

"I think Brixton has got a terrible image — once you mention Brixton to somebody they automatically think, like, bad boys, the robberies, the theft and all that sort of thing. I feel pretty cheesed off about it, do you know what I mean, because this is where I was brought up, this is where I live."

— a young man in Brixton, January 1996.

This is where I live

stories and pressures
in Brixton, 1996

The Runnymede Trust

An account of young people's
views and perceptions

Contents

- 1 The need for debate and action** page 3
— why and how this report was compiled
- 2 Careers, lives and life-chances** page 5
— three introductory case-studies
- **Jermaine’s story**
— *‘I look up to people who care about the community’*
 - **Danny’s story**
— *‘The expulsion messed everything up’*
 - **David’s story**
— *‘I live in hope’*
- 3 Tensions, projects and pressures** page 9
— notes for the policy agenda
- the area
 - home and street
 - school
 - between street and school
 - role models
 - the police
 - gender and masculinity
 - business and employment
- 4 Looking to the future** page 16
— seven main themes
- 5 Appendices** page 17
- A statistical background
 - B checklist of action points
 - C ‘But if ...’: Michael’s story

1 The need for debate and action

- why and how this report was compiled

Young African Caribbean men in British society, it is frequently claimed, are in crisis. There are concerns about the high rates of exclusion of African Caribbean boys from school, poor levels of educational attainment, high levels of unemployment, negative encounters with the police and criminal justice system, high rates of conviction and incarceration, involvement in drugs, and irresponsible early parenthood. At the same time there is widespread celebration of apparent success by black women, to add weight to castigations of young black men for their apparent failure.

The problems and concerns are reinforced by conventional wisdom and cultural stereotypes in mainstream society. As members of a visible minority, young black men suffer from racist assumptions and stereotypes which classify them as threats and troublemakers, especially in the contexts of schooling and policing, and from discrimination and exclusion. As young people they are perceived to have values which conflict with those of their parents and the wider society. As males they are expected to be aggressively assertive. They are associated by mainstream public opinion with crime, deviance and delinquency, and therefore are seen as constant threats to social order. In short, they are widely seen as an urban underclass to be kept under control. The young men themselves, in consequence, are rarely if ever given a public opportunity to explain their situation from their own point of view, or to voice how they see solutions and ways ahead.

In summer 1995, for example, there was a blaze of publicity for an observation made by Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Paul Condon, that victims of street robbery report that a high proportion of their attackers are young black men. Sir Paul himself emphasised that such statistics must be interpreted and used with care, and that a drift into delinquency and street crime is often engendered by exclusion from school. But the complexities and background to which he referred were omitted in much of the reporting and comment. Further, the young men themselves were excluded from the debate: no one asked them about, let alone reported on, their opinions, experiences or feelings.

It is against this background, of negative imagery and expectations on the one hand and of lack of opportunities for young men to speak out for themselves on the other, that this brief and impressionistic report has been compiled. The main body of the report was written by Angela Haynes. She conducted a small number of interviews and focus group discussions with young men in Brixton in January and February 1996, thus shortly after the disturbances of December 1995. Also, she checked out her perceptions and interpretations by talking with a range of people who are

professionally involved, in a range of different ways, with young people's experiences and needs. The latter included youth workers, headteachers, education inspectors, police officers, the manager of the local branch of a large retailing company, and representatives of the African and Caribbean Churches Evangelical Alliance, the Association of Black Probation Officers, the Home Office and Lambeth Council.

Brixton was chosen as the focus of the study because of its significant African Caribbean population, its national profile and its longstanding identification as a site of black protest. Additionally, the disturbances in the area which took place in December 1995 had heightened awareness of key issues affecting young black men, both locally and nationally — though incidentally the disturbances involved many white young people as well as black.

Angela Haynes conducted two structured group interviews. The first was with young people aged 18-23 at the Dick Sheppard Youth and Community Centre and the second was with young people aged 15-18 at the Abeng Centre. Semi-structured in-depth individual interviews were then conducted with eight young men selected from these focus groups. It was agreed that the interviews would be confidential and the identities of those who took part would be concealed. Material from the interviews forms the core of this report. The professionals who were interviewed are not quoted directly. Their perceptions did, however, affect how the young men's statements were attended to and interpreted.

The overall pattern of this report is as follows. First, there are three pieces of autobiography, drawn from transcripts of the individual interviews. They are respectively by Jermaine, Danny and David. They have been given prominence in the report for four main reasons:

- They are a vivid reminder that no two people are the same, but that on the contrary each person is unique, with their own distinctive experiences, responses and strivings.
- They introduce and illustrate the concept of career — the idea that each person's life can be seen as a sequence of critical incidents, with one key experience leading, for better or for worse, to another. Although every career is unique, all contain certain events and choices which are life-changing. All who work with young people, whether directly as teachers or youth workers or indirectly as policy-makers, need to be sensitive to these key make-or-break times.

- They show people as subjects, not objects — authors of their own lives, not powerless or choiceless, and full of energy, ambition and purpose, not sunk in apathy or negativity. Jermaine, Danny and David reflect angrily on unjust things which have happened to them, but also critically about how they themselves have sometimes responded and have contributed to their problems, and positively about how everything — their situation, and their own role within it — could be different and better.
- They recall the importance and value of case-studies, as ways of introducing major policy and theoretical issues. These three stories, for example, introduce issues to do with education, youth work, parenting, policing, adolescence, employment and racism, and with the relationship between personal choice, decision and responsibility on the one hand and the influence of social and impersonal circumstances on the other.

The next main section of the report focuses on specific issues. There are brief outlines of what the young people said about (a) the area where they live (b) tensions in their growing up between the values of their homes and the values of the street (c) their schools and teachers (d) the youth service and youth workers (e) the availability of role models (f) their experiences of the police (g) gender and masculinity and (h) local business and employment opportunities.

The report then briefly draws threads together from the first two parts, emphasising in particular some positive ways

forward. “As individuals,” Angela Haynes observes, “the youths were optimistic about their futures ... Most wanted to engage in youth work, and all wanted to be involved in the community. Those who had made mistakes knew where they had gone wrong. Everyone just wanted to be given a chance.”

Finally, there are three appendices. The first of these contains facts and figures about young people in the London Borough of Lambeth. It indicates the numerical scale of the problems touched on in the main body of the report, and emphasises also that problems are likely to become more intractable over the years if action to address them is not undertaken now. The second appendix derives from a meeting which the Runnymede Trust organised in early 1996 about the needs of young people. The meeting was addressed by Sir Paul Condon and by Herman Ouseley, chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, and generated a checklist of urgent action points.

The third appendix provides one further piece of biography, reminiscent of the stories of Jermaine, Danny and David. However, its protagonist is fictional not real. His story has been constructed to summarise some of the report’s principal suggestions.

The report as a whole is not, of course, intended to be objective or comprehensive. On the contrary, it is impressionistic and partial. We hope that young African Caribbean people who happen to read it will recognise here their reality, and that so also will their teachers, parents and youth workers: We hope further that policy-makers in a range of fields — education, the youth service, the business community, voluntary organisations, the police service — will find this document a useful broad-brush reminder of issues requiring further policy-oriented research. And, even more importantly, urgent action.

Views of Brixton: this cartoon by Michael Heath appeared in The Independent in December, 1995 and is reprinted with acknowledgement.

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Across	Down	⁴ B		I			E		
1 Forward-looking, positive London suburb.	2 Peaceful protest.	⁵ L	O	O	T	I	N	C	
5 Popular take-away service.	3 Atmosphere of mutual understanding.	O		T			S		
6 Men's club.	4 Feature of London streets.	O		S			I		
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			⁶ B	A	T	O	N		

HEATH

2 Careers, lives and life-chances — three introductory case-studies

Jermaine's story:

'I look up to people who care about the community'

I'm 20 years of age, I've lived in Brixton all my life. I went to Tulse Hill Primary School, I enjoyed it very much. In my first and second year at secondary school I got on with everyone, but once I reached the third year it just changed — teachers started having digs at me and that's when the problems started. I couldn't say why their attitude changed. As you get older they think they can talk to you rougher. Certain teachers tried to drag me up when I was talking, but I wasn't having it.

Every incident that happened I used to tell my mum. Throughout the year they called my mum up to the school. Out of all the things on the list none of it happened, they said things like I was bullying — things like that I never did. I eventually got expelled from school. They said I was disruptive and argumentative whenever I'd talk up for myself. Their mind was already made up — there was nothing I could do.

They waited just before the exams so they could mess up my life, and I couldn't go to other schools because the report they gave me was so bad. I eventually went to a centre where they didn't do GCSEs. I don't think they had the teaching staff to do the GCSEs. I spent a year at the centre. You were treated more like adults, no one was trying to bully you. The teachers were very understanding. It was more relaxed. They didn't care about the report from the school. It was all right, I liked it.

I left there and went to college in Tottenham Court Road to study a BTEC in Business and Clerical. Eventually a fight happened, I was there and my course got terminated, same thing again, I was back to square one. I was there, the whole of the college was there, looking at what was going on. They heard that I was there so they called me and terminated my course. Their mind was already made up. I didn't even want to appeal to go back because of that's their attitude — they didn't want to hear what I had to say — that wasn't the place for me.

