

Response to “Creating the Conditions for Integration”

Written by: Runnymede Trust and Voice4Change England

Signed by: *Runnymede Trust, Voice4Change England, Migrants Rights Network, Show Racism the Red Card, Race Equality Foundation, Race on the Agenda, Jewish Council for Race Equality, Just West Yorkshire, Discrimination Law Association, African Peoples Advocacy, One North West, Equanomics, Friends Families and Travellers, Cambridgeshire Human Rights and Equality Support Service, Ethnic Minorities Representatives Council, Sussex Muslim Society Trust, Sussex Muslim Ladies Circle, Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities, Kingston Race Equality Council*

Overview

The government’s integration strategy – “Creating the Conditions for Integration” – was published on Tuesday 21st February. We believe that this document does little to address the persistent racial inequalities that exist across the nation, despite the fact that the government has presented it as equivalent to a race equality strategy.

The document provides few real solutions on how to foster integration, and it appears that the government does not view integration as a two-way process.

We are also concerned that it was put together without proper consultation with ethnic minority organisations, includes little evidence to back up its claims and is not a substitute for a strategy to tackle racism and racial injustice. The government’s strategy is available here: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/2092103.pdf>

Our concerns with the integration strategy

1) Integration needs to be a two-way process

In the document, government states that it will promote a “clear sense of shared aspirations and values, which focuses on what we have in common rather than our differences”.

Whilst we recognise the importance in building a Britain in which all communities share a common sense of belonging, it is important that, in line with the EU Common Basic Principles on Integration, integration is a two-way process of mutual accommodation.

We have concerns that this is not the government’s intention. Comments made by Communities Secretary Eric Pickles in the Daily Mail and the Express in conjunction with the strategy’s publication, focus on how it will promote ‘British values’, ‘national unity’ and argues for the importance of adhering to ‘mainstream’ and ‘majority’ values. Rather than integration being a two-way process, these comments instead suggest that people from minority ethnic backgrounds are somehow a threat to these values or to a unified country.

2) Lack of solutions and substantial evidence

We are concerned at the lack of concrete policy solutions proposed in the document, as well as the absence of substantial evidence to back up its claims. Given that the strategy took 18

months to complete and was delayed a number of times, we expected a far more detailed and substantive document.

'Mainstream' policies - In the strategy, targeted policies to tackle racial injustice and promote integration are rejected in favour of "mainstream" approaches. Evidence as to why mainstream approaches will be effective going forward is not provided and substantial policy solutions are not presented.

Instead programmes such as the 'Big Lunch', 'community music days', and support for youth organisations such as the Scouts and Girlguiding UK are proposed as sufficient in and of themselves to foster integration.

Whilst we are certainly not opposed to the initiatives above and others included in the document, they alone are not enough to promote integration and community cohesion, and do not tackle issues of racial injustice. In relation to the examples given above for instance, there is no indication of how diverse such events and organisations are, and no evidence on how effective they have been to date in integrating communities.

To deliver the strategy, the government hands over the bulk of work to local authorities. We recognise the need for local solutions, but believe that far more substantive, evidence based guidance is needed at a national level if local authorities are going to develop productive approaches.

Furthermore, this strategy has no measurable outcomes and no proposals on how to monitor what is happening at a local level. Without these, there is no way of knowing if the strategy is working.

Extremism and intolerance - We acknowledge the government's commitment to challenging extremism and intolerance, particularly its focus on anti-Muslim hate crime. However, we would like to see a wider approach focusing on racism and discrimination facing all ethnic groups.

Evidence highlights a strategic approach to tackling racism across society is needed. 57% of ethnic minorities believe that there is racial discrimination in the UK, with 36% reporting personal experience of discrimination. In particular, amongst Black Caribbean people, 49% report personal experience of discrimination.

3) Lack of consultation and engagement

A number of race organisations have attempted to engage with the government regarding its integration strategy since May 2010 with unsatisfactory results. We believe that the document would have been more robust if more organisations with expertise in the fields of integration, race equality and migration had been properly consulted.

In addition, in the document, the government does not seem to consider the benefits of working with the Black and minority ethnic (BME) voluntary and community sector to promote integration and achieve equality. These organisations, operating in constituencies up and down the country, have a wealth of experience and expertise, and we are surprised and disappointed that the government has not included them as part of the solution.

4) It is not a race equality strategy

We are concerned that the government's integration strategy is being presented as an alternative to a race equality strategy, despite the fact that the document makes little reference to racism and race inequalities.

We know that there is no longer any dedicated team at Communities and Local Government, the department responsible for race equality, and there is instead a team working on integration, which the government states race equality is a part¹. In addition, answers to parliamentary questions asking whether a race equality strategy will be published stated that the integration strategy would address these issues².

5) Other government work on race equality

We have been encouraged by the government's recent work to tackle racism and racial inequalities in football, and welcome the Prime Minister's assertion after the Stephen Lawrence verdict that "we have still got a problem of people from different racial backgrounds being disadvantaged in Britain"³.

Given these warm words, it is now time for the government to take action to tackle the racial inequalities facing ordinary people in their every day lives. Such action would send a signal to ethnic minority communities that the government takes such issues seriously, and that inequalities of this kind have no place in modern British society.

What we want to see

We strongly believe that government needs to show its commitment to tackling racial inequalities by publishing a cross-government race equality strategy with clear, measurable outcomes.

Given the entrenched racial inequalities existing in England, we do not believe that the government's current approach is sufficient to tackle the persistent problems existing across the country. For example:

- Almost half of black young people, and 31% of Asian young people, are unemployed.
- There are three times as many young Black men in prison as in Russell Group universities.
- In 2010 only 6.8% of Black Caribbean pupils achieved the English Baccalaureate measure of achievement compared to 15.4% of white British pupils.
- 65% of Bangladeshis and 55% of Pakistanis live in poverty. This compares to 20% of White British people.
- Chinese boys are among the highest performing groups in our schools. After university, however, they can expect to earn 25% less than White graduates.

¹ Answer to parliamentary written question on 20/02/12 <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2012-02-20c.94499.h&s=speaker%3A24896#g94499.q0>

² Answer to parliamentary written question on 7/11/11 <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2011-11-07a.79309.h&s=race+equality+strategy+speaker%3A24896#g79309.q0>

³ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/9002758/David-Cameron-Britain-still-has-a-problem-with-racism.html>

We are not suggesting that all of these inequalities are solely due to racism, or any one simple factor. These inequalities have complex causes, and therefore need tailored and strategic approaches to tackle them – mainstream approaches alone will not solve these problems.

These inequalities need a comprehensive, cross-departmental strategy including concrete policy proposals and substantial evidence.

Even the UN agrees - last September the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination recommended that the government develop a race equality strategy in consultation with voluntary sector organisations

How can we help?

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