



RUNNYMEDE TRUST PRESS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
21 July 2011

Big Society risks increasing racial tensions, ethnic minorities fear

Ethnic minorities fear the Big Society will fuel racial tensions, according to a new report published by race equality think tank, the Runnymede Trust.

Particular concerns were raised regarding the government's flagship policies of free schools and elected police commissioners, with some arguing that these initiatives have the potential to increase segregation.

The report gathered its findings through interviews with residents in Blackburn, Croydon and Newcastle. The majority of the participants were from Black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds.

On **free schools**, participants argued that these have the potential to create religious divisions, fearing some groups would set up schools designed to cater to particular ethnic or religious groups, whilst excluding others.

In the words of one Blackburn resident, "I would be worried about segregation because parents would always want to send their children to schools in the religious community".

On **police commissioners**, there were fears that without proper safeguards, groups or individuals sympathetic to the far-right could be elected to become police commissioners or to other positions of influence.

Overall, there was a feeling that the Big Society gives power to those with the loudest voices and the most time to spare – more often than not those from the most privileged groups, with one Croydon respondent saying: "It's great for ladies who lunch who have the time, but I would struggle".

By neglecting voices from marginalised communities, the report argues, the Big Society will not reflect the communities it serves.

Commenting on the report, Runnymede Trust director Rob Berkeley said:
"It's hard to argue against the concept of the Big Society in principle, but in order

for it work the government needs to ensure that the Big Society does not become the big divide.

“It is surprising that the government are keen to push forward policies such as free schools without looking in more detail at how this could cause religious and racial divisions – particularly given the Prime Minister's criticisms of multiculturalism earlier this year.

“For the Big Society to be a success, the government needs to address the concerns expressed by the participants interviewed in our report to ensure that racial tensions aren't exacerbated”.

Notes to editors

1. For press inquiries and to arrange interviews, please contact Vicki Butler at vicki@runnymedetrust.org or 020 7377 9222.
2. The full report, entitled “Fair's Fair” is available here: <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/publications/161/32.html>
3. The findings of the report were gathered by deliberative consultation with approximately 60 individuals in Croydon, Blackburn and Newcastle.
4. An accompanying documentary has also been launched today, and is available to watch here: <http://www.youtube.com/user/runnymedeTrust#p/u/9/Nc68CG-9qJU>
5. The Runnymede Trust is a social policy research organisation focused on race equality and race relations. We work by:
 - Identifying barriers to race equality and good race relations
 - Enabling effective action for social change
 - Influencing policy at all levels through providing thought leadership and robust evidence

Further information is available on the Runnymede website: www.runnymedetrust.org