

A Clear Vision

Following the Home Secretary's speech, **Fiona Mactaggart** MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary for Race Equality, Community Policy and Civil Renewal, introduces some of the detail in the Government's strategy document¹

This strategy has taken quite a long time to develop but I think that it's got a clear vision, it's got a clear way of delivering that vision and I think it's worth you having a look at it.²

Concept summary

So let's start at the beginning – with a summary of the concept behind the strategy. It's a belief that everybody benefits when everyone has the opportunity to do their best, and that in itself strengthens society. But what we want to do is make sure that everyone does have the opportunity to do better.

We recognise that there are things that hold people back. Sometimes there are direct discriminations. Sometimes there are the kinds of things that the first report identified as institutional racism. Sometimes they are more intangible.

I keep in my head the memory of a young man I met in Peterborough. When I said to him, 'Hussein, do you feel British?', he said: 'Yeah, except, it's a bit as though I'm on a train and I'm not sure if anyone's paid for the ticket'. And that image really stays very powerfully with me – that there is a sense of contingency, of not being certain that your kind of rights are powerful and are real, that actually undermines the capacity of various groups in our society to achieve their best.

Consulting around earlier documents

We started as many of you will know with a consultation around a document called *Strength in Diversity*,³ and I want to thank those of you who responded. It was not like a conventional government green paper. Various people said 'What's this Fiona?' One of the things I said in reply was that, actually, I was involved in the Labour Party's big conversation and because of that experience I felt that a conversational style worked better, an approach where you actually ask people real questions rather than tell them what you're going to do and then expect them to respond to just the one little question – asking do you think we're right? – which is some kind of tradition in government consultation.

Strength in Diversity focused on four things:

- developing inclusive notions of citizenship identity and belonging,
- eradicating racism and extremism,
- increasing opportunities and tackling inequality
- and building cohesive communities.



Actually, as we got the responses we honed it down to two key elements: (1) improved life-chances, especially for those who need it most – the focus that Charles has described on the most disadvantaged; and (2) building greater cohesion between and within communities. And they all have positive results for society.

Improved life-chances for those most in need

The arrow at the foot of slide 1 (on p. 6) that summarises what we are trying to achieve highlights not the main element, but something that has developed as a new theme, which is enabling faith communities to play a full and active role in civil society. Charles has described how hatred against people on the basis of their faith is a phenomenon which we are planning to newly legislate against; and those who have opposed or who have questions about that legislation suggest that it might restrict freedom of speech, the freedom to criticise other faiths. It will not; let me reassure you of that. You know, I've been a civil libertarian and a free-speechnik for years and there isn't a risk of that. But actually there is a risk of violence and disturbance as happened in the northern towns, created and prepared for by this incited hatred. And in tackling this we don't just want to use the law, we actually want to use faith communities themselves and their ability to relate to each other, their ability to help us build a more positive society for everyone, and that's an important part of the strategy.

There are big challenges. There are still chronic underlying disadvantages and Charles has already referred to the fact that the picture isn't the same for everyone – as these employment figures, for example, demonstrate. But even in areas where the picture looks quite positive – for example, the employment gap between the Indian community and the white community, which you can see from the bar chart here (see slide 2 on p. 6), is relatively narrow – we see that actually there's still an ethnic pay penalty which members of the Indian heritage community experience.

So there are quite subtle and complex forms of discrimination and one of the things that we are determined to do, as well as having a focus on the most disadvantaged, is actually make sure that we know exactly what's going on.

Some time ago, the fact that we lumped all the south Asian communities together meant that we didn't actually have the texture that this kind of data gives us about where disadvantage hits hardest, but the experiences of, for example, Bangladeshi or Pakistani families were buried in a way that didn't necessarily highlight the extent of their disadvantage. But Charles has set out very clearly the fact that we are making progress. The narrowing of the employment gap reassures us; although we're not made in any way complacent by the fact that the increase in the employment rate in ethnic minority communities is seven times the increase of the employment rate of the white community. So what we know is that the gap is narrowing and we need to be able to assure ourselves that we are making progress on ending these disadvantages, on narrowing those gaps.

