

NIACE's response to Communities and Local Government's consultation on Tackling Race Inequalities

1. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) is an independent non-governmental organisation and charity. Its corporate and individual members come from a range of places where adults learn: in further education colleges and local community settings; in universities, workplaces and prisons as well as in their homes through the media and information technology. NIACE's work is supported by a wide range of bodies including the DIUS (with which it has a formal voluntary sector compact) and other departments of state, by the Local Government Association and by the Learning and Skills Council. The ends to which NIACE activities are directed can be summarised as being to secure more, different and better opportunities for adult learners, especially those who benefited least from their initial education.
2. NIACE has staff located in the nine English regions and offices in Leicester (headquarters), London and Wales.
3. The active promotion of equalities underpins NIACE's work and we have substantial experience of working to promote equality in the areas of age, disability, race, gender, religion and belief. (Our work around sexual orientation is less developed however we are aiming to enhance our experience in this area). For example, NIACE established the Commission for Disabled Staff in Lifelong Learning, hosts the Black Practitioners and Learners Network financed by the Local Government Association and provides an information service to education/ training providers and adult learners on the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006. Additionally, NIACE has completed a programme for Continuing Professional Development for Faith Leaders and Workers on behalf of DIUS, the Further Education Reform Unit and Communities and Local Government. Please visit www.niace.org.uk for further information.
4. NIACE welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Communities and Local Government consultations on the discussion document and proposal for a

Race Equality Strategy and in doing so we have made recommendations based on our experience of working with the education sector.

5. NIACE welcomes the Government's commitment to creating and supporting strong communities, where people have an equal chance regardless of their ethnic background; the recent announcement of the Tackling Race Inequalities Fund (TRIF) to help 3rd sector organisations expand the race related work they already do will support this aim. We especially welcome the Home Secretary's promise to focus "... educational support on those in greatest need..."¹ This will encourage and bolster work with those groups especially disadvantaged in learning like some members of the Somali, Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities.

However we are concerned that both the discussion document and the Government's strategy to increase race equality define 'education' in terms of the needs of children and young people, whilst neglecting the interests of adult learners. The only reference to adult learning is housed in the labour market agenda, focussing almost entirely on language skills and numeracy. This programme is too limited and underrates the value of a more comprehensive plan for adults who wish to engage in learning. As outlined in the DIUS's White Paper on informal adult learning (The Learning Revolution 2009), there is some commitment to increasing opportunities for informal adult learning in light of the fact that learning contributes to health, well being and community cohesion. We are keen to see a strategy which reflects this commitment.

6. Our main focus at the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) is to encourage more adults to learn, different kinds of learners to participate and a better quality of learning for all adults in England and Wales. While we appreciate the extensive range of consultation questions presented our response will focus on the five most pertinent to race equality in adult learning; at least one question from each of the sub-headings highlighted at the regional listening events hosted by CLG.

¹ Improving Opportunity Strengthening Society: The Government's strategy to increase race equality and community cohesion 2005

Response to Consultation

Race equality in the context of social and multiple disadvantage.

Q. 1 Is there a need for a separate strategy to tackle race inequality? If so what should the priorities be?

NIACE Response

We agree with the direction taken by the CLG in proposing a separate strategy for race equality. While the evidence outlined in the CLG's ²report shows that some progress has been made, it is clear that there is a lot more work yet to be done. A separate strategy will confirm the Government's commitment to tackling race inequality as well as ensuring that race equality is prioritised within public services.

We suggest that the strategy focus on *embedding* race equality in the planning, management and delivery of all public services. Only through a process of embedding will race equality become a sustainable objective. This will mean that main stream services and provision must incorporate race equality as an essential characteristic of all areas of policy and practice. The strategy should then focus prioritising race equality within *all* public services and provision rather than prioritising areas for a race equality focus as the question suggest.

Q2 What practical measures should we be taking to address disadvantages experienced by different Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups

NIACE Response

With reference to education, the third progress report rightly points out a requirement to reduce the persisting achievement gap; we agree that parents should be partners in this process. NIACE has developed a body of research and a range of family learning initiatives highlighting effective ways of engaging with parents and carers and fostering a positive attitude to learning within families. Family Learning has also been proven to encourage some of the most marginalised parents to engage with other learning and skills development opportunities. "Working with Gypsy/Traveller

² Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society: A third progress report on the Government's strategy for race equality and community cohesion (Volume 1) 2009

Families” (NIACE 2009) has useful examples of family learning models and projects that benefit the whole family.

