

Response to 'Strength in Diversity', Consultation on Community Cohesion and Race Equality Strategy

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Consultation commissioned by the Institute of Ideas

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'Strength in Diversity' provides a welcome opportunity to assess the trajectory of race relation policies in the last decade, which I consider to have had a malign effect on public life and social relations. As someone who is currently conducting academic research into multiculturalism and who also grew up in Oldham, I have been concerned for some time about the changing nature of race relations in the UK.

My main concerns focus on how policies designed to eliminate 'institutional racism' appear to have had the paradoxical effect of what I call 'racialising social experience', and over-sensitising people to the threat of 'unwitting prejudice'. I will consider how:

- Using the blunt instrument of law to regulate 'good relations' between ethnic groups can increase racial anxieties and heighten the perceived threat of discrimination.
- Race relations policies based on multicultural ideas have been divisive in a number of spheres and prevent the development of robust social bonds within communities.
- The obsession with far-right extremist groups is misplaced and used to justify restrictions on free speech.
- The promotion of 'tolerant citizenship' hinders the development of common values.

In this paper I examine some of the duties laid out by recent race relations legislation (most significantly, the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000) and their effect on social life. I also assess the current terms of the debate and the likely effect of further policy interventions through the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights.

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1. How racist is Britain?

Over the past two decades the annual Survey of British Social Attitudes has shown a welcome decline in racist attitudes in the population. Today, nearly twice as many people surveyed are likely to regard racial discrimination by employers as wrong, as discrimination based on gender. There is also high indication of social integration, as evidenced by indicators such as the rising numbers of interracial relationships. Whilst there remain serious cases of discrimination and a minority of people continue to hold firm racial prejudices, overall British society is far less racist than it was twenty years ago.

Yet despite this clearly discernible shift in attitudes, the *perception* that racism is increasing is greater than ever. 43 per cent of people surveyed by the Home Office felt that there was more racism now than five years ago.¹ Interestingly, it was white people who were more likely to say this, whilst ethnic minorities were more likely to say there had been an improvement. This suggests that the heightened sensitivity to racism does not accord with the lived experience of racism by ethnic groups.

How can we explain this? At a time when race relations have never been so smooth, increasing numbers of people are pessimistic about racial issues.

Much of the explanation seems to lie in the way public authorities have redefined racism and therefore elevated its importance in the public eye. The term 'institutional racism' has dominated discussions about race relations since it was first popularised in the MacPherson report following the Stephen Lawrence inquiry in 1999. It has been used to explain the persistence of racial tension in social life and to justify the development of government policies to enact change in key social and political institutions.

Institutional racism is defined by MacPherson thus: 'It [racism] can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour, which amount to discrimination, which amount to unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping, which disadvantage minority ethnic people'. This definition:

- a) Situates racism at a personal and psychological level and ignores more systematic reasons for racial inequality.
- b) Encourages authorities to solve the problem by changing people's attitudes and behaviour.
- c) Assumes that every stranger is a potential racist who may even be unaware of his/her prejudice, and therefore needs to be monitored by an authority.
- d) Implies that ethnic minorities are typically victimised by white people and encourages individuals to regard affronts against them as racially motivated, even when not intended as such.

As a result, the idea of institutional racism may have created more problems than it sought to solve. In the past five years, we have seen a range of social and political institutions cry *mea culpa* and confess to being institutionally racist. They have implemented new monitoring schemes; positive action to recruit minority groups and initiatives to change their internal culture. Yet, as the following sections discuss, racial tensions have continued to persist, and in some cases, have deteriorated even further.

