesterday, Peter Ellwood launched the report of the IPPR business-led –task-force on race equality. One of the key messages in that report is that business leaders need to take personal responsibility for driving progress on race equality – which is a message that resonates with the public sector too. I welcome the report, and hope it can provide a catalyst for a new relationship between government and the private sector round the shared agenda of reducing race inequalities and building cohesive communities.

This is a matter of self-interest for businesses, not merely that in a tight labour market improving recruitment makes sense, but because in reflecting the diversity of users and consumers a company enhances the likelihood of better tailoring delivery to customer needs. Precisely the same argument applies in the public sector for example in relation to police recruitment.

RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION

Focusing on race alone will not achieve full equality of opportunity. We know that people can be and are discriminated against because of their religion, and that people of faith cannot have full access to jobs, careers and services if their religious needs are ignored or overridden.

The Government is already responding to this. In December we implemented the EU regulations against religious discrimination in employment and training. We have funded ACAS and community organisations like the Muslim Council of Britain to help employees as well as employers understand their rights and obligations. Under our recent White Paper proposals, the enforcement of those rights and duties will be further championed and strengthened by the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights. The White Paper creates a new duty on the CEHR to promote good relations between faith communities and the wider society, to promote good

practice in relation to goods and services and to promote human rights.

Already, in the consultation on the cohesion and race strategy we have heard strong voices calling for the extension of the protection against religious discrimination. This is an important part of the debate and I hope that people will take the opportunity of making these points in the context of the ongoing consultation on the CEHR.

COHESIVE COMMUNITIES

Our challenge is not just to tackle unfair inequalities in people's life chances – vital though that is. One of the reasons we have to tackle these inequalities is because we want to build cohesive communities, in which differences can be accepted and celebrated rather than resented or feared.

We are still too far from achieving that – exactly how far, can on occasion become painfully clear. We are three years on from the disturbances in 3 northern towns. This is not an anniversary to celebrate but I believe we have learned from what happened. A lot has changed. Bradford has recognised that responsibility for building strong, cohesive, communities does not rest with one group or agency. Working in partnership across public services, engaging local people and businesses – the work led by Bradford Vision has started to strengthen civic pride and rebuild the sense that Bradford has of itself as a cohesive community.

The positive side of community cohesion is empowering and enabling communities to do things for themselves in a spirit of mutuality and co-operation. But if they are divided by mutual suspicion and misunderstanding of diverse cultures and faiths, then even without visible conflict, they will not be able to organise themselves to tackle their common problems.

There are plenty of examples across the country where people do form bridges across the community and come together to define and tackle their common problems. SPEC East in Tower Hamlets

is a place where young people can discover and learn about other value systems and lifestyles, supporting community cohesion and personal fulfilment. It is run by the Catholic Church, but is available to young people of all faiths and none, for example making its accommodation available to the Bangladeshi community for prayers during Ramadan.

In Bradford, Manningham Mills Sports Association has shown how sports and cultural projects can bridge cultural divides, securing funding to build practical facilities to bring different parts of the community together. We need to find more ways of supporting this kind of work, to help people build on their shared aims rather than focusing on their differences. I have established the Civic Pioneers initiative to encourage local authorities to commit themselves to apply the ethos of community engagement to everything they do, and help develop the skills and capacity of local people and community organisations in learning to work together. These local authorities will play a major part in demonstrating how vital and rewarding it is to involve local communities in shaping a shared agenda to meet their common needs.

Private sector organisations also have a key role to play in building community cohesion, for example in the Oldham United project where local employers are leading work with the media to ensure that the benefits of diversity are recognised.

The key to civil renewal is to meet the challenge of building people's confidence and ability to engage, not just with the state but with each other, against the background of a changing world which can undermine that confidence and trust. The cultural and economic opportunities offered by a more mobile and diverse society can only be fully realised if we make the effort to reach out to each other, build mutual respect, and develop co-operative relationships. Government has a role in this, in providing the framework to make it happen. But it is the individual people and communities who work within this framework who must ultimately embrace and drive the change themselves and I believe that the people of Britain can rise to this challenge, as the example I have set out here illustrate.

NEXT STEPS

I started by saying that I wanted to see an honest and robust debate about the challenges we face in achieving that vision of a successful, integrated society that values and celebrates its diversity, and that the debate has to go wider than the people in this room. I have given a commitment to publishing a government wide community cohesion and race equality strategy, and over the coming months, I want us to have a real debate over the direction this strategy should take.

I am pleased at the level of discussion and thought that Strength in Diversity has already generated. I now want to step up the nature of that discussion and take it into the community as a whole. The pamphlet gives some suggestions – but the challenges it talks about, and which I have outlined today, are not just issues for politicians and policy makers; they are issues for the whole country. We'll play our part in government, guiding that debate, ensuring it is informed and constructive, but I am also looking to all of us in positions of leadership to engage our networks in addressing these issues, which are profoundly important to us all.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The consultation document: *Strength in Diversity: towards a community cohesion and race equality strategy* and other relevant documents are available on-line from our web page <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/comrace>

We are also happy to send you copies of any of the publications related to this consultation. Please contact us at the address below.

The closing date for responses to the consultation exercise is 17 September 2004. Responses should be sent to:

Strength in Diversity Consultation, Home Office,
50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT

Email: ccresconsultation@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