After that I did a lot of voluntary work in youth centres, play schemes, that's what I want to do, to get into youth work, to work with young people who need someone who's been through it themselves, not someone with A levels — can they really relate to someone not coming from the ghetto? Because I was one of the youth myself, I know exactly what they were going through. A lot of my friends were into crime, drugs, that sort of things. Now I'm a lot older, more mature, I can see where I went wrong.

When I was about 15 or 16 I used to spar with a lot of youths, I was around crack, but it's not something that I

indulged in, seeing what it's done to people. It is a very serious problem. It is turning people into nothing, mentally and physically. There's people like me but at the end of the day it depends on willpower. I'm a person that is not easily led. It didn't interest me in the least. I heard about crack and cocaine, it didn't do nothing for me. Marijuana is something I tried years ago, it doesn't do nothing to you.

I used to go out breaking into cars, shoplifting, that sort of thing, with friends, you don't want them to say you're selling out. I was caught a few times, just cautioned, I was young at the time. When you're young you don't follow your own mind. As I got older I learnt to say no, that's not how I wanted to live my life.

My mum didn't like it — I got in trouble, got grounded, got beaten. I'm very close to my mum, she felt that I let her down. When I was around her at home she would never've got the impression that that was the sort of thing I would do. I didn't want her to know what I was getting up to when I was out of her sight. At the end of the day everyone grows up differently. If my brother and sister did the same, I didn't know about it. They just got on with their life.

I was with a group of guys who said they were going to rob a bookies. I shouldn't have been nosey, I should have stayed outside, but they took a long time. As I went in is when they decided to rob the place. I went in and they ran out. We were all dressed similar, and we were all black. I didn't run off because I didn't do nothing. The guy in the bookie came out, I got caught, got charged. They wanted to put it on someone. I was in Feltham on remand for six months. I didn't get no bail, it was set at £10,000 because I was on the camera coming into the bookie.

I went to court, my solicitor said we stood a good chance of winning. The jury saw the video where you could see I wasn't doing nothing — and I still got guilty. Up to now I can't believe that I got a guilty. I put it down to because I'm black. That was a year out of my life, I did nine months in Feltham, then spent the rest in Dover. I didn't get many visits from family and no visits from friends. When I was in Brixton every step I take someone would be hailing me. In prison I didn't see no one.

Prison is a waste of time. You get treated like dirt by the screws. You are no longer a person, you are a number. You just have to bear it. They talk down to you, stitch up your visits, when they're supposed to let you out they don't, and they spike your food. It is a dirty place, it is degrading. It is not nice. They beat you up in there. Basically you don't have a say. Prison isn't supposed to be nice, is it?

The only way you get on in there is if you turn informer — brown tongue. Its a jungle in there. If you can't defend yourself nothing will be yours. I was tested. I had to beat up people. I did a building course — a City and Guilds — I actually got the City and Guilds — it must be the one and

only qualification I have got. They got a library but you get bored, there is nothing to do. You listen to tapes until you know them all off by heart. Because you have so much time, you have lots of time to think about your life. There were lots of people in there that I knew.

I regret going out there and thieving because I've now got a criminal record. They say it gets wiped off when you're sixteen but it's there. When you go for a job they can do a police check. Certain jobs you go for they find out. A criminal record — any involvement with the police — stops you from doing a lot of things. Once people find out that you've been to prison they look at you like — prison, criminal, their attitudes change just like that.

I see my future as very prosperous because I know where I went wrong so now I'm looking to do something positive. Nothing negative. At the moment I'm doing agency work, industrial work, i.e. work in warehouses that

sort of thing. I've been doing that for about two weeks now, it's all right but it's not something I'd like to do for the rest of my life. No prospects in that at all. I'd like to do youth work. I do voluntary youth work now, I'm trying to get my youth leadership course. No matter what it takes I'm prepared to do it, because I want to do something for the community, something for the youth out there. I look up to people who care about the community, people who care about people.

I've worked in Pizza Hut, Tescos, the money's not good for starters. If I'm going to do something where the money is not good I'd prefer it to be youth work.

I like Brixton, I was born in Brixton, what I don't like is the amount of youngsters out there getting themselves into trouble. Brixton could be a really nice place but the police and the drugs and things like that just make everything go crazy.

Danny's story:

'The expulsion messed everything up'

I am 18 years old, I am black, I regularly attend Dick Sheppard Youth Centre. This is one of the few places I come to play basketball. There is nowhere like Brixton, it's special.

My influences are sports people, people who do things for other people, basketball players, my parents — well, my mother. Those people that are on the telly could be putting on a front. You don't know what they're really like. After the camera's switched off they could be different.

I used to go to school in Pimlico. Around that area there's a lot of old white people. I could be with two of my friends — not even a big group — and we'd walk past them and they'd be clutching their bags and crossing the street, expecting us to attack them or something. So they're expecting us to rob them before they even know who we are or whatever.

I got one of the highest marks on the 11+ tests and my mum sent me to school in Pimlico because it has a good reputation. There were always a few people that you didn't get on with but the majority of the teachers were good, I liked them. They helped you out if you needed help, you could stay behind and talk to them if you needed to. Yeah, I liked the school. There was a few teachers I could talk to about problems, but the majority was about work. I did well.

A week before we were due to go on work experience a friend of mine had an airgun, well it wasn't really an airgun, it was just a toy gun and it fired out little pellets. He was messing about with it in the playground during the breaktime and because we had finished mock exams that day I was going to go home. So I went to the gate and he gave the gun to somebody else. He came back with the gun and he was laughing, saying "I just shot some kid, blah, blah."

I went off on work experience. I didn't really like it, it was in a travel agent's doing admin, so I came back to school early. The day that I came in, the head of year started asking me questions: did I shoot this boy? He's got bruises up and down his arm, and he's saying that you did it. And I was kind of stunned because I didn't even fire the gun, let alone shoot anybody. The rest of the boys were brought in. At first Curt denied it, but when it was brought up before the governors of the school he admitted it. He apologised for what happened, but the boy whose gun it was and myself were still expelled from the school, as well as Curt, the guy who did it. Which I think was a bit unfair, because one, I didn't do anything and two, I'd already said I didn't do anything. Why should I get expelled for something somebody else has done?

That was in the fourth year. It happened at the beginning of March and I was out of school from March until September, not doing anything, just staying at home trying to find another school which I could start in September in the same position. At first I went to North Westminster and they said they were going to put me back a year. I didn't like the idea of that, so when it came to the interview and they asked me what I thought of it I said no, so they said okay.

I know me and the other guy who were expelled got the highest marks in the school for the science tests and English and the rest of them I passed. But I didn't actually get the results.

It was unfair. It's obvious I was bitter about what happened. I didn't do anything and I was punished.

The majority of GCSEs I got were Cs and a few Ds and an E which were because of coursework, because at the time of the deadline, a week before that, I broke my foot and I was out of school for around a month, so I couldn't exactly go in and do whatever I had to do to pass and hand the coursework in. So, when the teachers asked me why I wasn't in and I told them, they said that it was a shame because you would have done well, you just needed to hand

in the coursework, which is how I got a few bad marks in the GCSEs at the end of the fifth year.

The year after I wanted to do re-takes, but North Westminster told me I couldn't do them. I wasn't given a reason. They just wanted to get as many people as they could on the new GNVQ. So they're saying, oh, we're not doing that, if you want to do it these are the subjects you have to do. And there wasn't really much there that would have made me do it. So we started the GNVQ, which was a new course. We went on it not really knowing exactly what we were doing. Every time we did a subject, or a module, we'd hand it in and they'd say it's wrong, but before they're giving us time to correct it and hand it in corrected, they'd start the new module, so we wouldn't have time to do anything, and as a result of that nobody on the course passed.

I wasted a whole year. I found out later that I could've went to a college about a mile from where the school was and done the GCSEs and they didn't inform me. I'd got three GCSEs and you needed four and they wouldn't let me do A levels. I spoke to my careers adviser and she was

David's story:

'I live in hope'

I went to a local primary school and my parents decided rather than send me to a local secondary school, which is where my friends went, and which is where I wanted to be, they'd send me to a Roman Catholic school they'd heard of through my cousin. I'm not actually a Catholic but supposedly they had higher standards of morality and education than state schools — the prospects were better. So they packed me off to this school. I tried everything I could in the first two years to get myself kicked out, it didn't work. I wanted to be with my friends, they were neighbourhood people and everyone went there. Why did I have to be the odd one out?

It was mixed. In my year there was 200, I'd say 20-25 per cent ethnic minorities, but not black African Caribbean specifically. My immediate reaction was this place was all right. My initial problem was that I wasn't where I wanted to be, as opposed to hating the place I was.

I was terribly upset but I got used to the idea. After a little while I grew to like the school, the people in it, what it stood for — well, not what the school stood for, but collectively, the students, my peers. I left there with nine GCSEs and wasn't quite sure what direction to go, I didn't have a clue what I wanted to do, where I wanted to go. I knew I wanted to make a lot of money, how I didn't know.