A focused tailored approach

In order to do that we believe it is right to focus most on those who are most disadvantaged – to tackle, for example, the proportion of children of Pakistani and Bangladeshi descent who are growing up in poverty, nearly two-thirds of them, compared to around one-fifth, which is the national average. Now, tackling that requires a complex multi-layered way of doing things, dealing with issues of housing, education, employment, access to employment. We know we need a way to do that. And our approach is to develop a focused and tailored approach to improving life-chances, not saying that we'll try and do everything better, which will make things better for everyone and the benefits will flow down, as it were. We actually want to focus what we do in order to make sure it works well.

Education. Charles described how, for example, the EMAG grant in education will be more focused, that qualification for teachers in teaching English as an additional language will be developed to improve access to the English language for those children who didn't have this early on in their education. We need to make sure

¹ Just a few of the slides with which the Minister illustrated her speech are included here with the text. The full set of ohps can be viewed on the Runnymede website [www.runnymedetrust.org]

² Launched at this conference on 19 January, *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society: The Government's strategy to increase race equality and community cohesion* has been produced by the Race, Cohesion, Equality and Faith Directorate. Other documents were published alongside this strategy. They include *Race Equality in the Public Services*, the *Summary of Responses to Strength in Diversity*, and material on meeting the duties of the RR(A)A, HO progress on its internal diversity targets, and diversity monitoring reports. These can all be found on the Home Office website [www.homeoffice.gov.uk]

³ *Strength in Diversity: towards a community cohesion and race equality strategy*, London, Home Office, 2004 [www.homeoffice.gov.uk]

that these tailored responses meet the needs of specific groups, to bring about in the labour market, for example, better, more effective connecting up of people and work, often using community networks.

Employment. One of the things we know is that advantage in employment is partly provided by people knowing about job availability through informal networks, and actually we need to find ways of, if you like, mobilising informal networks through communities and giving them access to that kind of job availability information. Investing in skills development. Investing in entrepreneurship because we know it to be another example where, as well as tackling enormous disadvantage, we can also contribute substantially to the wealth of our country, and delivering a programme of equal opportunities in the workplace.

Health. In this area, we need to make sure that we know about inequalities and that we then have the well-focused tactics to develop them. For example, in improving mental health services for people from the BME communities we plan to appoint 500 new community development workers to focus on mental health, targeting, working with BME communities and making sure that we have tailored services to meet the specific needs of different cultures, such as specific cancer screening programmes for women of Asian origin, or CHD programmes to help deal with the high incidence of diabetes and coronary heart disease amongst those communities too.

Housing. A critical indicator of disadvantage is housing conditions. We've got a programme to make sure that all social housing meets the decent homes standard by 2010, and actually doing that will benefit 1 in 10 of black and minority ethnic households. So, by developing these programmes which actually tackle the most disadvantaged, we will tackle ethnic disadvantage as well. But we want to make sure that we've got an action plan which focuses on housing needs, and we'll be developing that later in 2005.

Criminal Justice. Here we're establishing a new statutory duty on police authorities to promote diversity within their police force and their authority, thereby continuing the Macpherson process, and in particular ensuring that stop and search is applied fairly and appropriately to all communities and identifying good practice to drive improvements nationwide. And I think the Macpherson experience is an important one about driving delivery. Because on the Lawrence Steering Group we've got an engagement with community activists, community organisations and individuals which can actually help government to deliver. Our ambition therefore is to work with practicality in government, to work with our partners to make sure that we deliver a difference.