The benefits of adults learning could be realised through a more comprehensive approach to education and learning where CLG move away from the narrow focus on education in schools and other formal settings and embrace a more holistic learning agenda. Informal and other learning opportunities foster community cohesion by helping people integrate into their community and in turn helping communities welcome and adapt to new members.

Informal learning is also a stepping stone in many instances onto more formal learning opportunities and skills development especially for those groups identified as being at the greatest disadvantage; this will not only act as a buffer, in light of the recession, but also protect against further disadvantage.

Linking this strategy to other Government agendas will promote both collaborative work across departments and the concept of embedding race equality. For instance looking at how the strategy should affect Every Child Matters through to the Housing Reform Strategy will identify what the race equality priorities are within each agenda and how to progress towards them.

Employment and the recession

Q3 What role does the voluntary and community sector have to play in prioritising race equality at the local level?

NIACE Response

We are pleased to see that the voluntary and community sector (or 3rd sector as they are now popularly known) are expected to play a role in delivering this strategy; however the question implies that their involvement will only be at a local level, whereas we anticipate their role being more far reaching. There are regional and national 3rd Sector organisations doing some excellent work with Black and Minority Ethnic Groups, for example the Race Equality Councils and Equality and Diversity Networks across the country. These groups will be vital to articulating some of the issues to smaller organisations as well as collating and linking local issues to regional and national programmes.

The voluntary and community sector have long established relationships with marginalised communities and groups. As such they are in an ideal position to identify and engage with these communities; they will also have a role in developing the public sector’s resources and capacity (as consultants, trainer etc) to work effectively with local groups. What we do not want to see is the 3rd Sector becoming

a dumping ground for Race Equality work whilst the public sector absolves itself of its Race Equality duties.

Q4 How do we ensure that people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities have the skills to fully participate in the post downturn economy?

NIACE Response

The consensus has long been that Black and Minority Ethnic groups have been disadvantaged in terms of access to learning and skills development; this calls for a specific focus on those groups at the bottom in order to close the skills gap. Funds dedicated for employability and training should include ethnicity targets (based on local populations) or ring fenced resources which target marginalised groups. The government's Train to Gain and Apprenticeship programmes are good examples of resources which should be targeting disadvantaged groups.

NIACE is managing a project called "A Woman's Place" which looks specifically at Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Somali women and has developed a number of approaches to engage these women in the wider community and build on their skills. We have particularly focused on developing a programme of buddy groups which enable the women to meet on a weekly basis and partake in a wide range of learning events all related to the findings from an initial screening conducted with them. Support for local projects targeting BME groups is essential; these projects bring to light examples of good practice which can be replicated in other areas.

Civic Participation and regional/national issues

Q5 What are the barriers to civic participation and representation that need to be addressed?

NIACE Response

It is important for a well-developed civil society to offer citizens greater scope for influencing public policy, by providing opportunities for participation. Yet there are too many instances where individuals feel disenfranchised by the processes which govern participation. The barriers to civic participation vary but can be placed into the following categories:

- Individual - low self esteem, lack of education
- Systemic – family, tradition, religion

- Institutional – Institutional policies, procedures and practice

When speaking of Black and Minority Ethnic communities or individuals, we cannot ignore the impact of racism and discrimination in hindering representation and civic engagement and the compounding effect this has on individuals facing other disadvantages.

Many studies document a link between education and civic participation; the more educated you are, the more likely you are to engage with civic society. NIACE supports this finding and adds that access to any form of learning, whether academic, technical or social, will not only encourage but also enable individuals to play a more active role in their communities. The publication 'Dare to Dream: learning journeys of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali women' (NIACE 2008) shows how learning has benefited the women's engagement with the wider community by giving them the mobility, independence and confidence. ³"Teachers mentioned spin offs such as volunteering, attending community festivals and events, joining associations such as the Parent Teacher Association..." We hope that the strategy can support this approach to encouraging participation.

³ 'Dare to Dream: learning journeys of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali women' (NIACE 2008)