At school they didn't give me any kind of motivation, saying that provided I get decent qualifications I could do this to gain this. Now in school there was a thing called a GCAL, can't remember what it stands for, where the careers officer comes into the school and gives you an interview.

going to send me to do a Youth Training Scheme, doing sports, training to become a coach. That's not what I wanted to do at all, but I was just going along with it. Then I changed my mind and I said I might as well get it over and done with, so I went to the college I could've done the GCSEs at, and applied to do four GCSEs so I could do my A levels. I'm doing Art, History, Maths, Human Biology and I'm on course to pass them all — Art, Human Biology and History with B and above grades, so I will be doing A levels next year and I'm going to do A level Art and History. I want to do something in the arts, probably graphic design, there's a lot of money involved. Part of education is to get a better quality of life, so wherever the money is, I'm going for it.

I'll attend Camberwell or another school of art, which will allow me to be flexible with what I want to do. I was speaking to a teacher who said he'll arrange for me to do work experience in a company.

I would have been in my second year of A levels now. The expulsion messed everything up.

There's multiple choice interview questions and at the end they tell you what kind of job you'd be suited for. Mine came up that I'd be interested in advertising. I said I wanted to be a brand or a product manager, which is sophisticated stuff for someone at that age but after I had had this interview my careers teacher — he was a racist bastard basically — said "well, why do you want to do that? Why do you have to be different? Why don't you be a bank clerk or do some kind of administrative job, or better still be a labourer?" Labouring just ain't for me.

I applied for an art course, but didn't get in because of my work — they told me it wasn't mature enough. And then I decided I'll do A levels. There again there was no specific direction, it was just the means to an end. I'll do these A levels, get these qualifications, plus my mum wanted me to do it. Took me a long time. The first year I failed because I was otherwise engaged, I wasn't very focused. And I took them again and wasn't intending to, but I passed. I didn't like A levels, I didn't think they catered for me, my social background, everything. It was all theoretical: Sociology, Psychology, English Language.

I was lucky to get through that. Then I left, went to work for a year in a PR company as a junior PR assistant. Didn't like PR, still mucking around, still not quite focused, not knowing what I wanted to do. Then I realised, boy, if there's nothing specific that I want to do at the moment, rather than flapping round, waste my time, I should do a business course whereby I can apply everything to any discipline that I was interested in. Went to this course, did a BA in Business Administration and Business Finance at the London Institute, graduated in November of '95.

I stumbled into this degree. If I had been helped and coerced or given some kind of motivation at an earlier

date... Obviously my parents didn't have the academic background or knowledge to give me the guidance, though they obviously wanted me to achieve. They couldn't steer me into the right direction, because they didn't have the experience to guide me. They told me what I shouldn't be doing, what they didn't want me to do, but on the flip side they didn't tell me "I think you should do this".

So far I'm unsuccessful in finding secure employment. Well, I'm employed, but it's not the career path I'd choose. I must admit I've been a bit apathetic. I'm confident but at times I'm over-confident and that over-confidence drives me to lethargy, because if I don't get precisely what I want I won't do it, so I'm very choosy when it comes to applications for jobs.

I had one interview for an advertising agency. I kind of put all my eggs into one basket, because the first interview went very well. They called me back for a second interview and it was a job for a controller, a trainee department controller, I'd liaise between the accounts manager and the creative staff, arranging meetings and making sure that both parties keep to their schedules. Second interview went very well, I was told I'd be called back the following week. It just so happens, I don't know whether it was my bad luck or just coincidence but the day after I had the interview the

Creative Services Director, which is the person that gave me the second interview, got made redundant, so there I was up in the air and I haven't really been applying to other things.

I've started now, though, because I've realised I can't put all my eggs into one basket. Things aren't looking so bad now because the new person's coming and supposedly has taken an interest in my CV, things I've done alongside my formal qualification, and I've done a lot of exterior stuff. I believe that anything that I strive for I can obtain, provided I can put my mind to it.

Some of the people I used to move with are running up and down, in and out of prison, off their head on crack and craziness like that, or just street youths running up and down. And a lot of these youths are very intelligent people. I'm not an innocent person, I do things that deviate from what society says I'm supposed to be doing, but at the end of the day I've got my career laid out. Hopefully, I've got some sense of direction.

Some of my closest friends are successful, they went through a further education process or higher education and they are working for themselves. Some are bums. That's life. I live in hope. If I can achieve half of what I believe I can achieve, then I'll be happy.

Brixton: a selection of headlines from the national press, December 1995.

'Disaffected youth' warning follows Brixton riot
 Unemployment fuels anger in the black community
 'The police believe that they are beyond the law'
 Race riot or just class war?
 Giving new hope to Brixton area
 This is a tragedy, says sad Scarman
 Still full of hope in brave new Brixton
 dream unfulfilled
 Black youngsters blame the police
 The school failure who turned to life of crime
 yet a burnt out case
 Despite the riot, there is cause for hope in Brixton

3 Tensions, projects and pressures

— notes for the policy agenda

The area

Brixton is located in the centre of the south London borough of Lambeth and has a national and international reputation as the heart of African Caribbean Britain. This stems in part from its historical significance as a site of primary settlement for newly arrived Caribbean migrants from the 1950s onwards; in part from the continued presence of a significant black population in the area; and in part from the fact that in 1981 and 1985 it was the site of major urban disturbances which were replicated in other parts of the country. The sum total is that Brixton continues to be regarded as a thermometer of 'black' Britain.

As with any area which has symbolic importance but lacks fixed geographical boundaries, definitions of Brixton vary. Commonsensically it consists of Brixton Road and the market area, while the whole area which might sensibly be called Brixton pans out from the London Underground station within a half mile radius. It touches on the SW9, SW4, SW2 and SE5 post codes, and on several different wards.

Lambeth Council's housing department has areas designated Central, East, West, North and South Brixton, but the areas classified as East Stockwell and North Clapham are also generally regarded as Brixton by the local populace. Brixton City Challenge has yet another definition. This centres on the shopping area and covers the main roads into Brixton: Acre Lane, Effra Road, Stockwell Road, Coldharbour Lane, Ferndale Road and Brixton Hill. It has been estimated that the City Challenge area has a population of 60,000, of whom 40 per cent are members of minority ethnic groups. Of these more than 50 per cent are under 35 years of age.

Brixton is widely identified with an African Caribbean population but in reality it is a highly cosmopolitan area. The term 'multi-cultural', though a cliché, accurately describes this place where people from diverse backgrounds, with differing cultural norms, values and ways of life, live, work and socialise in ways which confer on the area a distinctive character.

"Brixton is so diverse, you walk down any street in Brixton and you see a multitude of different races, creeds and all sorts of other things. Overall it's a wonderful place."

For young Brixtonians themselves, precise geographical and official definitions are unimportant. They are more interested in the people, in the community, and in the area's reputation. The young people interviewed for this report, for example, all saw Brixton as unique and exciting. They spoke bitterly about the negative impressions of their home, and by association of its residents and community, which

they encounter continually in the mass media and in the attitudes of people who have had little or no contact with the area. They felt that these perceptions are inaccurate and undeserved, but also that the prejudices they engender seriously affect their lives and life-chances:

"When anybody mentions Brixton, it's as if the story is already told. They believe what the press says: they don't think that people who work for a decent living live here."

"I think Brixton has got a terrible image — once you mention Brixton to somebody they automatically think, like, bad boys, the robberies, the theft and all that sort of thing. I feel pretty cheesed off about it, do you know what I mean, because this is where I was brought up, this is where I live."

Brixton is renowned for its market, which is in fact three outdoor markets plus two indoor arcades. These markets sell goods ranging from fresh fruit to clothes and household utensils and attract shoppers from all over London. The Brixton Academy stages weekday indie concerts which attract large numbers of white youth into the area. On weekend nights The Fridge on Brixton Hill attracts a more mixed clientele of young ravers from outside the area in search of entertainment.

In common with many other inner city areas Brixton undoubtedly has a high crime rate. The young people attributed this partly to the work of outsiders — the non-Brixtonians attracted to the area. Their real concern, however, was that the over-emphasis on crime has been at the expense of recognising some of the more positive things going on in the area.

If I was going to be put off by what happened last night I would have given up long ago. We have to find ways of getting through to people who don't think they're being listened to. We don't want or need help from outsiders: we can and must do this ourselves. We have seen some very bad times in this area, but this last year we have seen the real hope that things may be different. We will pull through.

Kate Hoey MP, Evening Standard, 14 December 1995

Home and street

The youth experience a contradiction between the way they need to present themselves in home or at school and the way they have to portray themselves on the street. Pressured by family to conform to one set of behavioural patterns, and by peers to behave according to opposite and contradictory norms and values, they feel unable to behave naturally in either context, for they can conform wholly to the values of one world only at the expense of those of the other. The tension may be felt as between showing respect on the one hand and getting it on the other:

“At home you’re not yourself but you have to show respect. Out there with your peers, you can’t be yourself either, but you have to get respect.”

“Friends and family are your life at the end of the day. You always have friends, you’re going to be influenced by them. It’s not a matter of which is more important — at 16 you’re not too much thinking of what is more important.”

