

RUNNYMEDE



Runnymede is pleased to be able to respond to the interim report of the Equalities Review. We recognise that it is an *interim* report and have therefore chosen to focus our response to seven key areas. We look forward to the realisation of the ambitious plans you have set out for Part II, and want to use this opportunity to express some of the misgivings that we have about the approach that has been taken thus far, with a view to constructive engagement in the ongoing Equalities Review process.

Summary

In summary, direct responses to the questions posed on p. 94 of the report:

Has the analysis addressed the factors that are most important for life chances across the life cycle?

Too much emphasis on education and employment has led to a failure to engage with some very important issues. Health, citizenship, crime, justice, transport, and immigration are largely missing. This makes the report weaker than it could have been.

Do you agree with the priorities for action set out at page 62? If not, why not?

They are too restricted to education and employment and reflect thinking that is based on the strands that the review seeks to reject. There is not yet a workable framework for deciding on priorities between these and other claims for priorities for action.

Is the framework for defining and measuring equality, set out at Chapter 5, an appropriate way of thinking about inequality?

There remain some concerns about a capabilities approach as described here – significantly that it fails to address systemic discrimination, that capabilities are very difficult to define beyond human rights, and that culture/values is too convenient an excuse for failing to address inequalities.

About Runnymede

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 collective responsibility, all in the spirit of civic friendship, shared identity and a common sense of belonging. We act as a bridge-builder between various minority ethnic communities and policy-makers. We believe that the way ahead lies in building effective partnerships and we are continually developing these with the voluntary sector, the government, local authorities and companies in the UK and Europe. We stimulate debate and

suggest forward-looking strategies in areas of public policy such as education, the criminal justice system, employment and citizenship.

Founded in 1968, Runnymede has established and maintained a positive profile on the social and interpersonal benefits of living affirmatively within a society that is both multi-ethnic and culturally diverse; and continues to speak with a thoughtful and independent public voice on these issues today.

We are currently undertaking a range of research projects and community engagement programmes to further our understanding of the dynamics of race equality and to continue to influence civil society in working towards a successful multi ethnic society. We have set out six priority areas in which we will be developing work in the medium term;

- **Race and the equalities agenda:** How does racial justice relate to other equally significant identities – both theoretically and practically – to cope with fluid and multiple identities and discriminations? This is likely to become even more salient with regard to faith and belief where there is little real understanding of the relationship, and where legislation runs ahead of understanding.
- **Choice in the public services:** All the major parties are signed up to delivering greater choice in the public services. How can an unfavourable race equality impact be minimised? If school choice is anything to go by, people from certain minority ethnic communities are likely to find that choice reinforces current patterns of disadvantage rather than opening up new avenues and new options.
- **Multiculturalism/integration/segregation/cohesion:** This debate will not go away and is likely to remain unresolved in the face of global change, changing patterns of immigration, European expansion and integration, and the persistence of racisms and xenophobia.
- **Hyper-diversity:** Changing patterns of immigration will present a challenge to the structures of race relations organisations as the monolithic minority ethnic categories become increasingly irrelevant to explain people's experiences, and challenges come from groups who suffer racisms but are currently left out of the debate.
- **Mixed heritage:** Appropriate policy responses, language and community building are still lacking for people of mixed heritage. This question poses challenges similar to those of hyper-diversity and multiple identities, and needs consideration, despite its capacity to elude research categorisation by virtue of the breadth of experience involved.

Having commissioned the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, which reported in 2000, we have some experience of undertaking wide ranging reviews of policy in this area and recognise the ambition of the Equalities Review in attempting, within such a short time frame, to challenge and change public attitudes, government action, and civil society. We understand that the process is a difficult one given the gaps in data, the differing approaches in different fields and standards, and the changing political and social background.

This response is in addition to the joint response submitted by the Equality and Diversity Forum of which we are members.

