

Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society

One year on – A progress summary



The Government's strategy
for race equality and
community cohesion





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November 2006

Communities and Local Government

On 5th May 2006 the responsibilities of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) transferred to the Department for Communities and Local Government. Lead responsibility for *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society*, the Government's strategy to increase race equality and community cohesion, moved from the Home Office to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

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Introduction

Launched in January 2005, *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society* sets out the Government's commitment to create strong, cohesive communities in which every individual, whatever their racial or ethnic origin, is able to fulfil his or her potential through the enjoyment of equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities.

The strategy has two closely linked aims to:

- achieve equality between different races; and
- develop a better sense of community cohesion by helping people from different backgrounds to have a stronger sense of 'togetherness'.

Progress on delivering the *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society* strategy is overseen by the Race Equality Unit and the Cohesion and Faiths Unit at the Department for Communities and Local Government. The strategy's first annual report, published in July 2006, confirms that progress is being made, with many members of Black and minority ethnic communities thriving in Britain today. But this picture is not universal and there is still a long way to go.

This summary provides an overview of some of the key findings of the annual report and outlines challenges for the future. For further information or a copy of the full report visit www.communities.gov.uk/race

Public Service Agreements back up commitment

The *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society* strategy is backed by the following Public Service Agreement targets to enable the public to check on progress over time:

- reduce perceptions of discrimination across a range of public services;
- increase perceptions of community cohesion;
- increase the employment rate of disadvantaged groups (including ethnic minorities) and reduce the difference in employment rates between disadvantaged groups and the overall rate;
- promote ethnic diversity in the workplace.

(Please note that in this summary we use the terms 'Black and minority ethnic', 'minority ethnic' and 'ethnic minority' interchangeably.)

Reducing inequalities in public services

Education

Education must unlock the potential of every child regardless of their ethnicity or background. Pupils from most minority ethnic groups have already improved their performance (and many are outperforming their peers) at GCSE, however for others the achievement gap remains wide.

The Government's wider Skills Strategy is therefore aiming to give every young person a firm foundation in the skills they need for their future; and to provide adults with opportunities to keep developing skills.

FACT

- Chinese pupils are the highest achievers – 81% got five A*-C GCSE grades in 2005 compared to 55% of all pupils;
- the proportion of Black Caribbean, Black African, Indian and Bangladeshi pupils getting five or more A*-C GCSE grades improved, in each case by more than 3%, between 2004-05;
- between 2001-02 and 2004-05, the proportion of minority ethnic students attending higher education institutions rose from 13.7% to 15.4%.

ACTION – We are:

- ensuring that mainstream education programmes such as the Primary and Secondary National Strategies deliver for all Black and minority ethnic groups;
- developing targeted programmes: the £168.6 million Minority Ethnic Achievement Project, Gypsy Traveller and Roma Projects and the national Black Pupils Achievement Programme are directly tackling underachievement among particular groups;

- increasing the recruitment of ethnic minority teachers who can encourage young people to engage with the curriculum and the wider school community. The proportion of new entrants to teacher training from a minority ethnic background increased to over 10% in 2005.

CHALLENGE – We need to do more to:

- help many more Black and minority ethnic children at an earlier stage to reach their full potential: the new Early Years Foundation Stage on which we are currently consulting, will aim to meet the individual needs of *all* children by providing a statutory framework for care, learning and development for children from birth to the age of five;
- further close the attainment gap for those Black and minority ethnic children who perform below the average at school: the *Aiming High* strategy is targeted on raising the achievement of groups at risk of underperforming eg African-Caribbean, Gypsy Traveller, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Turkish and Somali pupils;
- encourage participation of students in higher education: the 'Aimhigher' programme is working with talented young people living in deprived areas to encourage them to think about the benefits of higher education and then to help them to apply for places at top universities.



The labour market

A strong and competitive economy needs to make the best possible use of the talents of all members of society. The employment rate of Black and minority ethnic communities has historically been 15-20% lower than that of the overall population. Although this gap is starting to narrow, patterns vary greatly between different ethnic groups. The Government is offering more tailored support to jobseekers from these communities not only to increase employment levels but also to improve progression prospects and average earnings for people in work.

FACT

- people from ethnic minorities are almost twice as likely to be unemployed as the national average;
- people of Indian and Black Caribbean heritage have the highest employment rates among minority ethnic groups at 70% and 69% respectively. The Bangladeshi (39%) and Pakistani (44%) groups have the lowest. All minority ethnic groups have lower employment rates than the majority (77%);
- around one in four people from an ethnic minority group are employed in the distribution, hotel and restaurant sectors compared with one in five of the overall working population.

ACTION – We are:

- working with the Ethnic Minority Employment Task Force (EMETF) to drive forward the labour market strategy – this is supporting the use of public procurement as a tool to promote greater race equality. Work is now underway to test approaches to promoting race equality when procuring goods/services;
- working with the Ethnic Minority Business Forum whose plan of work for 2005-08 includes improving access to finance and leadership/workforce development;
- Piloting the Fair Cities initiative in Brent, Birmingham and Bradford. This employer-led programme works alongside particular job sectors, such as the hospitality industry to get local people from deprived wards into good, sustainable jobs.

