

RUNNYMEDE



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THE RUNNYMEDE TRUST RESPONSE TO

The Role of Further Education Providers in Promoting Community Cohesion, Fostering Shared Values and Preventing Violent Extremism

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We are grateful to be provided with the opportunity to submit our views on the role of further education providers in Promoting Community Cohesion, Fostering Shared Values and Preventing Violent Extremism.

The Runnymede Trust is an independent policy research organisation focusing on equality and justice through the promotion of a successful multi-ethnic society.

Our mandate is to promote a successful multi-ethnic Britain – a Britain where citizens and communities feel valued, enjoy equal opportunities to develop their talents, lead fulfilling lives and accept a collective responsibility, all in the spirit of civic friendship, shared identity and a common sense of belonging. Runnymede has been active in the field of education for many years. Within our current education programme we devise and promote practical strategies for use in the classroom and, at community level, we aim to address and support the specific needs of minority ethnic young people. Further we focus on identifying, sustaining and augmenting improvements in race equality and social cohesion in the changing terrain of education policy and practice

We broadly welcome the attempts within the consultation document to highlight the important role that further education colleges and institutions have for creating safe spaces for students to learn and to foster good relations between those from diverse backgrounds. As with work addressing community cohesion within maintained schools, these aims are indeed laudable – they reflect many of the concerns expressed in our publication on choice and segregation,¹ specifically in relation to the ability of children and young people currently being educated in

¹ Weekes-Bernard, D. (2007) *School Choice & Ethnic Segregation: Educational Decision making among Black and Minority Ethnic parents*, London, The Runnymede Trust

segregated schools to learn about those of other ethnicities, faith backgrounds or from different socio-economic groups.

There are a number of areas of concern however which we feel should be raised in relation to the consultation document, much of which centres around the apparent conflation of issues contained within some of the main aims of these proposals.

The conflation of community cohesion with the prevention of violent extremism

One of the biggest issues of concern with the draft consultation document is the ease with which the notion of community cohesion has become intertwined with the wider Government priority of combating violent extremism, and more specifically, that which is Al-Qa'ida influenced. We argued elsewhere that a careful look needed to be taken at the types of discourse which surrounded the concept of community cohesion specifically as it seemed that some very *local* events in 2001 (namely the disturbances in Oldham and Burnley) had prompted *national* thinking about relations between groups². A critical engagement with this issue was necessary to avoid community cohesion being seen as something that only specific ethnic or faith groups would be required to do. Worryingly however, the clear association between community cohesion and violent extremism found both within proposals for further education and guidance for higher education institutions, will do little in our view to allay these fears.

The Commission on Integration and Cohesion report published in 2007³ suggested that there should occur a de-linking of the question of political extremism from that relating to integration and cohesion and indeed comment on early consultation of the guidance that has now been issued to universities and other higher education institutions, noted that the focus on violent extremism within these proposals tended to 'set Muslims apart as having a particular propensity for violent extremism.'⁴

It is clear that the main focus of this consultation document is *not* with the promotion of community cohesion – the bulk of the proposals and questions posed relate specifically to the prevention of violent extremism. This document moves away somewhat from the focus on 'Muslim extremism' as expressed in guidance on this issue for universities, by specifying Al-Qa'ida Influenced extremism and clearly this is a welcome attempt to distinguish between Muslims generally and those who would promote intolerance. The focus however on Muslims remains – many of the examples provided in the annexes to the consultation include situations that Muslim students or the tutors of Muslim students, might find themselves in, and much reference is made to faith based student societies or activities. Though these latter activities and societies could include Christian fundamentalists for instance, examples that refer to such groups are not provided.

More importantly violent extremism is not just about faith. A disclaimer noting that there are other areas of extremism which may impact upon students is provided in the foreword by Bill Rammell MP, and though this point is necessary, it re-iterates that Al-Qa'ida influenced terrorism is that which is of most concern to the Government. That this may be of greatest concern to the Government, but possibly not to other students or indeed staff working within the further

² Weekes-Bernard, D. (2007) 'Learning to Live Together' in *Fabian Review*, Volume 119, No. 2, pp 21-22

³ Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007, *Our Shared Future*, London, TSO

⁴ Maughan Brown, D. (2007) "Disingenuous, Patronising and Dangerous", *Education Guardian*, 19th February. Available under: <http://education.guardian.co.uk/higher/comment/story/0,,2016555,00.html>

education sector⁵, is not addressed within the document and as this presumption drives the remainder of the proposals, it is unlikely to prevent negative reception by Muslim students and/or staff.