Response to The Equalities Review Interim Report

General comment

The process by which the review has been undertaken thus far has not been particularly transparent or accessible to smaller community organisations. The report is written in language that is likely to be difficult for those without particular expertise in social policy or political theory to access and indeed, writing a response to such a broad ranging report is challenging even for those who do! In moving to Part II **we hope that the review will be mindful of ways to include those with learning disabilities, children and those with English as a Second Language in their consultation methods.**

The Review coincides with a number of other equality policy initiatives that are also being undertaken by government and may be contributing to a certain amount of unease that there is so much change taking place at once. It is important to remember that, however concerned, there is a limit in terms of the capacity of organisations to respond in detail to such a number of consultations – especially when it is unclear what relationship the Equalities Review has to the future of government policy, the transition to the CEHR, influence over the Discrimination Law Review, the Gender Equality duty, or new regulations on Sexual Orientation, Age, and Religion and Belief. **We hope that in publishing Part II of their report the Review Team are mindful of the other pressures on smaller community and voluntary sector organisations and can find ways of making consultation more accessible to them.**

Capabilities approach

We agree that trying to find an approach that allows an accessible discussion of the aim of equality and which moves beyond ‘equality of opportunity’ approaches is valuable. We are concerned, however that **the way in which the approach is presented here does not lead to much greater clarity.** As the crucial point in the report, it could benefit from greater explanation.

The criticism may go further than one of presentation, however, since a capabilities approach is bound into political debate and contemporary understandings. **Beyond a basic human rights agenda, all other additions to a desired set of capabilities are subject to constant debate** – similar to ongoing debates about the definition/measurement of poverty. The mechanisms for deciding which capabilities are the most important does not lead to the greater clarity that the Review set out to bring – it merely moves the debate to another contested location.

The proposed opinion survey to find out which capabilities are the most important is unlikely to yield clarity as it falls foul of the Review’s wish to move beyond the *‘most popular cause, rather than what is most urgent’* p.9. The few examples of possible contenders for a desired capability already pose some difficulty. The DRC have raised concerns about how a capabilities approach that relies on ‘intrinsic capabilities’ as prerequisites of successful participation excludes many people with disabilities. Reliance on GCSE results and understanding of citizenship as markers of capabilities excludes many people and suggests that the 50% of children this year without 5A*-C passes at GCSEs are somehow less deserving of equality in employment.

Further the statement '*often people make choices that are constrained by cultural and other pressures* (p.73)' is too broad a 'get out clause'. **It may be interpreted in such a way that the persistent inequalities that operate are a function of choice/preference, rather than a product of systemic discrimination.** Should we then, in keeping with the reports emphasis on education and employment, excuse the disproportionate rates of exclusion from school for boys on the basis that the excluded boys themselves have some agency in the exclusion – they *chose* to behave in such a way as to lead to them being excluded. For Black boys, some commentators have given a cultural explanation for such behaviour (cf. Tony Sewell – Black Masculinities and Schooling). The under-representation of Bangladeshi women in the workforce is not simply a factor of cultural preference; we should look to systemic discrimination.

The choices which people make are rather, *always* constrained by cultural and other pressures – and these pressures may be racism, fear of racism, homophobia, disability, sexism, inter alia. Choosing not to join the police force, enter certain Higher Education institutions, work in certain industries or visit the GP, are all factors that impact on race equality as currently understood. A capabilities approach as framed here would not address the changes that these institutions need to make to address this inequality. If the choice can be made but is not, due to constraints that are not well understood by those within the institution, this could lead to blaming the victim for their own 'fecklessness'.

Another worry is in the recourse to culture and how this is often understood in public discourse; characteristically as belonging solely to minority ethnic groups. Thus **fixed views of culture are used to add to the constraints placed on marginalised communities**, about what choices are culturally authentic, and also in reticence from those outside and within communities to challenge 'cultural practices' that further marginalise groups within communities, e.g. people with disabilities, people of no faith, homosexuals, and women.

Vulnerability and trigger episodes

The analysis of trigger factors and vulnerability is problematic. Firstly **vulnerability as a concept individualises the inequality by locating it in the identity of the individual.** Vulnerability becomes a function of a particular sexual orientation, ethnic origin, gender etc. Rather than a function of a society that operates in ways that are homophobic, racist, sexist etc. This is more than splitting hairs and is a factor in our current equality discourse which sees members of certain groups as a problem rather than wider society's/an institution's relationship with them as the problem. This has led to discrimination in employment, policing, housing etc.