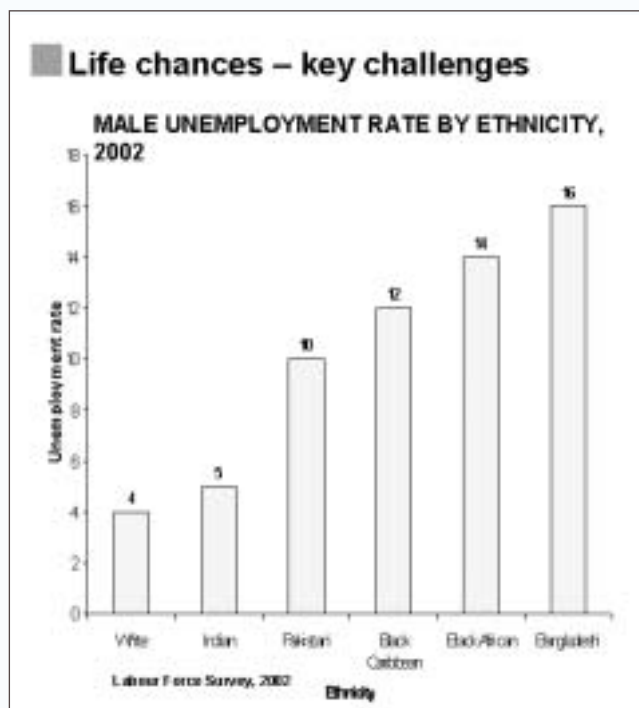
How it will work

How are we going to make sure it works? When I first got this job I felt like a missionary. I would go along to other government departments and say oh please do something about this, and actually, we've got a Labour government, we've got good will. And people said yes they would do something. But they didn't have the tools to make sure that that good will was translated into practical action. What we're doing here is making sure that we've got the tools.

Tools

The first item in our list is better information. What information reveals are the pockets of extreme disadvantage, the differences between the black and minority ethnic experience. With this better information we will be producing annually a race equality and public services report, which will actually analyse the progress that we've made against the targets we've had.

Next is the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, which is one of the most dynamic pieces of legislation as it puts a positive duty on public authorities to promote race equality and good relations between people, to make more difference in practice. I think when we passed this dynamic law we thought that was enough in itself,



and now we need to deliver the purpose of it.

How are we going to do that? By working with the CRE, providing guidance to people, making sure that they themselves, or working with other inspectorates, deliver it; so that Ofsted, when they are inspecting a school, make that school's race equality activity an absolute at the heart of what they are doing. So that the Audit Commission, when they are looking at local authorities, makes sure that the local authorities are delivering a difference.

And jointly we will be pulling together some of this strategy in our new Commission for Equality and Human Rights, which will be in place by 2009. And we will have a duty to track progress and the job of developing a strategy based on what works. And these aren't just warm words; there's a public services agreement target on race equality which is cross-governmental, but which is owned by departments as well as the Home Office, which means that we really can deliver an effective oversight on that.

Community cohesion – a greater emphasis

But actually, equality on its own isn't necessarily enough. We know that we've got an issue to deal with – community cohesion. It's not just an issue about race. It's also about the other things that divide communities. In the past, race has often been the flashpoint. I produced the map⁴ merely to show the variety of challenge in different parts of the country. Diversity is complex; it operates in

⁴ For clarity, see it on the Runnymede website [www.runnymedetrust.org]

Improving opportunity, strengthening society: the Government's strategy to increase race equality and community cohesion

Vision: Opportunities for all and a contribution by all

A more focused, tailored approach to improving life chances

What?

- Education
- Health
- Employment
- Decent Homes
- Police and CJS

How?

- Tailored programmes in key areas
- Smarter working by CRE, e.g. partnerships with Inspectorates
- New legislation against religious discrimination
- Commission for Equality and Human Rights by 2009

A greater emphasis to cohesion and sense of common belonging

What?

- Citizenship and participation
- Immigrant integration
- Increased participation in civic society
- Less racism and prejudice

How?