2. Promoting 'good relations'

The consultation paper asks how we can reduce prejudice faced by ethnic minorities in contemporary Britain and promote good relations in an 'integrated' society. In this section I consider the effect of recent legislation and some problems that have emerged.

a) *Pre-emptive action*

The Race Relations Act 1976 outlawed direct and indirect discrimination and victimisation in a range of areas such as education, housing and employment. Over twenty years later, the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000, which extended this law to cover 43,000 public authorities, was significant in that it placed a general duty on them to 'have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons or different racial groups.' What is significant about this duty is that it requires bodies to take action to prevent acts of racial discrimination *before* they occur.

b) *Unwitting racism*

One significant development from this duty has been the impulse to regulate relationships between people of different ethnic groups. The justification of this is the idea that people often hold 'unwitting prejudices' which can cause psychological harm in the workplace. Such problems, it is argued, must be addressed because racism can affect staff and organisational performance, and it is in the employers' interest to prevent sour relations between workers.

c) *Promoting good relations*

This duty encourages public authority to intervene in the way people interact with each other at the informal level, and creates a number of problems. First, the term 'good relations' is vague and risks conflating acts of serious racial harassment with people 'not getting on with each other'. When people work together, there is often tension and disagreement that needs to be managed effectively. However, if tensions between groups are designated as potentially racist by an external authority, it can damage any efforts at reconciliation. Policing informal behaviour can make it difficult for people to speak freely and develop genuine bonds, in fear that they will 'say the wrong thing', despite not intending any harm. At the same time, ethnic minorities who are reminded of the potential 'unwitting prejudices' of their colleagues may be

more likely to view their experience through the prism of racism and see themselves as victims.

The call for employers to monitor their workers' actions for discrimination reflects a fear that individuals cannot be trusted to act independently according to their own conscience. This risks creating an infantilised view of people where they need to be watched in case they cause unintended harm. When racial discrimination is understood to be something 'unwitting', it makes it very difficult to imagine how people can ever come together freely without regulatory measures.

The intrusion of an external body can often undermine strategies of negotiation and make it difficult for people to work out such problems between themselves. Whilst some prejudices undoubtedly continue to exist, these are best tackled in the open and robust atmosphere of discussion and engagement, rather than in self-censorship and policing. We ought to question whether diktats from authority can ever be effective instruments in changing attitudes and eliminating racist views.

d) The diversity industry

This brings us to the rise of diversity training. This is now widely used by organisations in both the private and public sector in the hope of improving relations between different cultural groups. However, there is considerable scepticism about whether such schemes alleviate tensions or in fact exacerbate them. In America some academic studies have demonstrated the negative effects of diversity training.² The 'diversity machine', as one academic describes the ever-growing industry of consultants and guidance literature, has been strongly rebuked for its over-reliance on pop sociology and pseudo-therapeutic techniques. Indeed, much of the criticism of diversity training highlights its poor quality. Participants often describe their experience of workshops as patronising or basic, and resent the implication that they need to be trained in how to interact with other people.³

However, the problem with diversity training is not its quality but the incoherence of its underlying philosophy. On one hand, trainers claim to eliminate stereotypes in the workplace, yet in talking about 'different cultural perspectives', they end up generating new and more insidious ones in their stead. Home Office guidance on diversity training naively suggests that such incoherence can be ironed out by 'building a philosophy'⁴ but no amount of brainstorming can get around the contradiction that people are valued for their individual merit and yet treated as 'different' because of their ethnic background.

Ultimately, diversity training can end up reinforcing the sense of racial difference. The CRE's recent inquiry into the police forces in the UK provides a worrying example of this. The authors note one finding that black and Asian officers in the Metropolitan Police Service were one and a half to two times more likely to be subjected to internal investigations and written warnings. The reason given is that 'supervisors often lacked the confidence or experience to tackle problems informally with ethnic minority officers, that they were wary of *doing the wrong thing*'⁵ (my italics) and therefore they were more likely to report such cases to the professional standards department which was 'over-zealous' in its approach to targeting complaints. Unsurprisingly, ethnic minority officers felt they were being unfairly targeted. This example demonstrates how over-sensitivity to race can damage trust between employees and paradoxically lead to differential treatment in fear of being perceived to act in a racist way.

With the proliferation of diversity schemes, I am concerned that there will be an increase in the number of reported racial incidents, as people begin to internalise a sense of victimisation and interpret behaviour as racially motivated. Interestingly, the Home Office cites Leicester City Council as a best practice organisation for diversity issues, and yet it cannot explain its high rate of internal complaints, employment tribunal cases and messages from internal discussions that minorities feel disenfranchised.⁶

The 'diversity machine' is highly expensive, but more worryingly, it can be highly corrosive. It creates divisions within the workforce and generates an unhealthy preoccupation with racial tension in the workplace.