CHALLENGE – We need to do more to:

- help minority ethnic groups into work in cities: the new *Cities Strategy* is establishing local consortia whose knowledge and understanding of specific areas will help to identify employment opportunities, particularly for people from minority ethnic groups;
- support the five major cities (Birmingham, London, Leicester, Leeds and Bradford): a new Commission of business leaders has been established to provide advice on employment issues in these cities;
- make the most of the opportunities that the London Olympics 2012 offer: the *Cities Strategy* pilot for East London will help people in the five Olympic boroughs to find employment and to benefit economically from the Games.



Housing

Everyone should have access to decent, safe housing in the public and private sectors. Although overcrowding rates have been falling, and the numbers of decent homes improving, inequalities still remain. The Government is aiming to ensure equal access to public and private sector housing across all communities, regardless of ethnicity, and to improve conditions in the most deprived neighbourhoods.

FACT

- the proportion of Bangladeshi households that are overcrowded has fallen from 40% in 1996/97 to 29% in 2004/05;
- the number of minority ethnic households living in non-decent homes has fallen from 52% in 1996 to 33% by 2004;
- ethnic minority households are around three times more likely to experience homelessness than their proportion in the overall population.

ACTION – We are:

- getting all social housing into a decent state by 2010: we are now half-way towards hitting this target. This will benefit 3.6 million households including 430,000 minority ethnic households;
- tackling homelessness: a new £3 million Ethnic Minorities Innovation Fund for 2006/07 and 2007/08 will support local authorities and their partner stakeholders in developing innovative ways to tackle and prevent homelessness in minority ethnic communities;
- increasing authorised site provision for Gypsies and Travellers: the Government has made £56 million available between 2006/7 and 2007/8 for this.

CHALLENGE – We need to do more to:

- achieve our decent homes target from which minority ethnic communities benefit;
- tackle perceptions of discrimination in the housing sector among ethnic minority and majority groups and stop exploitation of housing issues by political extremists;
- improve deprived neighbourhoods – the national strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal is currently being evaluated and will include a report on race and diversity.



Simon Evans, Open Productions

Health

Black and minority ethnic communities suffer poorer health than the general population, and disproportionately from certain health conditions. However this is not uniform across all communities or all aspects of health. The Government is working to address the health needs of these communities as part of the national drive to increase health overall.

FACT

- South Asian born people are up to 50% more likely to die prematurely from coronary heart disease than the general population;
- the first census of mental health inpatients showed that Black people had significantly higher than average compulsory admission rates;
- the life expectancy for Gypsy and Traveller women is up to 12 years less than the average.

ACTION – We are:

- placing race equality at the core of primary care services through the 'Race for Health' programme; and helping to tackle issues such as diabetes, strokes, heart disease and cervical screening within minority ethnic communities;

- improving mental health care: the 2005 *Delivering race equality in mental health care* plan sets out a vision of a service to be achieved by 2010. It also commits the Government to an annual census of ethnicity in mental health which will provide a vital measure of success;
- targeting campaigns to those who need it, eg the tobacco campaign targeting South Asian communities and the organ donation campaigns aimed at African-Caribbean, South Asian and faith communities.

CHALLENGE – We need to do more to:

- narrow the gap in health outcomes: the White Paper *Our health, Our care, Our say* on community services and the structural re-organisation in *Commissioning a Patient-led NHS* provides real opportunities to meet the challenge of health inequalities;
- increase the choices available to ethnic minority patients and service users by commissioning a more diverse range of culturally appropriate community services;
- engage local communities with Strategic Health Authorities and their trusts working in partnership with local populations to test innovative models of community participation.



The Criminal Justice System

People from Black and minority ethnic communities commonly have a different experience from the majority at every stage of the Criminal Justice System (CJS) – in stop and search, as defendants, as offenders and as victims of crime. There have been improvements in tackling these issues but there is still a long way to go. The Government is committed to building a CJS that is fair, and that is seen to be fair.

FACT

- in 2004-05 Black people were six times more likely to be stopped and searched than White people and 3.4 times more likely to be arrested;
- the number of Black and minority ethnic staff in CJS agencies continues to grow eg in the Crown Prosecution Service the proportion of minority ethnic staff (11.7%) is higher than the proportion in the general population;
- in 2005/06, 74.2% of all recorded racist and religious crimes resulted in successful convictions compared with 72.1% in 2004/05.

ACTION – We are:

- working to ensure a steady decrease in disproportionality in stop and search, while increasing Black and minority ethnic confidence in the use of the powers. For example we have published new guidance for police forces on the effective use of the powers and a guide for local communities on what they should expect;
- driving progress in dealing with hate crime and learning the lessons of three Crown Prosecution Service community engagement pilots. For example, in the Race Scrutiny Panel in West Yorkshire, representatives act as critical friends to the Crown Prosecution Service;
- improving diversity – all CJS agencies now have targets to increase minority ethnic representation at all levels within their services. As a result representation is increasing.

