



EMBARGOED UNTIL 0.01AM THURSDAY 1ST APRIL

JOHN DENHAM MP PRAISES LABOUR'S RECORD ON COMMUNITY COHESION AHEAD OF ELECTION

Communities and Local Government Secretary John Denham MP has argued that community cohesion has been at the heart of Labour thinking over the past decade in a pre-election paper published today by race equality thinktank Runnymede.

Following papers written for Runnymede by the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats on the topic of race equality, the Communities Secretary calls for a renewed focus on class in Britain and argues that whilst the growing self-confidence of minority communities is a positive thing, it can be seen as a threat to communities under pressure.

He also states that whilst it is still important to fight racism and discrimination, a more nuanced approach is needed to understand how race interacts with other social factors.

Criticising the concept of multiculturalism, Denham argues that it neglects to focus on shared interests – “the glue that binds us together” – although acknowledges the benefit of its emphasis on respect for different cultures.

Denham praises Labour's cohesion policies during its time in government, in particular highlighting:

- The introduction of the Race Relations Amendment Act in 2000 following the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry;
- The introduction of a duty for schools to promote community cohesion;
- Investment in promoting dialogue between different religions through initiatives such as Inter-Faith Week;
- The rolling out of the Black Pupils Attainment Strategy in education

Denham also defends the government's controversial “Prevent” programme – designed to tackle religious extremism – and argues that the government has been willing to listen to criticism in order to improve the scheme.

The paper includes responses from prominent academics including Professors Derek McGhee (University of Southampton), Mary J Hickman (London Metropolitan University) and Chris Gaine (University of Chichester).

In her response, Hickman questions Denham's assumptions underpinning notions of shared values and a shared identity, adding that the concept of integration "is predicated on positioning (certain) migrants as outsiders who have to change".

Commenting on Prevent in his response, McGhee states that it is unlikely that Muslim communities will ever 'feel ownership' of the policy but suggests that some community groups have taken advantage of it for the broader benefit of their communities without reference to tackling violent extremism.

In response to Denham's argument surrounding community hostility to new migrants, Gaine points out that there is no evidence that immigration causes more competition for jobs and housing.

Commenting on his essay Denham said: "Sustained action over the last ten years has promoted racial equality and better race relations, dismantled unfair barriers faced by many and helped to nurture a society more comfortable with diversity than ever before.

"We are working towards building a society where regardless of class, race, beliefs or anything else: in every community, in every corner of the country - we are on people's side. No favours. No privileges. No special interest groups. Just fairness."

Today's report was published as part of the Runnymede Platform series which has previously featured essays by Dominic Grieve MP and Lynne Featherstone MP. Commenting on the series, Runnymede Director Rob Berkeley said: "It is important during the imminent election campaign that we have a grown up debate about eradicating racism. By providing a space for each party to set out their record and vision and inviting informed comment, Runnymede Platform is a good starting point."

Notes to Editors:

- 1) A copy of the report will be available on our website from 0.01am Thursday 1st April: <http://www.runnymedetrust.org>. For an advance copy please email Vicki Butler – vicki@runnymedetrust.org
- 2) For more information or to arrange an interview with Runnymede's Director Rob Berkeley please contact Vicki Butler on 020 7377 9222 or 07534 929275, or email vicki@runnymedetrust.org.

- 3) Runnymede is a social policy research organisation focused on race equality and race relations. We work by;
- Investigating challenges 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

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- 4) Runnymede Platform aims to create a space in which senior political figures can discuss issues of race equality, with critical comment from the academic community. Today's paper is the third in the series following the publication of "Conservatism and Community Cohesion" by senior Conservative Dominic Grieve QC MP and "The Liberal Democrats and Race Equality" by Liberal Democrat frontbencher Lynne Featherstone MP.