- Driving down racist crime and supporting anti-racist work
- Support for good, moderate leaders to marginalise extremists
- Stronger legislation against incitement to hatred
- Embedding public duty to promote good race relations

A delivery approach for a fairer, more inclusive, more dynamic Britain

different ways in different places. There are optimistic signs – like self-reported racial prejudice going down. But there are also pessimistic signs – the growth of political racism, the election of BNP councillors. They are trying to divide communities and generate hatred. So we actually need to make sure that we put really practical effort into delivering a difference.

How are we going to do that? Well I think there are three themes to it.

Three Themes

Belonging not contingency

The first is making sure we have that common sense of belonging, and we're starting with young people to make sure that the next generation of Husseins don't grow up with that feeling that their ticket isn't paid for.

How are we doing that? Through foundation partnerships in school: making sure that we get exchanges between pupils of different backgrounds and working to develop integrated youth activities. I met Hussein on a programme funded by the Home Office, which was actually bringing together a group of young people who at first had had a confrontational kind of relationship I said to them, 'How did you used to know each other?' They were white and Pakistani heritage mostly. The way they knew each other before this project was by fighting. Actually that was their relationship. They walked past each other in the street and they balled their fists in their pockets. They fought each other. That was the sum of their relationship. This project brought them together, talked to them about racism. Helped them understand the nature of racism. Helped them do things together. Helped them feel that actually they had more in common than divided them. And eventually helped them stop being part of the problem for that community, and become part of the solution.

That's the kind of project that we'll be investing in. We'll be making sure that we can develop civic participation amongst young people, and more widely in the community, with the proposal for a new Citizenship Day in October, and building on the citizenship curriculum both in school and beyond school.

Cohesion across communities

We're also focusing on community cohesion, which means providing opportunities for new immigrants to integrate, giving

them access to English language learning, giving help to new refugees, including the settlement loans that we're proposing and so on, so that they can actually properly take part in society. And also celebrating diversity through sporting and cultural opportunities, which bring people together. Too often the diversity celebration is the leftover stuff that happens after you've had your town fete, when the stage is left up and the minority communities get their show the day after. Well actually that isn't celebrating diversity. That is celebrating two different sets of cultural activity one after the other. What we want to do is to make sure that we bring those two things together, that you don't get the show on the leftover stage, but have the salvation bands, the rappers and the white bands all performing together. We have the kabaddi being played next to the football. That we have actually engaged with different kinds of people all

at once, so that we're celebrating our diversity together as a sort of strength which can create unity.

Cohesion within communities

We are developing specific proposals to challenge hatred. Tackling racism, helping victims through making sure that everyone wherever they live in the country, even if they're running a Chinese restaurant at the foot of Cornwall, has access to a helpline if they are the victim of a racist attack. Making sure that we've got effective action against hate crime and that we are marginalising the extremists by the work that we do, including work with faith communities – we propose to put £3 million into helping them develop inter-faith dialogue. So we're promoting cohesion at a local level particularly. It's all very well for government ministers to stand up here and say it's a good thing, but actually it's delivered in our neighbourhoods. So we need to make sure that at that neighbourhood level the difference is made.

Inhabiting the strategy

There are too many words on this slide (see above), but I put it up because in a way it's a summary of the business. What we're trying to do is make sure that we do 'what it says on the tin' of this strategy. That we improve opportunity and, through doing that, strengthen society. That to improve opportunity we've got to increase race equality, and that if we do that we need to focus on cohesive communities. So we're producing a focused, tailored approach to improving life-chances by working smarter, by driving progress, a delivery approach.

We're building more effective action to make more cohesive communities, and doing this isn't a kind of political correctness, it's actually about making a society in which all of us can thrive. That's actually the ambition. So that everyone can give of their best, which means that all of us can benefit.

I focus on what government can do because this is the government strategy. But we know we can't do it on our own. Unless we make sure that private-sector employers, voluntary organisations, faith bodies, community partners actually play a part in this, we will not make the difference we need. Some of those people are here in the audience. We are determined to work with you to make a real difference because if we do we will all benefit from that difference. □