Policy recommendations:

1. Review the 'general statutory duty on race' in the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000), and delete the specific duty to promote good relations.
2. Encourage all public bodies to review critically their diversity training schemes and policies.

3. Promoting race equality through positive action

The consultation paper asks how public bodies can make a real difference to deliver race equality. Currently, all public authorities are encouraged to develop certain measures and policies that will deliver this goal. I will consider the underlying assumptions and negative effects of some of the measures taken.

A) EMPLOYMENT AND RECRUITMENT

Whilst quotas are illegal in Britain, a number of public bodies have set targets for ethnic minority recruitment. It has been argued that there is a need to tackle persistent discrimination leading to inequality. It is true that the employment demographics of an institution rarely ever mirror the demographics of the population as a whole. For instance, there is a relatively low number of ethnic minorities working in the arts sector in Britain (4 per cent), although they make up almost 8 per cent of the entire population. However, this is not necessarily because arts organisations have racist recruitment policies. Relatively low numbers of ethnic minorities choose to pursue careers in this sector. The Arts Council has argued that this is because they are 'put off' by the dominant white image of the institutions. However, the reality is far more complex. People make career choices for all sorts of reasons: socio-economic background, educational achievement and personal ambition, to name a few. It is too simplistic to reduce the imbalance to racist attitudes. After all, there is a relatively high presence of Asian men in the medical profession but this cannot be explained by biased interviews or selection policies. The low presence of ethnic minorities in a sector does not automatically indicate racial discrimination is occurring.

i) Targets prioritise ethnic background ahead of merit

When targets are put in place, it encourages institutions to consider people's ethnic background as a criterion for recruitment as well as or even instead of their eligibility for the job. In specialised areas such as policing, the dilution of a workforce can lead to inexperienced officers rising through the ranks. Arguably, this causes resentment between the ethnic minority officers and the white officers. The former feel unconfident of their ability and suspicious about why they have been recruited, whilst the latter feel resentful that they have been unfairly passed over. Understandably, people begin to perceive the success of minority officers to be based on politics rather than merit. When an institution is racialised in this way, it makes it very difficult for people to unite over a common project. In the case of the police service, both black officers and white officers are sensitive to accusations of racism (between themselves and in the public eye), which makes it hard to develop the bonds of trust that are crucial in any team environment.

ii) Ethnic minority representation

It is often argued that unless institutions reflect the demography of the communities they serve, they will not be able to relate to their needs properly. For instance, some believe that ethnic communities need ethnic minority police officers they can trust and who appreciate their own unique crime problems, such as gun crime in the black community. Whilst the police have a long and shameful history of racial discrimination, we should be cautious of accepting the idea that ethnic minorities can only be properly served by their own members. This perpetuates the racist view that 'only we can understand our own kind'. In the same vein, there are a number of high-level advocates for more black teachers in schools to address the disproportion of under-achievement amongst black children⁷. Logically then, we would have to accept the argument that white teachers should teach white children, and black teachers for black children – a viewpoint which supports segregation.

B) DIFFERENT TREATMENT IN PROVISION OF SERVICE

Society is diverse and inevitably certain groups will have unique needs. High quality public services ought to attempt to meet these as much as possible. However, differential treatment for ethnic groups should be based on their equal needs for responsive services, not a political need to be respected for their cultural difference.

i) Healthcare

For instance, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are known to experience higher rates of class 2 diabetes and therefore require particular information and preventative care. For those populations, their different needs are based on medical fact, not a political response to preserve their cultural identity. Similarly, it is perfectly acceptable that hospitals provide halal and kosher food, just as they should provide a non-meat option for vegetarians. This level of responsiveness – to give everyone a high level of personalised service - seems to be a reasonable aspiration for any public service.

ii) Education

However, the notion that we should treat people differently in order to boost their cultural identity can lead to problematic division. An area where this issue arises recurrently is schooling. It was recently suggested that the current educational system is unsuited for black children because it 'is rooted in thinking over 100 years old and is essentially constructed around middle class values', which implicitly suggests 'white values' which black children may feel excluded from.⁸ Black boys are therefore perceived to be low achievers because their cultural identity is being neglected. However, there is a danger that in trying to explain inequality of educational achievement in terms of cultural difference, we freeze expectations of what they can achieve and discourage them from believing they can ever do well at academic work. This risks discrimination against black children, perpetuating low academic expectations (and therefore outcomes) because their needs are perceived to be different.

