informed and up-to-date. This, however, presupposes availability and accessibility of information.

3. Capacity
Encapsulated within ‘accessibility’ is the issue of capacity. Capacity in this context is about know-how – increasingly, technical know-how. Efficient use of information, particularly information that is processed through new technologies, requires levels of training commensurate to the task. Contrary to what Internet Service Providers suggest, surfing the net successfully takes time to learn.

There is an issue of human capital investment in this for voluntary organisations. Once the hurdle of funding to purchase and support the use of quality hardware and software has been overcome, organisations are often faced with technologically under-trained staff and are then unable to utilise the systems to their full potential.

In this situation, then, the increasing use of new technologies for information provision may be understood as another form of exclusion for voluntary organisations from a meaningful participation in those developing, and increasingly important, emerging debates and opportunities for engagement.

4. Challenging the ‘Satisfied’
The research found that 37% of respondents, from both mainstream and ethnic minority organisations, felt that they did not require information on ethnic minority issues to support their work. While this is a disconcerting finding in itself, it also implies on the one hand the insufficient extent to which ethnic minority issues have penetrated mainstream areas of policy and research, and on the other the lack of awareness that exists among many ethnic minority organisations themselves of the constantly emerging debates and issues.

Whether this is directly attributable to poor or ineffective dissemination of information to voluntary organisations and/or related to accessibility (including resources, knowledge and capacity) is difficult to say. However, it is reasonable to postulate that greater and wider dissemination of information, through increased accessibility of information sources, would at last begin to challenge these ‘satisfied’ organisations to reassess the importance to their work of up-to-date information on ethnic minority issues.

‘Information Gateway’
To bridge the divide between information users and information sources and suppliers, and to address the issues of accessibility, knowledge, capacity and dissemination, the development and establishment of an ‘Information Gateway’ could offer an effective and efficient strategy.

An Information Gateway would perform a number of useful functions:

1. Information Network. There are many organisations that already act as information providers. An Information Gateway would not attempt to duplicate these services, but rather consolidate them. To accomplish this an Information Gateway would create and manage a comprehensive database of information providers and sources. This would permit an ‘information network’ to be established, one that would be accessible and useful to both information users and providers. In essence, an Information Gateway would act as a filtering system to identify information providers and monitor the kinds of information services/sources available. This would also offer a sound foundation for the development of an active network of information providers.

2. One-Stop Information Shop. An Information Gateway would offer voluntary organisations a first point of contact to help them on their way. A comprehensive database of information providers and sources, as noted above, would be indispensable in directing voluntary organisations to the most appropriate providers or sources to meet their information needs. With targeted advertising of one source of information, such as an Information Gateway, more and more organisations would hear about it and hence be able to use the service and gain access to the right information source. It might be thought of as a living or interactive directory source.

3. Synthesis and Distillation. In addition to establishing an information network and acting as an interactive directory service, a key contribution of an Information Gateway could be to provide essential information in a user-friendly format. Rather than undertake new research, it could act as a compiler of abstracts of key information pieces from a wide array of organisations, agencies and sources. Disseminating information in such a format would enable voluntary organisations faced by time and other resource constraints to keep up-to-date and informed on the continuously developing and changing debates relating to ethnic minority issues.

Establishing an Information Gateway could offer the capacity for provision of a truly comprehensive and effective information service – not just for London but nationwide.

The Full Report provides a detailed account of the research findings. It documents the stated information needs of voluntary sector organisations, and what is currently available from some of the key information providers to this sector. It also identifies gaps that exist in information provision and looks at ways in which these can be addressed by providing recommendations for future action. Copies of the full report will be available from the middle of November 1999.

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website: www.fhit.org/runnymede

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Runnymede Chair: Samir Shah
Chief Executive: Sukhvinder Kaur Stubbs
The Information Needs of London’s Voluntary Sector: Ethnic Minority Issues

Introduction
Mapping the information needs of London's Voluntary Sector is a unique project that focuses specifically on the ethnic minority related information this sector requires. It has gathered and analysed data from 151 voluntary organisations – both mainstream and those that work mainly with or for ethnic minority groups across London.

In light of the rapid growth of the voluntary sector and the current Government's recognition of its value, together with the Government's expressed eagerness to work with this sector, The Runnymede Trust has researched the information requirements of the voluntary sector with a threefold purpose:

- To investigate the sector's information needs with regard to ethnic minority issues;
- To ascertain the information provision currently available in and for this sector;
- To identify any gaps that may exist and provide recommendations for bridging them.

In order to meet these aims, the research was constructed in two phases:

Phase 1. A sample of 500 organisations were asked to complete questionnaires in order to gather data. In all, 151 organisations responded to the questionnaire.