All of the men interviewed lived with their parents or a parent. None had started their own family. One was engaged. The Brixton Challenge records a figure of 27% of lone-parent households, 99% of which are female-headed. The majority of the sample lived with or had contact with both parents although the nature of contact with fathers varied, and one youth had no contact with his father. The home and family were important to them and they stated that they looked up to their parents. The notion of respect in the domestic sphere was linked to that of obedience where parents saw compliance with their wishes as proof of respect. Also it was linked to respect for the law:

“I look up to my dad. At the end of the day he’s never been stopped by the police, let alone arrested. I look up to him for that.”

Yet also parents — particularly mothers — are most valued when standing by and standing up for their offspring in official contexts when needed, helping them to avoid, or come out best in, confrontational situations. In the same way that they saw their parents as role models they also saw themselves as role models for younger siblings towards whom they felt a responsibility as good examples and as sources of support and guidance.

On the street, however, young men have to be tough, willing and able to fight when required, and to have access to the trappings of material success: expensive cars, mobile telephones, gold teeth and jewellery. For the youths the attraction is obvious: these are desirable consumer items and they want to obtain them as fast as possible. However, even where they do not seek to acquire material possessions pressure is exerted by peers to engage in opportunist and petty crime: burglaries, shoplifting, mugging and car theft. Often the young people engage in such activities in order to keep the respect of their friends.

School

School and the education system were regarded with ambivalence. Overall, the young men had enjoyed school as a place where they made lasting friendships and had enjoyed a childhood and adolescence in which transgressions would not follow them through life, and they had gained one or two qualifications along the way. Tribute was paid in general terms to teachers, and to the readiness of many teachers to listen and help.

“I came out with BTEC, so I have to say I learnt something. You know when they say school is the best days of your life, it’s true though, because it’s only when you hit eighteen that you realise that no matter how bad school was, it’s easier than what happens to you after.”

“I got one of the highest marks on the 11+ tests and my mum sent me to school in Pimlico because it has a good reputation. There was always a few people that you didn’t get on with but the majority of the teachers were good, I liked them, they helped you out if you needed help, you could stay behind and talk to them if you needed to, yeah, I liked the school.”

Although in retrospect the overall experience at school was largely enjoyed — “at the time you think nah, but afterwards you realise when you look back and think...., yes” — trouble at school was an all too common experience. The problems generally began while the young men were at secondary school but they observed that now black pupils are facing problems in school at a much earlier age also.

“Nowadays you can see it starting from as early as primary school. Before, when I went to primary school it didn’t matter to me. As little kids you get influenced by the older ones. They say you get a fresh start, but you don’t get a break. Your history stays.”

African Caribbean young people tend to have excellent school attendance records and truancy is not a problem for this group. But white teachers’ misinterpretation of young black male behaviour, dress and language often results in sanctions and these sometimes have long term effects if they contribute to the young men’s reputations as trouble makers. In particular problems and confrontations arise from the tendency to question requests and instructions. It’s not necessarily insolence, but a desire to be treated with respect, which means being given reasons and explanations, not just orders:

“At school I wasn’t exactly a good student. I used to argue certain things, not because I wanted to cause trouble, but because I wanted to get it straight in my head.”

"If you conform a certain way and didn't ask no questions you got on all right."

"As black kids we tend to ask why. I'm not just going to do it because you ask me to do it and I'm not stupid, I know that as a teacher you can't hit me."

Black professionals interviewed for this report were aware of such perspectives but were adamant that African Caribbean pupils need to recognise that sometimes they must simply do what they are told without question or argument, if only because this is what is required in the outside world. Black teachers were perceived as tending to punish black pupils more frequently and for lesser offences than their white colleagues but at the same time they were perceived to be more interested in the development of the black students. However, the belief was also expressed that in the context of a dual state education system, in which grant-maintained institutions co-exist alongside local-authority controlled schools, teachers working in the latter schools "only want to draw a salary". The system is deemed to be two-tiered, rendering institutions without grant-maintained status to be "ghetto schools" which are staffed only reluctantly and without commitment. Several of the young people felt their life chances had been blighted by the reputation and location of their school.

"When you fill in your applications and say you went to Dick Sheppard School and when you tick what ethnic group you are, you know you don't stand a chance. I've never understood equal opportunities. There isn't any."

The extreme result of trouble at school is of course permanent exclusion, which disproportionately affects male African Caribbean secondary school pupils. A third of the youths interviewed for this study had experienced permanent exclusion. Even more common were negative school experiences which included bad reports, detentions, suspensions or temporary exclusions, and labelling as troublemakers. These experiences had had a significant impact on their lives, hindering them from taking exams, limiting the qualifications with which they emerged from school, and providing them with tarnished school records by which others would later judge them.

Initiation of the conflict was often attributed to the inability of white teachers to comprehend what the youth deemed to be cultural norms, particularly their tendency to question instructions, their mode of dress and their ways of walking. There was also a general frustration at white teachers' lack of responsiveness to, and interest in, the needs of black students. Thus when teachers gave instructions or orders without any explanation or discussion, the alienated youths responded in ways which were negatively interpreted. From there the trouble escalated.

The youths felt that their own parents were unaware of the processes by which bad experiences within the educational system lead to continual confrontations and

eventually result in temporary or permanent exclusion. This had rendered them powerless to halt the downward slide, and open to manipulation by teachers intending to exclude the pupils.

"Teachers do a psychology on parents. They come in and they go 'your son has the potential to be one of the brightest kids in the class' and all of a sudden you see your parents switch on you!"

The youth felt outside of the processes by which they had been labelled, scapegoated and thrown out, without being allowed to put across their viewpoint. Often, for example, they felt that their offences had been exaggerated or invented. Two instances were given where an identifiable offence had been committed by a white youth but where his black friends had been expelled as well. After expulsion the white boys had gained immediate admission to other schools while the black ones took longer to resume their education.

As senior police officers blamed Wednesday night's violence in Brixton on "a small minority of thugs and criminals", a government-funded report warns that increasing numbers of young people will become marginalised and grow more disaffected unless new national strategies are developed and more funding is found for programmes to meet their needs.

Ministers are about to consider the unpublished report, which expresses particular concern about unemployment among young black people. It estimates that more than 100,000 young people, of all races, between 18 and 20 years old have withdrawn from education, training and employment. Many lacked either "competence, confidence or experience" or all three.

The report was funded by the Department for Education and Employment and undertaken on behalf of Training and Enterprise Councils, which administer government-funded training.

Mr Michael Howard, the home secretary, said yesterday that the disturbances in south London, which are thought to have caused more than £1m worth of damage, bore no comparison to inner-city riots in 1981 and 1985.

Sir Paul Condon, Metropolitan Police Commissioner, said: "I am convinced this was the work of a small minority bent on criminal acts. The majority of law-abiding citizens did not riot. This is a setback for Brixton after all the good work that has gone into better policing and a partnership with the local community. But it is only a setback."

Financial Times, 15 December 1995

Between school and street: the youth service

Youth centres provide a sanctuary for the young people which is halfway between the school and the street. A youth centre is streetwise in its provision, but is not the street. It provides examples of role models who operate inside the law but are not seen as living in a different world in the same way as, for example, are middle class white teachers. The youth workers are extremely conscious of their role in keeping the young people out of trouble, and at the same time are concerned to encourage them to fulfil their potential and to have a sense of community, identity and responsibility.

The youth centres, as non-judgemental and informal settings, put the young people in contact with workers with whom they can identify, but who also can demonstrate by example the rewards of keeping on the straight and narrow. Youth workers aim to develop the young people with whom they come into contact by giving them responsibilities within the centres, providing opportunities for educational development within an adult training environment, and facilitating sports and other recreational activities.

Support for the youth service is generally regarded as important across the board. The police, for example, recognise the youth provision as a key factor in keeping young people off the streets and out of trouble. Also the education service sees the youth workers as performing a valuable and much needed role in picking up young people who have fallen by the wayside. However, the local council has to bring the finances of this inner city borough into order and there has recently been a reduction in the number of weeks per year that the youth centres are permitted to open.

Consequently, the youth service feels itself to be particularly vulnerable in a climate of thinly spread economic resources and where no statutory obligation compels the local authority to provide support for the services. An attempt in 1990 to shut down the Dick Sheppard Youth Centre, which serves around 400 young people per week, provoked a large demonstration which was a graphic illustration of the strength of popular local feeling. For the people of Brixton and for the youths "this is not just a building" and they successfully reversed the decision.

Role models

Youth workers see their task as a constant battle: to keep the youth on the straight and narrow in the face of peer group pressure, and despite examples of easy success tempting them to live up to criminal stereotypes, and to motivate those who have already been criminalised, through no fault of their own, to stay away from crime in future. They are ever conscious of their own importance as role models but stress the need for more examples of successful black people who have acquired all the desirable consumer goods by legal means.

"The problem is, we haven't got many role models. Our role models, heroes, are not recognised. We want to be something. The people that are supposed to be our role models, like the ones you see in the media, you can see they're staying away from the culture."