Similarly, a group of academics recently called for more state-funded Islamic faith schools because they were concerned that Muslim children were being neglected by the current system.⁹ They argued that Muslims needed separate curricula for the teaching of religion and culture. This view of education as something to be chosen according to one's ethnic identity misses a fundamental point about the teaching of knowledge. All children should not be taught only about their culture but the widest possible range. Education ought to broaden the mind and offer a position by which all values and systems of belief are questioned. To say people's needs are different is often another way of saying 'they have their own culture and we have ours'. This kind of different treatment risks ghettoising groups at possibly the most important point of socialisation – schooling. Indeed, it is worth questioning the extent to which Muslims do actually want separate faith schools for their children or whether they are simply concerned that their local school is not academically successful. Parents often freely admit that their preference for religious schools stems from their academic success, rather than their religious character.

c) Making exceptions for religious minorities under the law

It is argued that the law should make exceptions for religious groups to carry out certain customs related to food and burial rites, etc. Whilst any society should seek to accommodate the needs of its diverse population, these are usually made within the boundaries of the law as it applies to all people. Being regarded the same under the law is the best way to ensure equality of treatment in the courts. If there were a particular reason why the rest of society is not able to do something, it would be discriminatory to allow a minority to do this on the basis of their religion.

For instance, Rastafarians have long argued that they should be allowed to legally smoke cannabis on the grounds that it was a spiritual requirement of their religion. Now, either smoking marijuana is not so dangerous and it is a harmless exception to make, in which case, we should also change the law for everyone; or else it is so dangerous that the law must continue to ban it for everyone regardless of his or her religion. The fair approach in both cases is to treat everyone equally.

That is not to say that the law always provides favourable outcomes for everybody, only that it is important to remember that being treated the same is the basis of a fair system and that recognising differences opens the door for discriminatory treatment. For instance, should the police be allowed to stop and search devout Muslim men in the streets because they suspect them to be more likely to be terrorists? If they were allowed to treat Muslims as different kinds of citizens who could not be expected to follow the laws in some cases, it is only a short move to argue that they cannot be treated as equal legal subjects in other cases either.

It could be argued that Sikhs already receive legal dispensation for some religious practices (such as not having to wear a motorcycle crash helmet), and therefore, the precedent has already been created. I believe it is worth arguing the merits of such past legal decisions and we should certainly pause to think before using them to justify continued discriminatory legal treatment.

Policy recommendations:

3. Review how employment strategies and service provision are being conducted in public authorities and ensure that 'race equality' does not mean discriminatory treatment.
4. Resist calls to dilute the principle of equality of treatment under the law for ethnic or religious minorities. Review existing exceptions under the law for minority groups such as Sikhs and Jews.

4. Building Cohesive Communities

The consultation paper asks what more can be done to build relationships and understanding between people from different backgrounds. In particular, it invites us to consider how we can promote cohesive communities in towns with significant ethnic diversity.

Contemporary society is increasingly fragmented as the old collective bonds around church, union and political party have weakened. In towns with extreme social deprivation, this sense of isolation can be acute. However, the multicultural policies that are being employed do not challenge this process of division, rather they redefine division as a virtue. By emphasising difference in the classroom, the police station and the local library, people are made to feel they have less in common than they actually have. Studies into the northern town riots in 2001 reported the phenomenon of 'parallel lives', where people who were very similar hardly came into contact. This division has not always existed and did not arise out of nowhere. It is a consequence of multicultural policies employed by councils.

One of the clearest examples of how contemporary anti-racist policies have weakened, rather than strengthened communities is the town of Oldham. Since the mid 1990s, the Labour council instituted numerous anti-racist measures in education, policing, culture and housing.