CHALLENGE – We need to do more to:

- drive change across all services through better use of data. A review of CJS statistics is complete and an action plan is now in place;
- further increase the number of staff from Black and minority ethnic communities at all levels across the CJS;
- tackle disproportionality in stop and search, arrests and cautions and provide fair and effective offender management and resettlement.



Building Cohesive Communities

A cohesive community is one where:

- there is a common vision and a sense of belonging;
- the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued;
- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities;
- strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds and circumstances in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.

FACT

The 2005 Citizenship Survey found that:

- 80% of people agreed that they lived in an area where people from different backgrounds got on well together – a figure unchanged since 2003;
- in twenty areas surveyed from 2003 to 2005, cohesion increased in nine of the areas and decreased in only one; cohesion increased in four of the five most disadvantaged areas.

ACTION – We are:

- creating a shared sense of belonging through:
 - citizenship education as an integral part of the National Curriculum;
 - the *Together We Can* plan which aims to empower local people to be involved in the decisions that affect their lives. www.togetherwecan.info/
- working to tackle racism and extremism, including:
 - the introduction of new legislation to protect people from religious hatred;
 - building strong local leadership to prevent extremists getting a hold in a community;
 - the *Preventing Extremism Together* Report which has led to close working with the Muslim community to discuss how to tackle Islamophobia and extremism;

- supporting areas experiencing challenges to cohesion by:
 - providing targeted support to local areas experiencing cohesion issues;
 - working with regional Government Offices, local authorities and other local partners to ensure that cohesion is fully factored into local strategic planning;
- engaging with faith communities through:
 - the new Faith Communities Consultative Council – members drawn from the nine major world faiths will look at a range of issues including cohesion and integration;
 - visiting and listening to the views of faith communities across the country to help inform our work;
 - the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund which aims to help faith communities play a full part in civil society and promote inter-faith dialogue.

The local Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* includes proposals for the Government to support local authorities in tackling cohesion problems, and setting up local forums to address the causes of extremism. The White Paper will also help cohesion through stronger local leadership, more responsive services and increased resident participation in decision-making.

The Commission on Integration and Cohesion is considering how all communities can be empowered to improve cohesion and tackle extremism. www.communities.gov.uk/coic

CHALLENGE – We need to do more to:

- deal with the concerns of some communities who perceive they are treated less favourably than others, to stop resentment from feeding extremism;
- engage with communities to build a readily identifiable local vision with which people can rally around;

- strike a balance between the need to build integrated societies and the need to allow choice in, for example, education;
- ensure that people in this country, from all backgrounds, have access to similar life opportunities.



Working in partnership

Different regions and local areas have different needs and priorities. We want to provide a framework that areas can tailor to their circumstances, and in turn use knowledge from these areas to drive national change. To achieve this we have to step up our work with national, regional and local partners.

The Department's 'Connecting Communities Plus' grants programme is providing the voluntary and community sector with £18 million in 2006-09 to support delivery of the *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society* strategy. Visit www.communities.gov.uk for further information.

Engaging stakeholders to advise on race equality and cohesion issues

As part of a new, more open approach with stakeholders we have established four new project-based groups that bring together practitioners and academics from all sectors to provide advice on:

- building relations between criminal justice services and minority ethnic communities;
- raising aspirations and achievement among young Black boys and men – the REACH project;
- increasing representation of minority ethnic staff at senior levels in public services;
- handling racist incidents.

Each group will provide practical recommendations to the Government during 2007 – we will report back on how we are acting on these. Visit www.communities.gov.uk/race for further information.

Legal framework

In 2006 we celebrated thirty years since the 1976 Race Relations Act and the thirtieth anniversary of the Commission for Racial Equality. This country now has some of the most comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation in Europe.

In addition:

- Legislation has recently been strengthened to protect against discrimination, on grounds of religion or belief, in the provision of services and the exercise of public functions, and to create an important new body – the **Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR)**. The CEHR will provide for the first time a single equality body for: race; religion and belief; gender; disability; age; and sexual orientation. If you would like to know more about the CEHR visit: www.cehrappointments.co.uk/
- The Government has set up the **Equalities Review** to investigate the causes of persistent discrimination and to advise on how they might be tackled more effectively. It is due to deliver its final report in December 2006. Visit www.theequalitiesreview.org.uk/
- The **Discrimination Law Review** is aiming to bring together existing separate Acts into a modern, streamlined legislative framework during the life of the current Parliament. Visit www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/dlr/index.htm

Abolition of the Slave Trade Act

2007 marks another important anniversary – the bicentenary of the passage of the 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in the former British Empire. This is an important opportunity to reflect on the past and look to the future. And it provides a timely reminder of the importance of doing more to build equality for all our citizens, and to tackle the many and persistent present-day forms of slavery like people-trafficking.

Further Information:

www.communities.gov.uk/race