The problem of role models 'staying away from the culture' manifests itself in two ways: inaccessibility and distancing. Role models become inaccessible by setting up obstacles which prevent young black people from contacting them, by not making time to talk to the youth, and by charging large fees for personal appearances.

"Once these people reach a certain stage they have agents and to get access you need to have appointments. It is difficult to get access if it is not high profile enough and they don't turn up unless they get paid £2,000."

The second issue, a perceived distancing from African Caribbean people and culture, was seen to be a deliberate attempt to get away from their roots and denying their blackness. On this point the then world heavyweight boxing champion was singled out for criticism:

"I saw a programme where he actually introduced his family and it was a whole heap of white people — do you expect me to see him and not say what's happening, Frank?"

The question of whether such public figures have to be role models is contentious. On one level there is a feeling that the youth themselves should be able to decide who they want to hold up as representatives and role models based on their reported actions and perceived values and link with the community. In this respect champion boxer Lennox Lewis, whose concern for excluded black boys has led to his starting a school for them, was highly praised.

"Lennox Lewis is picking up kids off the street. He's putting money into the community."

On another level it was acknowledged that all celebrities have access to platforms from which they can call attention to important issues and the young people feel that such access should be used. Additionally their black skin means that they will be held up as African Caribbean success stories and that therefore neither the individual personality nor the young people themselves are able to choose who can and cannot be a role model.

"They will become a role model whether they like it or not. They have no choice. A percentage of the kids will follow them whether they do bad or good. At the end of the day those in the public eye are being watched."

The young people were particularly concerned that their role model options are confined to the fields of music and sport.

“What happens to those people that work in the stock market, what happens to those people that work in the bank? It is those that have made it that we need to see. We need to set up structures in the community and in voluntary organisations where accountants and people like that are represented. We don’t need to see people just from a platform of sport, we need them in the business world. We need them to show us that it is possible.”

Gender and masculinity

Role models from the ranks of the black professional classes include African-Caribbean women. Such women were congratulated for their achievement by the youths who were generally proud of them. There is a general perception that a greater proportion of African Caribbean females than black men are represented within the ranks of the professional classes in Britain. The basis of these perceptions is usually observational and several theories have been advanced:

- Black women face less discrimination than males in the jobmarket and workplace.
- Women react to discrimination differently from men.
- Women become more responsible after child-birth, deciding to advance their careers to benefit both themselves and their families.
- African Caribbean women appear to be professionals in their manner of dress but most are in fact lower grade administrative staff.

These theories have yet to be tested against empirical research. In the meanwhile it is relevant to note that the term ‘Professional Black Women’ with its implication of success is a catchphrase and corollary to that of the ‘black male in crisis’ whom the system is failing. The young men articulated this relationship in terms of a reversal of gender role stereotypes:

“I get the feeling that a lot of black career women don’t support black men. A black man is out of a job and she turns round and says ‘I’m the one who brings the food into the house’. You get low self esteem and all of that.”

Gender roles are a particularly controversial area and whilst there is annoyance at the stereotypes whereby “young men are looked at as potential criminals and young women

are looked at as potential babymothers”, the young men noted an increase in the exhibition of violent and overtly sexual behaviour by younger black women. What is commonly designated masculine behaviour is frowned upon by the young men when exhibited by women .

“Unfortunately young women are beginning to behave as black men, because they feel they have to be tougher. Women are getting hassled by the police as well. It is like equality on the street.”

For the young men recognition of their manhood was essential. In fact they stated that the ability to command and be afforded simple respect was the only measure of masculinity that mattered and it would be fought for if it was not demonstrated.

“All you should need is respect from other people. It’s where you don’t get that respect when you need to do something. If you’re not going to give it to me the nice way then I’m going to get it any way I can. It’s not that I am ignorant, I’m a reasonable guy: it’s just street culture.”

Andy Morris, deputy chairman of Brixton City Challenge and one of those protesting, said the disturbances appeared to begin spontaneously. “There was a great deal of tension and anxiety about these people who have lost their lives through police brutality. There is a great deal of money been spent trying to do Brixton up but when you treat the people badly the buildings don’t remain standing for long.” Some of the worst violence took place on Brixton Road, where at least three shops had windows smashed and goods looted.

Mr Morris said more than £90 million had been spent regenerating Brixton in recent years but to no avail.

“What we have seen tonight is a great tragedy because the place was really up and coming but the young people around here have been neglected for so long it has got to the stage where they don’t have a care in the world — you have seen the result.”

The Guardian, 14 December 1995.

The police

Young black men feel criminalised by the media and by the police with whom they interact in their everyday lives. They become demoralised and develop a kind of paranoia whereby they assume a person standing or sitting next to them will perceive them to be a mugger or a rapist. Thus young black men often go out of their way to stand apart from someone — white or black — who might suspect or accuse them of wanting to commit a crime. The long term psychological effects of this have yet to be investigated.

“I used to go to school in Pimlico. Around that area there is a lot of old white people. I could be with two of my friends — not even a big group — and we’d walk past them and they’d be clutching their bags, and crossing the street expecting us to attack them or something, so they’re expecting us to rob them before they even know who we are or whatever.”

Such criminalisation is sometimes used to justify policing strategies which disproportionately target young African Caribbean males. Those interviewed were used to being stopped, searched and questioned about their possessions and movements. Experiences were similar: the youths’ mode of dress had been used to justify — where justification had been offered — their being stopped and sometimes detained.

The young men sometimes felt that this targeting was a result of police perception that it was a part of their job. Often they felt that officers abused their power, or that they manipulated notions of black criminality in order to attract more resources and to justify more confrontational styles of policing. All felt that personal inconvenience is an inevitable consequence of living where they live, being black, being young and being male. Most had evolved coping strategies in order to ensure that they do not provide justification for harsh or violent treatment or incarceration.

“Getting hassled by the police is part of life. If you’re black you look suspicious, if you’ve got a mobile phone you’re a drug dealer.”

Black police officers have met some of the youth and have managed to earn their respect through their unwillingness to gloss over the very real problems of racism within the police force. Whilst the young people often demonstrate initial hostility to black officers they are willing to hear them out. However, they are not rushing to join the force and they still see the police as a white, repressive body.

The police are only the first and most confrontational of the stages of the criminal justice system which convicts young black offenders earlier in their criminal career, for longer and for lesser offences than it does white youths. Thus proportionately more black men go to prison than their white counterparts. Encounters with the wider criminal

justice system were less widespread than those with the police — amongst the sample only one person had been incarcerated — but everybody knew people who regularly engaged in petty crime and had done time in prison. The members of the sample did not intend to end up in prison but did not think less of friends who had been incarcerated. They noted that this experience is no longer stigmatised, in fact it has come to be seen as an occupational hazard.

Rioting is not a solution to the long-term problems of black people — or anyone else. But it seems to be the only opportunity that people have got at the moment to express the way they are being treated as second-class citizens of this country. There is so much pent-up frustration and isolation. People round here are, for instance, still very angry about the comments made by London’s Police Commissioner, Paul Condon, linking black people to mugging.

As far as the police go, there is a lot of work to be done to re-educate them to understand that they are not a power to themselves: their actions must be accountable.

But anger at the police is coupled with deprivation and lack of opportunities. There are deep resentments about the lack of jobs and social and recreational facilities in Brixton. No one wants to see a repeat of 1981 or 1985 riots. And to prevent such a recurrence, this Government gave £37.5m as a grant to set up Brixton City Challenge in 1993, to regenerate the area. I am a director — one of four who represent community organisations — on the City Challenge. It had a grand founding vision:

“Our programme will place people and communities at the heart of the initiative. The investment of £189m will create around 1,650 new jobs and it is estimated that more than 2,500 local people will attain recognised qualifications. Communities will flourish in good homes, be healthy and safe, and participate in the changes that will take place. Young people will grow up in an attractive and prosperous environment and will build further prosperity in Brixton, Lambeth and London and further afield.”

That vision is no longer there. Despite the investment, local people have not benefited, because the local communities and existing small businesses — the people who live and work in Brixton — have never been at the heart of the regeneration process. It didn’t have to be like this ...

Mike Harry, a director of Brixton City Challenge, The Independent, 15 December 1995.

Business and employment

The youth believed that there are local business prejudices against Brixton residents, both as shoppers and as potential employees. There is an absence of large companies in the borough, the largest employers being the local authority and the Post Office, both of whom have shed staff in recent cost cutting exercises. The other major employers in Brixton are the stores which line the high street.

The young people complained that they had not been able to secure Saturday jobs in the area and that upon entering certain shops they were followed throughout the premises, suspected of intending to shoplift. The end result was a feeling of bitterness and anger at being criminalised and discriminated against in their home and community area.

“These people want to open shops in an area where they don’t want to have a relationship with the local people. The relationship’s not there so the respect cannot be there — you can’t respect a building.”

This lack of ‘respect for a building’ was displayed most starkly during the disturbances of December 1995. Although the youth did not condone, excuse or even explain the acts which took place it was widely acknowledged that the destruction had a pattern.

“The places burnt down were targeted. Those places wouldn’t give black youth a Saturday job. These are shops in Brixton where there’s black people but they only want to take black people’s money. They need to say that their shops are backing Brixton.”