In particular, the police were so keen to demonstrate their commitment to dealing with racism, that officers went into local communities and actively encouraged people to report racially motivated crimes. Indeed, the police treated all crimes between whites and Asians as racially motivated, even when they were not reported as such. It borrowed Macpherson's open-ended and highly subjective definition of a racist incident as 'any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person'. As a result, the number of racial incidents recorded in Oldham for 1997-1998 was 238, almost twice as much as the next highest, 122 in Rochdale and over four times higher than in any other division in Greater Manchester.¹⁰ Oldham was also unique in that the majority of victims were in fact white, 116 out of 204. The local British National Party (BNP) was strongly vilified in the media for pointing to this figure as evidence of white victimisation by ethnic minorities, but it was the police who encouraged such skewed statistics in the first place. In light of this and other 'anti-racist' measures that reinforced the perception of hatred and tension between Asians and whites, we can see why Oldham experienced an explosion of racial tension in the summer of 2001.

Policy recommendations:

5. The Home Office should commission an independent and critical review of the negative problems that have arisen out of multicultural policies of local authorities in the past five years.

6. Particular attention should be given to the spheres of education and policing, where ethnic differences are strongly emphasised.

5. Eradicating racism and extremism

The consultation paper asks how to tackle the rise of extremist opinions and far-right parties, but I would question the extent to which we should perceive extremism as a significant problem in Britain today, and whether proposed legal measures for 'hate crime' will help.

i) Far-right groups

Whilst it is true that the BNP has achieved some recent electoral successes, we first need to put the size of its support into perspective. The BNP's voting constituency is based in a small number of towns with high levels of social deprivation and existing racial tension. It therefore has very low chances of making a decisive impact at the level of a general election. In the 2004 local elections, the BNP did gain a further four council seats, bringing its total to 17. However, this figure was still much lower than some media predictions and even some BNP representatives admitted their disappointment.¹¹ The party similarly failed to get an MEP elected in the 2004 European elections. Their success is therefore limited to the confines of specially targeted areas and is currently negligible at the national level.

Yet, I believe it is worth trying to understand why the BNP has achieved the limited success it has. It is clear that a large number of BNP voters admit they are making a 'protest vote' against the mainstream parties, in particular, the Labour Party. In this respect, it could be argued that the support for the BNP mirrors that of political parties such as Respect, UKIP and the Green Party, who win votes by virtue of being located outside the 'mainstream'. Another reason for the support of the BNP is that it is sometimes the only party actively to canvass the constituency area, again appealing to voters who feel neglected by mainstream politicians. There is a perception amongst their supporters that the BNP stands for the majority white population that nobody else wants to listen to. This sense of isolation amongst white, working class voters explains much of the BNP's popularity.

Indeed, the BNP's self-image as doing nothing more than representing the ordinary white man on the street reflects how easily it has been able to take advantage of the existing racial divisions flowering under official policy (see section 4 above). Multicultural policies and the celebration of difference have already served to racialise communities and make divisions seem like a natural fact of life. When white people in Oldham are constantly told about how culturally different their Asian neighbours are, it is not surprising that some of them believe that they have different needs from Asian people and that Asians inhabit an unknown, alien world which might pose a threat. It is also interesting that much of the BNP's campaigning centres on 'racism against whites' and promoting a 'white ethnic identity'. It has used the logic of multiculturalism to promote its own insidious brand of racism.

The BNP did not racialise society by itself; rather it has latched onto a prevailing trend. Its relatively small success cannot by itself explain the problem of racial tension in society. The political and media obsession with the BNP provides a convenient way of avoiding genuine debate about race relations. Rather than discussing the problems of inequality and racial division, it is easier to blame a small group of far right extremists for stirring up racial hatred.