Community Cohesion and race/faith

There is also come conflating with current work colleges are undertaking regarding community cohesion work and promotion of good race relations. Whilst this may demonstrate how well these areas work together, it is also potentially confusing. DCSF guidance for schools on ways of meeting their duty on the promotion of community cohesion, does indeed focus on race and faith problematically, but also stresses that the remit of schools must be wider than race and should explore gender, sexual orientation and disability. The ease with which notions of community cohesion becomes conflated with work on race and faith has been explored by us elsewhere, leading some to comment that it adds nothing to existing work on race⁶ and worse confuses those public bodies already failing to meet their duties under the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000.

Such conflation also has the potential to create uncertainty among groups as to 'who' may be responsible for creating cohesion. In our work exploring the process of choosing schools among BME parents, Clare Alexander noted that the lack of fit between a policy that promotes choice and one promoting cohesion presumes that there are only certain types of parent (those on lower incomes and/or from BME groups) who are required to have responsibility for cohesion within English schools⁷. Indeed within our work on Faith Schools and Community Cohesion (forthcoming), there is much concern among faith groups that the responsibility for 'integration' – a term widely regarded with suspicion at some community levels – lies solely with them based on the way that discourse around community cohesion has developed. The now resultant coupling of community cohesion with the prevention of violent extremism, and more importantly that which is Al-Qa'ida influenced, does little to rectify this problematic association and the way it will be received at ground level.

Links between colleges and communities

We welcome the point raised regarding building links between further education colleges and surrounding local communities though would suggest that these important links *not* be predicated on engagement with police in the first instance. Good links between these groups do require work to foster not only good relations but also the learning ethic, for students and their families, as well as to improve the standing of educational institutions within wider communities, much in the way that the Extended schools programme must also work towards at the level of compulsory education. Again the link here with ensuring that good links with local police forces be fostered through these good relations complicates the focus of developing the links in the first place. Ultimately, we would fully recommend dissociation between the concepts of cohesion and prevention of terrorism if positive inter-cultural and interfaith work is to practically occur.

Support for staff

⁵ Renton, D. (2008) "Document on Student Extremism Seriously Flawed", Institute of Race Relations. Available under: <http://www.irr.org.uk/2008/april/ha000019.html>

⁶ Weekes-Bernard, D. (2007) "Promoting Community cohesion through schools", *Runnymede Bulletin*, No. 352, December

⁷ Alexander, C. in foreword to Weekes-Bernard, D. (2007) *ibid*

The document recommends that colleges develop separate ‘preventing violent extremism’ plans in addition to college programmes of promoting community cohesion to support those students facing particular threats. This is vague and presumes much about the abilities of a college teaching/management body to fulfil these ideals.

In respect of this we support the contention of the UCU that some of these proposals – specifically those relating to provision of individualised advice for at-risk students cannot ‘put teaching staff into roles beyond their professional brief.’⁸ Support required for staff in this instance is more complex than that needed for schools meeting their current promotion of community cohesion duty – it is the added dimension relating to the prevention of violent extremism which creates a set of difficulties, assumptions and resource stretching that may or may not have any place within existing educational institutions.

Student societies and segregation

Finally we would argue that asking colleges to look critically at the way students set up and indeed join various student societies must be done with care. We have looked elsewhere at work exploring good campus relations between students⁹, and whilst there are indeed difficulties with the way that some student societies can work on an exclusionary level, for many students the joining of specific societies in this way is not so much about segregation as about fostering friendships and important cultural links, especially in colleges where students of certain groups form a distinct minority.

We hope that these comments provide a useful contribution to the consultation process and look forward to reading the full Guidance on *Promoting Community Cohesion, Fostering Shared Values and Preventing Violent Extremism* once published.

Yours sincerely

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⁸ Hunt, S. (2008) “Every college needs a race strategy”, *Education Guardian*. Available under: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3046>

⁹ Sims, J. M. (2007) *Not Enough Understanding? Student Experiences of Diversity in UK Universities*, London, The Runnymede Trust