Particular annoyance was expressed at larger stores in the area which depend on the custom of the local black population, but are seen to be unwilling to play a role in the community. There was also much criticism of Brixton City Challenge.

This week’s violence was not as intense as that of 1981 but it may be just as serious. For it points to the heart of the problem of Britain’s inner cities today. And it is not one of race but of economics.

... The real problem is the young people on the streets who are not engaged in society — through the schools, through the economy, or through the family — and whose disastrous pattern of alienation may only be part of a chain of violent reactions to which society is yet to find an answer.

The Independent, 15 December 1995.

“I am black. I was born here and I am English but white people do not want to accept us. As a young black male I am looked upon by many as a criminal every time I walk down the street.”

*Man aged 30, quoted in Financial Times,
15 December 1995*

From its launch in April 1993 the Challenge has been dogged by controversy. Questions about whether the Challenge will eventually lead to permanent jobs for the young people of the area are constantly being raised in the context of concern about the lack of development of an infrastructure to support initiatives after the end of the Challenge in 1998. The Challenge is not seen as offering employment solutions and has been highly criticised both by the wider community in Brixton and by the young people of the area who feel alienated from it, perceiving its emphasis to be on flashy projects to attract outsiders into the area at the expense of the needs of the people who live there.

The refurbishment of the Ritzy cinema is a case in point. The Challenge plans to promote Brixton as a centre for tourism by developing the central site area (the high street), improving its safety and appearance and attracting new businesses. The Ritzy is the flagship project and the first phase of the plan, but the young people of the area see it as too expensive and to be aimed at outsiders.

“Most of the things they’ve built up were of no use to the community. They could have built up houses with the money spent on the Ritzy. Change is happening in Brixton but unfortunately Brixtonians don’t benefit. White affluent people are coming into Brixton now, while people are getting rid of jobs in meetings in private.”

The City Challenge is aware of such criticisms and has attempted to stress that funds allocated to the improvement of local estates have led to their attracting government investment in projects requested by the youth themselves. However, such responses cannot mask the fact that the Challenge has failed to target the young people of the area, nor the fact that anger has been generated. The City Challenge’s claims of bringing together the police, local community, small business and government to address the problems of the area are not only perceived as being invalid by the youths, but the Challenge is seen as contributing to some of the problems, particularly that of silencing the people of Brixton while purporting to speak on their behalf.

4 Looking to the Future

— seven main themes

Seven main themes emerge from the stories and comments presented here on earlier pages:

1 Individual aspirations and energy

As individuals the youths were optimistic about their futures. Most were at college, some were engaged in casual work, one was unemployed but had the prospect of employment. All had clear ambitions about the career they wanted to pursue on finishing their studies. Although aware of the high rate of unemployment in the area they were not pessimistic about their own chances of obtaining work and were generally confident that attainment of the necessary qualifications would lead to their successful acquisition of desired jobs. Some wanted to be sports persons, some successful entrepreneurs. Most wanted to engage in youth work, and all want to be involved in the community. Those who had made mistakes knew where they had gone wrong. Everyone just wanted to be given a chance.

2 Role models

There was a clear need for convincing and self-chosen role models from professional people who operate in and maintain links with the community. There are already many such people, who make time to meet with young black people, listen to their views, validate their perceptions and experiences, give advice and counselling at critical times, and discuss work and career paths.

3 Partnership

A range of organisations and agencies have key roles to play in responding to the problems — it is a partnership or multi-agency approach which is required, for no single agency can do everything. There is no point blaming just one set of factors, or in expecting just one set of agencies to find the solutions. Key partners include families, parents and communities; schools; further and continuing education; youth work; agencies concerned with employment training and economic development; the police; the probation service; churches; and — not least — the street and youth culture itself.

4 Community action

Within a partnership approach, the role of the community itself is essential. The task is to promote the empowerment of the youth by helping them identify their options and make positive choices, and in this way take control of and responsibility for their own lives. At the same time there is need for advocacy and practical assistance and support at critical times, and for challenge of unfairness and injustices in the wider system.

5 Policing

This was a key area of concern of both the youths and the professionals. The young people interviewed displayed an attitude which was akin to resignation at having to expect and experience hassle from the police — being questioned as to their whereabouts, consenting to be searched for the possession of goods, and sometimes being subject to physical restraint and temporary incarceration. More generally, there was a lack of respect for the police service, and lack of confidence in its fairness.

6 Education

The young people themselves, as also the teachers, the police, the youth workers, the probation service and the local education authority are all concerned about the unacceptably high rate of exclusion of young black men from school. Also — a different but closely related point — there is deep concern about the extremely poor levels of educational attainment amongst black male school students, as measured by GCSE qualifications. The curriculum of schools, in its widest sense, needs to be more inclusive, responsive and sensitive, and teachers need sharper skills in avoiding and de-escalating unnecessary conflicts. Also, of course, youths themselves need training and instruction on how to manage and reduce conflicts.

7 Employment and training

Even though none of the youths had yet achieved their stated employment goal, no one was totally hopeless about their chances of gaining employment, despite the high levels of unemployment in the area, and despite difficulties in gaining Saturday jobs. However, there is clearly a need for economic development which will bring more jobs to the area and for training which is directly relevant to such opportunities. Programmes which do exist, for example those set up under the City Challenge and Single Regeneration Budget schemes, need to collect and publish ethnically-based statistics regarding their impact on the local area.

Please note:

The further practical implications of these seven themes are itemised in the checklist of action points in Appendix B, pages 21-22.

Appendix A

Statistical background

Introductory notes

The following tables are based on the 1991 Census, or else on Lambeth Council reports. In certain instances, however, we have used terminology which is slightly different from that which features in our sources. For example, we have preferred the term “African Caribbean” to “Black Caribbean”, and have combined the categories “Bangladeshi”, “Indian” and “Pakistani” (all three of which refer to extremely small proportions of the population of Lambeth) into the single category “South Asian”. Also, we have used the term “white” rather than “English, Scottish, Welsh”.

As mentioned in the main body of the report, the area of Lambeth known as Brixton does not have sharply defined geographical or administrative boundaries, and it includes parts of several different political wards. It is therefore not possible to derive precise statistics about the area from Census data. Similarly, the Council provides educational statistics for the borough as a whole, not for specific areas such as Brixton. It is important to note in this regard that statistics about education are for the borough’s maintained schools — they do not include the grant-maintained schools, nor pupils who live in Lambeth but go to school elsewhere, for example in Southwark, Wandsworth or Westminster.

Lambeth’s Young People — a selection of key facts

- In Lambeth, as in most other areas of Britain, black and ethnic minority communities are much younger than the white community. For example, almost two fifths of African Caribbean people in Lambeth (37.4 per cent) and almost a half of African people (46.5 per cent) are under 25. These proportions compare with just over a quarter of white people (26.8 per cent). Also, two thirds of those classified in the Census as “Other Black” are under 25.
- In the next 15 years, the number of young people aged 15-19 will double in the case of African communities, and increase by 58 per cent in the case of African Caribbean. The percentage rise for white people will be 28 per cent.
- Three fifths of all pupils currently in Lambeth schools are from black and ethnic minority communities.
- Recent assessments carried out in schools show that at the age of seven there are quite marked differences in attainment by ethnic background. This is the case for all three core subjects — English, Maths and Science — and for both girls and boys. African Caribbean boys have lower attainments than white and African boys. In the case of girls, there is little difference between African Caribbean and African girls, but members of both groups have lower attainments than white girls.
- At GCSE there are again marked differences, but their pattern is not the same as at the age of seven:
 - Girls of all backgrounds have higher attainments than boys — in most instances their mean performance score is close to twice that of boys.
 - African students, both girls and boys, have higher attainments than their white and African Caribbean contemporaries.
 - The attainment of African Caribbean girls is the same as that of white girls and higher than that of white boys.
 - The attainment of African Caribbean boys is very poor.
- African Caribbean boys are twice as likely to be excluded from school as other boys.
- At the age of 16 African Caribbean boys are far less likely than all other students to enter a sixth form or sixth form centre, and twice as likely as all others to become immediately unemployed.
- About half of all African Caribbean young men under the age of 25 are unemployed. This is more than twice the unemployment rate of their white counterparts.

The overall population

Table One is based on estimates made by the London Research Centre, using data in the 1991 Census. It shows that the black and ethnic minority population of Lambeth is currently 87,191 out of 261,531 altogether. This is almost exactly one third. The largest minority community is African Caribbean (13.4 per cent) and the second largest is African (8.2 per cent).

Table 1: Population of Lambeth by ethnicity, 1996

African Caribbean	35,101
African	21,662
Other Black	8,758
Chinese	3,101
South Asian	9,763
Other Asian	2,678
Other minorities	6,128
White	174,340
Total	261,531

Table Two is similarly based on estimates made by the London Research Centre. It shows that there are major differences between the various communities in terms of age. Just over a quarter of white people (26.8 per cent) are under 24, compared with almost two fifths of African Caribbean people (37.4 per cent) and almost a half of African people (46.5 per cent). Conversely, a higher proportion of white people are over 65 — 14 per cent compared with nine per cent of African Caribbean people and one per cent of Africans.