The analysis of trigger episodes represents a wider problem with the report and the way it accepts current data without contextualising it, in that **very few of those that are identified are in fact trigger episodes – they are merely moments at which some measure is made.** Without KS1 tests, would moving from infant to junior school be a trigger episode? These 'episodes' have little causal power. Birth of a child or divorce can lead to widely differing outcomes. The identification of life events that could be measured in terms of their impact is helpful – the attempt to impose causal links between them is beyond the scope of the data that is available.

Beyond education and employment

On p.23 (paragraph 4), the report shows how it has constrained itself in such a way that it fails to achieve its goals. **The focus on education and employment is unnecessarily restrictive.** Granted, we have the best data on these two areas but that is largely a function of prior government activity and preoccupations. It is unsurprising that respondents to the call for evidence pointed to education and employment as areas in which there was existing data. We look forward to Part II of the review when other areas can be taken into consideration – the failure of the NHS to undertake successful ethnic monitoring is hardly a reason to ignore health and well-being issues, research into civic attitudes and volunteering, the media, housing and segregation, the criminal justice system, immigration, political representation, all exist. Further, any review of equalities must take into account the prevalence of hate crime and fear of violence – constraints which still impact on the lives of many from marginalised groups and communities. By focusing only on employment and education the report feels constrained and restricted to a narrower view of equalities than is helpful in moving forward.

Multiple identities

The focus on equality penalties is also unhelpful for similar reasons as those given above regarding vulnerability. It is also a concern that whilst attempting to move beyond a strand approach, these penalties would entrench an approach of this nature. **There is also a missed opportunity to discuss multiple discrimination and identities.** These become especially important to the proposed model in terms of measuring inequalities, given the range of indices that may have to be adopted, especially if the desire to go beyond the six strands is realised. What is the equality penalty when multiple discrimination collide, are their multiplier effects? The reduction of identity to a mathematical formula is unlikely to reap the rewards that the reports authors hope for.

Costs to society

We welcome the attempt to make a stronger modern case for equality. It is a disappointment that all the arguments in the case are expressed in economic terms. Even then, they are expressed in most narrow of economic terms to include additions to the workforce, but not less people in the criminal justice system, more productive employment, less civil unrest, or cuts in welfare benefits. **There is also a moral case to be made for equality that is surprisingly absent.** Such instrumentalist cases for equality have been shown in the past to be weak. Indeed they struggle to counter instrumentalist arguments in favour of greater inequality.

Lobbyists and democratic deficit

We appreciate the attempt to encourage a debate about equalities with a wider section of society and beyond the usual organisations. However, the accusation that those who have been involved in working towards equality are merely lobbyists, fighting for special interests, is unfair. The role of the voluntary sector in campaigning for change has been great over the past 60 years and is likely to be for the next 40 at least. Further whilst we agree that *'it cannot be right that public policy is determined largely by the best organised, often most well-funded and ultimately most popular cause, rather than what is most urgent'* – **we also want to reassert the role of political debate and democracy in defining public policy.** It is also unacceptable for public policy to be determined by unelected quangos and technocrats. It is important that our political structures also reflect and embody the principles of equality set out in the review.

Novel measures and future proofing

The choice of issues to focus on in terms of the future of equalities was rather restricted. While both issues identified are relevant, the possibilities of further developments in telecommunications, the changing shape of the workforce, the speed and scope of international travel, longevity and improving health outcomes, among many others could also have been considered. There were a number of times in which some of the predictions made for the future were based on conjecture which may be likely but is presented as if there are no other options – especially with regards to future labour demands and migration. Where some conclusions were made it appeared that the equalities mechanisms suggested were still stuck in the present, for example, categories such as ‘White European’ may be of less use if the predicted movement of workers from across Europe comes to pass. Our current structures do not recognise the existing (super) diversity of our society – the review needs to find some way of addressing this.

We hope that this is a useful contribution to the ongoing work that the Equalities Review will undertake. We hope that by sharing our criticisms at this interim stage we can support the production of a final report that comes closer to reaching the laudable aims of the Review. In its current form, however, it is lacking in several areas and in order to make a fruitful contribution to the work of the new CEHR, and new legislation on discrimination, should be revised.

Rob Berkeley,
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