Phase 2. Eight key information providers of material on ethnic minority issues were consulted to identify current provision. We also researched the Internet for websites dedicated to ethnic minority issues.

In addition, the research was supported by an Advisory Panel of experts in information provision.

Key Findings
1. Demand for Information on Ethnic Minority Issues
Highlighting the demand for information on ethnic minority issues from London’s voluntary sector, the research findings demonstrate that 63% of the respondents to our survey stated that their organisation has required such information during the preceding 12 months (Figure 1). Further demand for this information was expressed throughout the responses given by voluntary groups.

The largest single category of respondents (36%) stated that they need this information at least once a week (Figure 2). This breaks down into: 18% requiring the information once a week; 15% two to three times a week; and 3% needing daily access.

Most of the respondents cited Current Legislation (70%), Current Statistics (61%), Education (60%) and Health (59%) as the categories under which they most frequently require information on ethnic minority issues. Their need is for material in which ‘race’ perspectives on social policy are specifically addressed or from which such policy perspectives can be further researched.

Advisory Panel - Participating Organisations
- Centre for Race and Ethnic Relations
- City Parochial Foundation
- Commission for Racial Equality
- Farndon House Information Trust
- London Borough Grants Unit
- London Research Centre
- National Council for Voluntary Organisations
- SIA
- The Baring Foundation
- The British Library
- The National Lottery Charities Board (London)
- The 1990 Trust
- The Staples Trust

Figure 1. Number of respondents requiring information on ethnic minority issues.

Need for information on ethnic minority issues
Figure 2. Frequency with which respondents required information on ethnic minority issues.

- Blank: 2.1%
- Other: 3.2%
- Once a year: 4.2%
- 2-3 times a year: 25.3%
- Once a month: 13.7%
- At least once a week: 30%

2. Sources of Information (for Material addressing 'Race' Perspectives on Social Policy Issues)

(a) Categories of information needed

Designed to extract data on the categories of information needed by organisations within this sector, the questionnaire examined the sources voluntary organisations access in order to gather their information on ethnic minority issues. Responses indicate that Government Agencies as well as Newsletters & Bulletins are accessed more than any other source by the majority of respondents in order to gather this information. These sources were followed closely by Published Books & Reports.

(b) Frequency of consultation

As well as identifying the sources they access respondents were asked to specify how frequently they consult each source in order to gather information on ethnic minority issues. The findings demonstrate that not only is there demand for information on ethnic minority issues, but that this information is required on a regular basis, with the Press & Media and in-house Research categories being accessed most regularly, i.e. daily. Government Agencies and Newsletters & Bulletins are consulted mainly on a monthly basis.

(c) Traditional or electronic media

The research shows that respondents are likely to access the more traditional sources for information on ethnic minority issues. These sources are categorised as: Newsletters & Bulletins, Published Books & Reports, Factsheets, Briefing Papers and Press & Media (i.e. newspapers).

Linked with the preference for more traditional forms of information the survey finds that, despite the increase in its popularity and use in recent years, the Internet is the source least often accessed by organisations to gather information on ethnic minority issues. Furthermore, it is mainstream organisations that are more likely to use this source than are those working mainly with or for ethnic minority communities.

3. Quality of the Information on Ethnic Minority Issues

Most respondents gave their own work, i.e. In-house Research, a higher rating for quality of information than any other source – that is they rated their own source as 'excellent'. The category of Government Agencies was given the lowest rating – ‘poor’. This is an interesting response given that Government Agencies were accessed more than any other source.

Once again, respondents expressed a preference for the traditional forms of information sources, as they described the quality of the information from Published Books & Reports and Journals as 'good'.

As well as rating the quality of the information they receive from the sources outlined in the survey, the majority of respondents stated that there is 'a lack of information' or 'a lack of relevant information' on ethnic minority issues from these sources.

In addition, the majority (66%) of respondents expressed the opinion that a way to improve the information provision from these sources would be quite simply to provide more information on social policy issues with a race perspective; also more information on specific subject areas and their potential or actual impact on ethnic minority communities.

4. Use of Libraries

The survey asked organisations to give details of both the Public Libraries and the Specialist Libraries they access for information on ethnic minority issues. More than half (54%) of respondents who require this information on access public libraries to obtain it. However, only 17% of these respondents stated that they are able to obtain enough relevant information from this source.

Fewer respondents stated that they use specialist libraries (36%), compared with public libraries, in order to access information. Furthermore, where specialist libraries are used, they are accessed less frequently than public libraries. Nevertheless, more respondents felt able to access information on ethnic minority issues from specialist libraries than from public libraries.

Respondents who indicated that they do need information on ethnic minority issues, but do not access specialist libraries for it, were asked to explain why they do not utilise this source. The majority of these respondents stated that they were actually unaware of the existence of these specialist libraries.