Table 2: Age structures of various communities, 1996 (percentages)

	Total	Caribbean	African	Other black	White
0-14	20	25	33	50	15
15-24	12	12	14	17	10
25-39	34	31	35	25	36
40-64	23	22	17	7	24
65+	11	9	1	1	14

The London Research Centre has estimated that currently 48 per cent of all people in the 15-19 age group in Lambeth are of ethnic minority or “not-white” background, as defined by the categories in the 1991 Census. In the year 2011, the proportion will have grown to 57 per cent. If the census categories Black Caribbean and Black Other are

combined, the percentage growth in Lambeth in the 15-19 age group over the next fifteen years will be over 75, compared with 28 per cent amongst white people. The raw figures are shown in Table Three.

Table 3: Projections from the 1991 census: the 15-19 age range

	1996	2011	Actual increase	% increase
African	1508	3007	1499	99
African Caribbean	2164	3413	1249	58
Other Black	796	1770	974	122
White	6538	8391	1853	28

School population

Lambeth Education Department’s Pupil Survey 1994 showed that just over 60 per cent of all children in the borough’s maintained schools are of ethnic minority origin, the largest group being African Caribbean (26 per cent), followed by 14 per cent African. Ten per cent are classified as “Other Black” and there are in addition much smaller but still significant numbers of pupils from Bangladeshi, Chinese, Greek, Indian, Pakistani, Turkish and Vietnamese communities. Pupils from these latter communities are currently concentrated mainly in primary schools.

In 1995 the Lambeth Pupil Survey found that 59 per cent of African Caribbean pupils were eligible for free school meals. This compared with 50 per cent of African pupils and 45 per cent of white.

Twenty-seven per cent of pupils speak between them 129 languages other than English. The largest group of bilingual pupils, 1002 (17 per cent of all bilingual pupils), speak Yoruba. Of other bilingual pupils, eight per cent speak Bengali, eight per cent Chinese and seven per cent Twi.

Table Four, based on information in the Pupil Survey 1994, shows the proportions of the overall school population by ethnicity.

Table 4: Ethnic origins of pupils in Lambeth maintained schools, 1994 (percentages)

African Caribbean	26.3
African	13.9
Other Black	9.8
South Asian	6.0
Other*	4.2
White**	38.5

* Chinese, Vietnamese, Turkish, Greek

** includes six per cent “White Other” groups

Exclusions

Lambeth Education Department recently reported a study of all permanent exclusions from its maintained schools in the sixth month period from September 1994 to March 1995. In this period there were 51 exclusions altogether, of which 43 involved boys. Thirty of the 51 pupils were of African Caribbean background. This was 60 per cent of all exclusions, and compares with the fact that only just over 26 per cent of Lambeth's school population are African Caribbean — so twice as many African Caribbean boys were excluded as would be expected from their actual numbers.

Of 46 exclusions which went to appeal, the decision to exclude was upheld by the school governors in the vast majority of cases. In six cases, the governors reinstated the pupil with the support of the education authority. In four cases, the governors upheld the decision to exclude while the LEA supported reinstatement of the pupils in the school.

Educational attainment at Keystage One

In September 1995 Lambeth Education Department provided a paper entitled Pupil Performance at Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4 to the Education Committee. This showed that at the age of seven there are quite marked differences in attainment by ethnic background. This is the case for all three core subjects — English, Maths and Science — and for both girls and boys. African Caribbean boys have lower attainments than white and African boys. In the case of girls, there is little difference between African Caribbean and African girls, but members of both groups have lower attainments than white girls.

It is reasonable to speculate that the differences are related to social class and material conditions of life: study of children whose parents or carers are on income support, and who are therefore eligible for free school meals, indicates that overall there is less deprivation amongst white families than amongst Caribbean. More precise data on social class and ethnicity in Lambeth are not available. Overall, just over a half of all pupils in Lambeth schools are eligible for free school meals. Studies in the borough show a statistically significant relationship between poverty, as thus measured, and low educational attainment.

Table 5: Key Stage One attainment in English and Mathematics for boys and girls by ethnicity in 1995, percentages

	White	African Caribbean	Other Black	
BOYS				
English				
Levels 3 & 4	21	19	14	15
Level 2	54	49	52	59
Level 1 and below	25	30	33	25
Maths				
Levels 3 & 4	17	17	9	16
Level 2	56	53	58	56
Level 1 and below	26	29	32	28
GIRLS				
English				
Levels 3 & 4	32	18	26	30
Level 2	51	57	55	52
Level 1 and below	17	24	19	18
Maths				
Level 3 & 4	16	8	7	14
Level 2	64	61	62	63
Level 1 and below	20	31	30	23

Table Five shows that, for example, 21 per cent of white boys were assessed as being at levels 3 or 4 (i.e. "above average") for English, compared with 19 per cent of African boys, 14 per cent of Caribbean and 15 per cent of Other Black. Overall the table shows higher levels of attainment for girls than boys in all ethnic groups, and higher levels of attainment amongst white pupils than most of their ethnic minority counterparts.

Attainment at GCSE level

A total of 328 girls in Lambeth maintained schools took at least one GCSE in 1994, compared with only 173 boys. Girls recorded a mean performance score of 24.8 compared with 12.7 for boys. Twenty-one per cent of girls achieved five or more passes at grades A* to C, compared with only 5.78 per cent of boys. Table Six shows that girls from all ethnic groups achieved higher mean performance scores than boys; that both girls and boys from African backgrounds had higher scores than their counterparts from other groups; that "Other Black" girls had considerably higher scores than "Other Black" boys; that there was no significant difference between African Caribbean girls and white girls; and that the scores of African Caribbean boys were particularly poor.

(“Performance scores” are calculated by assigning numerical values to the various grades. There are eight grades altogether. An individual candidate with eight passes at the highest possible level would have a performance score of 64. A candidate with five Grade C passes would have a score of 25. The mean performance score for a group of pupils is calculated by adding together all their individual scores and then dividing by the number of pupils in the group.)

Table 6: 1994 GCSE performance scores by ethnic group and gender

	Boys	Girls
African	16.8	28.2
African Caribbean	4.6	21.9
Other Black	8.2	28.7
White	11.9	21.0

Destinations post-16

In autumn 1995 Lambeth Education Careers Service compiled a paper surveying the destinations of Year 11 school leavers in the previous summer. There were 1,156 school leavers altogether, of whom 471 were male and 685 female. Table Seven shows the overall pattern for all male and female students, and also for all African Caribbean and all white. The table shows that, for example, 47 per cent of all male students and 45 per cent of all female moved from their school to a further education college. The most striking figures in the table are those relating to African Caribbean males: they were less likely than anyone else to enter a sixth form (either at a school or at a sixth form centre), and twice as likely as anyone else to become unemployed.

Table 7 : Destinations of school leavers in 1995, by gender and ethnicity, percentages

	All		African Caribbean		White	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
FE college	47	45	50	47	46	38
Sixth form	19	30	5	24	14	31
Training	8	4	11	7	10	4
Employment	5	3	3	3	7	6
Unemployment	9	7	19	9	10	10
Other/not known	11	10	11	10	11	11
(Raw figures	471	685	86	156	166	239)

Employment and unemployment

The 1991 Census showed levels of unemployment in each political ward and related these to ethnicity and age-range. Table Eight summarises the unemployment levels of young people in five of Lambeth’s wards. In three of the five wards the unemployment level among African Caribbean young men was twice that of white and in a fourth (Ferndale) it was almost three times as much. In all the wards about half of all African Caribbean young men were unemployed. The rates for young African men were not much better. In the case of women, the differentials between African Caribbean and white were smaller though still substantial — around a third of all young African Caribbean women were unemployed, compared with a fifth of young white women. In four of the five wards, the unemployment rate amongst young African women was almost a half.

Table 8: unemployment among people under 26 in five Lambeth wards, 1991, percentages

	African	African Caribbean	White
Men			
Angell	32	52	27
Ferndale	53	53	19
Herne Hill	53	47	26
Town Hall	61	52	27
Tulse Hill	40	50	26
Women			
Angell	46	34	26
Ferndale	34	34	13
Herne Hill	46	31	18
Town Hall	46	32	21
Tulse Hill	46	29	19

Sources

Lambeth Education Department Pupil Survey, 1994.
 London Borough of Lambeth: Pupil Performance at Key stage 1, 2, 3 and 4, September 1995.
 Lambeth Education Careers Service: First Destinations of Year 11 School Leavers from Lambeth Schools and Centres, 1995.
 London Borough of Lambeth: summary of permanent exclusions September, 1995.