The consultation paper asks us how we can prevent the further growth of extremist groups. Indeed, there has already been considerable discussion about bringing in greater regulation of speech to limit their profile in public. However, to silence the BNP with the law will only strengthen its self-image as the 'oppressed' voice of the white majority, possibly even adding to their appeal. When the BNP won a council seat in Oldham in the 2002 local election, the elected councillor was not allowed to make his acceptance speech on the grounds that it would provoke further disturbances. In effect, the people of Oldham were denied the democratic right to listen to (and debate against) the views of their elected representative. The decision was patronising and fuelled a sense of disenfranchisement. More importantly, it closed down debate on race issues in Oldham, where it is perhaps needed most.

ii) Hate speech

Home Secretary David Blunkett recently announced proposals to ban incitement to religious hatred. This was widely welcomed by Muslim groups who see this as a 'corrective' measure as current blasphemy laws only recognises offence against Christianity. However, to equalise the playing field, we should argue against all blasphemy laws – demanding more freedom of speech, not less. The capacity to criticise or challenge any religion should not be censured in the name of protecting minority groups. Some argue that in the current climate, protection for Muslims is greater than ever because of potential incitement to violence. This conflates speech with action, and assumes people cannot use their own capacity for reason before they act.

We do not defend freedom of speech so that racists can have their say, but because in a democratic society people must have the right to listen to others and form their own opinions. In a society where certain issues are deemed too 'offensive' to discuss, we risk closing down debate and never challenging racist views out in the open. Also, there is a risk that in trying to outlaw all extremist opinions, whether religious or political, we end up enforcing political uniformity and allowing authorities to determine what is a 'sensible' view. It should be up to people to decide the merit of ideas, not for censors to decide for us.

iii) Hate crime

The Government has already introduced specific offences of racially aggravated crime in the Crime and Disorder Act, as well as religiously aggravated offences in the Anti Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001. This was done partially in response to rising incidence of race crime – although as the case of Oldham's police force demonstrates, this rise is almost certainly a result of new policing procedures, rather than any growth in racial tension.

Hate crime legislation is unprecedented because it criminalises the motive and attitudes of the perpetrator. It treats some crimes more harshly than others because the criminal was deemed to be acting on racist prejudice. The justifications for this are: the victim suffered more because of the racist component of the crime; the criminal deserves greater punishment for holding racist attitudes; and legislation is needed as a deterrent to other would be racially-motivated criminals. It is important to note that the crime does not need to be entirely racially motivated, only that the perpetrator held racist views at the time which could be seen as a factor.

These laws criminalise people's thoughts. By making a person's attitudes a determining factor in their sentencing, this legislation effectively criminalises racism. We should first question whether the law is the most appropriate way to eradicate racial prejudice, but also whether we should be prepared to allow judges to decide in such vague terms what is an appropriate belief.

Policy recommendations:

7. Recognise the limited significance of the BNP and not do play into its hands by attempting to silence it through legal means.
8. Abandon proposals to ban incitement to religious hatred.
9. Remove clauses creating specific legislation to deal with racially motivated crimes in the Crime and Disorder Act and Anti-Terrorism and Security Act 2001.

6. Citizenship and Identity

The consultation paper asks how people from diverse backgrounds can feel a sense of pride in being British, and also how to promote citizenship and shared values.

The British national identity appears extremely weak today, especially when compared to levels of patriotism of the past. There is of course, little to romanticise in old-style Britishness. The Union Flag has been a symbol of terror and oppression for many - the other side of national pride has often been imperialism. It is also clear that major social visions of the past, such as the creation of the post-war welfare state, have lost their grip on the popular imagination.

However, it is evident that nothing new has replaced the old common culture and in its absence, society feels unstable and fragmented for many. What has been lost is any sense of universal or common values. Contemporary society finds it difficult to claim that there are values and needs that are shared by everyone, regardless of their particular cultural upbringing, skin colour or ethnic background. Today, there is an absence of vision that can unite different groups. Indeed, as I have discussed, the preferred emphasis on diversity in all spheres of public policy only compounds the alienation experienced by ethnic minorities and makes it harder for them to feel part of society.

The consultation paper asks how to restore a sense of common citizenship based on shared values. The government's strategy to date has been to use schemes like the new citizen swearing-in ceremonies or citizenship education to address the problem. While these technical solutions profess to test one's qualification of citizenship (proficiency in English, knowledge of political systems, etc), they do not explain what citizenship actually means. Invariably, we are told that the core value of citizenship is tolerance of other people's values but this is a vague assertion that can just as easily lead to indifference of others people's belief systems rather than intellectual engagement. Tolerance implies accepting people's beliefs and never challenging them.