Contact details of the key information sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>General info</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Library</td>
<td>0171 412 7000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96 Euston Road</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London NW1 2DB</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre for Race and Ethnic Relations</td>
<td>01203 523523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Warwick Arts Building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coventry CV4 7AL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission for Racial Equality</td>
<td>0171 828 7000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliot House</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12 Allington Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London SW1E 5EH</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonwealth Institute</td>
<td>0171 603 4500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>230 Kensington High Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London W8 6NQ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institute of Race Relations</td>
<td>0171 837 0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-6 Leake Street</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kings Cross Road</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London WC1X 9HS</td>
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<tr>
<td>London Research Centre</td>
<td>0171 787 5555</td>
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<tr>
<td>81 BlackPrince Road</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>London SE1 7SZ</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>London Voluntary Services Council</td>
<td>0171 700 8121</td>
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<tr>
<td>356 Holloway Road</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>London N7 6PA</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The 1990 Trust</td>
<td>0171 717 1515</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Bank Technopark</td>
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<tr>
<td>90 London Road</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>London SE1 6LN</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Runnymede Trust*</td>
<td>0171 600 9696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>133 Aldersgate Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London EC1A 4JA</td>
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</table>

* The Runnymede Trust was also identified as a key information provider by our own provision in the research. Runnymede's contact details are, however, respondents' perceptions.
The other main reason given for not accessing information from specialist libraries was that respondents felt that their organisation lacked the time and resources to go out and retrieve material from this source.

5. Information Providers

The research identified eight information organisations as key providers of material offering race perspectives on social policy (listed below). The purpose of this phase of the research was not to evaluate these organisations but rather to examine the quantity, type and accessibility of the information they provide. The eight information providers were then interviewed for details of their key activities and services.

In order to get a general overview of the sort of information on ethnic minority issues that is available on the Internet the research also looked at some websites that are dedicated to ethnic minority issues. From the interviews conducted with the eight information providers and the websites examined the research noted that these key organisations, both individually and as a whole, provide a broad range of information on ethnic minority issues, although the type of information available varies from organisation to organisation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Supply and Demand

There is strong demand for information on ethnic minority issues from voluntary sector organisations in London. This is true for both mainstream and ethnic minority organisations. Moreover, this demand is not just for any kind of information, but for more and better quality of information.

There is also a relatively comprehensive supply of information. Information on ethnic minority issues can be obtained from a wide array of sources and suppliers. There are specialist libraries and there are several organisations and/or agencies that focus on information provision as part of their main activities.

Having looked at some key information providers in London the research established that, as a whole, they do in fact offer relatively comprehensive information services. Information is also available through the Internet, through key information providers, and through other organisations able to post their own work on the web for public consumption.

Therefore, the problem is neither a lack of demand for information nor a lack of potential sources or suppliers of information, but has more to do with accessibility and capacity.

2. Accessibility

'Accessibility' is examined here in terms of both resources and the knowledge base.

(a) Resources

First, voluntary sector organisations are under-resourced, both in terms of funding and staffing. While many information sources may exist, the capacity of organisations to access them is limited. In the case of specialist libraries, for instance, time constraints on voluntary sector staff mean that they cannot fit a visit to a library into their already full timetables. The added value that using the services of specialist libraries might bring to an organisation's day-to-day work is not justified by the cost of staff time in getting there, searching for and bringing back that information. In addition, the services of many specialist libraries are available only on a membership basis, often involving an extra cost to organisations which they are not able to afford or, again, to justify.

In the case of the Internet, a similar picture arises. The time investment for creative use of the Internet does not necessarily add value to the day-to-day work of voluntary organisations. That the quality of information available on the Internet was rated extremely low is a telling observation. Voluntary organisations do not have time to sift through the enormous amount of superfluous information one finds on the Internet. In addition to the time issues, the financial cost of new technologies is a deterrent to utilisation. In order to use the Internet and other new technologies effectively and efficiently, there is a need for substantial capital investment, an option not readily available to poorly resourced organisations.

(b) Knowledge

Second, the research also showed that information sources such as specialist libraries and the Internet are inaccessible to many, not only due to time and/or financial constraints as noted above, but through a general lack of awareness of their existence. This potentially reflects the crisis in under-resourcing noted above. For example, organisations that are unable to commit staff and time to networking that builds up key contacts, increases knowledge of the broader field and encourages partnership activities also lose out on the benefit of increased tacit organisational knowledge to support the work of staff that such activities bring.

Lack of access to information is a critical issue for the voluntary sector in London. If voluntary organisations are to continue to provide their invaluable services, and if they are to engage seriously in participating in the new opportunities that may arise from the Government's new Compact, then they need to be