Appendix B

Checklist of action points

Employment and training

We need to address unemployment amongst black and ethnic minority young people by:

- ensuring that black and ethnic minority students and trainees are fully involved in TEC programmes such as Network, Modern Apprenticeships, and Training for Work;
 - ensuring that black and ethnic minority students are fully involved in European Structural Fund programmes such as Pathways to Employment, Pathways to a Good Start in Working Life and Pathways to Integration;
 - checking that urban regeneration projects, for example those which are funded under the Single Regeneration Budget or City Challenge, really do benefit local people in inner city areas by creating real employment opportunities and that they are recognised and welcomed in local areas as contributing positively to the material conditions and quality of life;
 - ensuring that black and ethnic minority students (and, as appropriate, black and ethnic minority teachers) are fully involved in education business partnerships (EBPs);
 - taking a range of positive action measures to ensure that having completed their training, black and ethnic minority students and trainees are as likely as their white counterparts to gain employment;
 - ensuring that race equality issues and concerns are fully integrated into the Investors in People programme and into — for example — London Pride programmes and projects;
 - monitoring and analysing national, regional and local unemployment trends by ethnicity, and publishing the results;
 - providing more support from TECs for black and ethnic minority business, including consultancy and skills training.
- modifications in primary-secondary transfer schemes and processes, to decrease the likelihood of disaffection starting soon after a pupil's arrival at secondary school;
 - greater sensitivity in the curriculum, in its widest sense, to the experiences and perceptions of black and ethnic minority pupils and students, and of their families and communities;
 - systematic assistance for pupils to equip them with skills in avoiding or de-escalating unnecessary confrontations with teachers;
 - mentoring and role-model schemes which focus on the young people most at risk rather than, as often happens, on those who are heading for A levels and higher education;
 - counselling, advocacy, mediation and parental support schemes which are community-based, or run in partnership between school and community;
 - school-based staff development programmes concerned with conflict management and staff-student encounters and relationships, and with the skills which staff need to avoid or de-escalate unnecessary confrontations;
 - more use of compact schemes, involving targets and agreements negotiated between (a) schools (b) parents or carers and (c) the pupils or students themselves.

Education

There need to be improvements in the achievements and motivation of potentially or actually disaffected pupils and students. Some or all of the following measures are required:

- systematic measures to improve literacy skills, including writing as well as reading, in early childhood and primary education;
- youth centres, churches and voluntary organisations should develop counselling, advocacy and parental support schemes which are community-based, or run in partnership between school and community;
 - parental support schemes should involve informal home-based programmes for small groups using videos, magazines and books;
 - a national network or association of parents' groups should be set up.

Families and communities

Youth and community services have been decimated in recent years. One consequence amongst many is that young people have fewer role models, and less contact with elders who can provide support, counselling and practical assistance at critical times. If young people are to be “turned round” before it is too late, they need practical assistance at times of stress and crisis, and probably also advocacy and expert representation in relation to their school, the police and courts. The following measures, amongst many others, are required:

- youth centres, churches and voluntary organisations should develop counselling, advocacy and parental support schemes which are community-based, or run in partnership between school and community;
- parental support schemes should involve informal home-based programmes for small groups using videos, magazines and books;
- a national network or association of parents' groups should be set up.

Policing

There needs to be increased trust and confidence amongst the public, and therefore increases in the detection and reduction of crime, by:

- less use of speculative stop-and-search procedures;
- greater transparency and openness to scrutiny, for example through lay visitors to police stations and a continuous lay presence in police stations where there is most local distrust;
- structures of accountability, both at local levels and London-wide;
- more use of advisory committees at local and London-wide levels, leading to greater awareness of community needs and perceptions;
- independent procedures and structures for investigating complaints;
- in cases where someone dies in custody, a procedure whereby officers associated with the incident are automatically suspended without prejudice and in accordance with norms of natural justice;
- training in police-public encounters and confrontations, particularly where there is an inter-ethnic component — “police have to be respectful to get respect”;
- more opportunities for officers to meet and interact with young people in non-confrontational situations;
- renewed efforts to recruit — and, having recruited them, to retain — black and ethnic minority officers and special constables, and regular publication of relevant statistics;
- further acknowledgement of the need for rapid and vigorous responses to reports of racist attacks and harassment.

Data collection and research

At present we are working too much with impressions and anecdotal evidence. The actual situation may be either better or worse than we imagine. It would be valuable in this connection:

- to collect, analyse and publish ethnically-based data on the individuals, households and voluntary organisations which actually benefit, both directly and indirectly, from projects funded under the Single Regeneration Budget: for example, in terms of materially better employment opportunities, an improved and more healthy physical environment, improved local infrastructure, and measurably less crime;
- to examine the exact position regarding exclusions from schools — including temporary exclusions as well as those which are permanent (“expulsions”), and voluntary and covert (“under-the-counter”) exclusions as well as those which are official — and to establish whether indeed it is the case, as has been

suggested, that African Caribbean boys are about six times more likely to be excluded from school than others;

- to examine the “careers” of disaffected and deviant pupils and students in schools, and their careers as delinquents and young criminals — what are the principal crises and transition points in their lives? how can they be helped, at critical moments, to make different choices and decisions? how can adults avoid pushing them, at times of stress and confrontation, towards deviant patterns?
- to examine young people’s involvement in street crime, for example their motivation — is it to feed a drugs habit? how strong are peer group and street subculture pressures? to what extent are younger boys pressurised by older?

And in particular:

- to identify examples of good practice in smallish-scale settings, for example individual schools, police stations, youth clubs, community groups, and to describe these attractively so that they can be replicated elsewhere.

Appendix C

“But if...” : Michael’s story

Ages 5 — 8

Some of Michael’s teachers expected him to be a troublemaker. He was African Caribbean, and had not the media and history books told them, or subtly suggested to them, that black people are troublemakers? Not that they were consciously aware that they had been affected by media imagery, or by centuries of negative stereotypes. They criticised and rebuked Michael more than was necessary, they tried to keep him under tight control.

But if more of Michael’s teachers had resisted media imagery and colonial history, both as individuals and as a staffroom. If more of them had seen and treated Michael as an individual. If they had taken a sympathetic interest in who he was, and in his family and community stories, and in the future ahead of him. If they had been able to tell him and show him that they had high hopes for him...

Ages 8 — 12

It slowly became clear to Michael, though he couldn’t have voiced it like this, that he had a choice. Either he could accept the teachers’ valuations of himself, as an object to be feared and controlled, or — with a sense of mounting injustice — he could assert himself. He chose the latter. To begin with, his assertiveness took the form of ignoring instructions, or complying with them only slowly. Later, it took the form of questioning, challenging, disobeying. The teachers’ expectations, as they saw the matter, were confirmed: indeed, Michael was an aggressive troublemaker, someone to be kept under tight control if at all possible.

One result of these tensions and conflicts was that Michael became increasingly less interested in the whole business of writing. Since no one was interested in what he said or thought, why should he bother to write? Michael was not only a troublemaker, his teachers could see, but not at all academic either.

But if more of the teachers had looked at themselves and their own attitudes and ways of interacting with pupils. If they had given Michael a sense that they respected him and had high expectations of him. If the school had provided a curriculum which recognised and included Michael’s background, history and future as a black person in white society. If they had been able to help Michael develop skills in avoiding destructive conflicts with themselves. If Michael’s parents and family friends had realised what was happening, and had spoken up for him. If a friendly adult had helped him to identify the extent to which he was himself contributing to his problems, and could himself do something to solve them...

Ages 12 — 15

To begin with, at secondary school, Michael was happy. He felt that whatever had been wrong at primary school was now behind him. But he was badly let down, alas, by his poor writing skills, and embarrassed about them. He avoided writing as much as he could. He began to suspect — though still he could not have voiced this — that the school didn’t care about him, for it didn’t recognise and include him. He did, however, feel recognition, inclusion and respect from his friends. It was his friends who made coming to school each day worthwhile. Unfortunately, his friends were every bit as disenchanted with the official school system as he was himself. They too couldn’t write. They too were seen as troublemakers. They too questioned, challenged, didn’t take kindly to being given instructions and orders. They too, like Michael, were influenced by boys a few years older than themselves, anti-school, anti-authority.

Troubles and tensions mounted. Being thrown out of lessons. Detentions. Letters from the school to Michael’s home. Formal warnings. Various short-term exclusions. Eventually, Michael was permanently excluded from his school.

But if there had been sympathetic adults around, both at school and at a youth club or centre, who could have seen at an early stage what was happening, and could have worked with Michael and his friends — mediating in conflicts, advocating and defending where necessary, and challenging them to think about and change their own behaviour and attitudes. If the primary/secondary transfer arrangements had more consciously anticipated the kinds of problem which arose. If Michael had received more focused and systematic assistance for his writing, as distinct from being given remedial reading. If the curriculum had more sensitively supported him in his sense of identity, had helped him to make sense of who he was and what was happening to him...

Ages 15 — 18

Michael did not settle at his new secondary school. He was entered for a full range of GCSEs, but missed several of the exams. He left school with minimal, indeed worthless, qualifications. No chance of employment. He wasn’t interested in training, since so far as he could see there weren’t any jobs available any way. Drifted, along with his friends, into crime. Frequently stopped by the police. Eventually, convictions and detention. A lifetime of crime and prison stretched before him, and before the society which would be paying for it all.

But if ...

“But if...” was compiled by the Runnymede Trust for group discussions. It draws in part on insights and reflections in reports by the Lambeth Raising Achievement Project, 1992-1995.