Current citizenship initiatives are hindered because they do not address a core question: what is society for and what do we want it to be? In order to forge universal values, we need nothing less than the revitalisation of political discussion and debate. This covers our attitudes to things like access to high culture, the development and use of new scientific knowledge, the principles of liberty and individual freedom.

The challenge in all these areas of debate is that there is no immediate consensus. Common values cannot, and should not, be imposed or tested. We should defend people's freedom to believe whatever they choose, without intrusion or correction by government. Yet as a society, we should welcome robust debate and discussion about beliefs. It is positive that some people may wish to assert their views and persuade others of their argument, as long as people can challenge them in return. People's values change in the course of rational debate and some ideas are judged to be better than others.

To encourage this, the government should focus less on testing people's citizenship and more on encouraging public debate about what kind of society we want. A first step would be to resist calls for censorship on the grounds that some ideas are beneath discussion because they are 'too offensive'. Hence, in this paper, I have made a repeated defence of freedom of speech.

Policy recommendations:

10. Review the efficacy of citizenship tests and citizenship education.
11. Resist all calls for further restrictions of free speech.

Conclusion

'Strength in Diversity' has presented an important opportunity to assess Britain's race relations policies and the murky waters of contemporary debate. I have tried to demonstrate that the current preoccupations of policy-makers are in danger of exacerbating racial tensions rather than resolving them. Repeatedly, this paper has pointed out that treating people differently can often compound the feeling of racial tension and make it harder for ethnic minorities to feel part of society. I recommend the Home Office do the following:

1. Review of the 'general statutory duty on race' in the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000), and delete the specific duty to promote good relations.
2. Encourage all public bodies to review critically their diversity training schemes and policies.
3. Review how employment strategies and service provision are being conducted in public authorities and ensure that 'race equality' does not mean discriminatory treatment.

4. Resist calls to dilute the principle of equality of treatment under the law for ethnic or religious minorities. Review existing exceptions under the law for minority groups such as Sikhs and Jews.
5. Conduct a critical and independent review of multicultural policies at the community level and encourage local authorities to dismantle programmes that foster division, particularly in the spheres of policing and education.
6. Particular attention should be given to the spheres of education and policing, where ethnic differences are strongly emphasised.
7. Recognise the limited significance of the BNP and not do play into its hands by attempting to silence it through legal means.
8. Abandon proposals to ban incitement to religious hatred.
9. Remove clauses creating specific legislation to deal with racially motivated crimes in the Crime and Disorder Act and Anti-Terrorism and Security Act 2001
10. Review the efficacy of citizenship tests and citizenship education.
11. Resist all calls for further restrictions of free speech.

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Biography

Munira Mirza is researching her PhD at the University of Kent, which focuses on the influence of multiculturalism and social inclusion on contemporary cultural policy. She writes regularly on issues relating to race and diversity.

¹ Home Office (2001) 'Citizenship Survey', cited in Home Office (2002) 'Race equality in public services'.

² See Lasch-Quinn, E. (2001), Lynch, F. R. (1997), Hemphill & Haine (1997)

³ Commission for Racial Equality (2004), p.27-33

⁴ Home Office (2002), p. 4

⁵ Commission for Racial Equality (2004), p.42

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ In the Mayor of London's conference, 'Towards a Vision of Excellence – London Schools and the Black Child', the following speakers all made calls for more black teachers to address under-achievement amongst black children: Trevor Phillips (Chair, Commission for Racial Equality), Ken Livingstone (Mayor of London), Keith Davidson (Director of Education, Seventh Day Adventist Church), Geoff Schuman (Journalist, Choice FM), Brother Mandla Mbandeka (Alkebula Family Association), Jozimba Panthera (Camden Black Governors Forum).

⁸ 'Towards a Vision of Excellence - London School and the Black Child', 2004, Workshop discussion paper by Carol Hunte: p. 22

⁹ *Muslims on Education*, Association of Muslim Social Scientists, FED 2000, Muslim College UK & Fair

¹⁰ Ray, L. et al (1999) 'The Macpherson Report: A view from Greater Manchester', *Sociological Research Online*, vol. 4, no.1

http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/4/lawrence/ray_smith_wastell.html>

¹¹ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/3799697.stm