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# Cultural diversity – responding to the learning needs of older people from black and minority ethnic communities



Briefing paper to promote the learning needs of older people from black and minority ethnic communities to education practitioners, policy makers, managers and funders, and to older people themselves.

This is the thirty-fifth in a series of briefing sheets which aim to provide an introduction to a variety of lifelong learning issues

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- 34. Learning and health
- 33. Fees charged to part-time adult students 2001-2002
- 32. Older people and learning – key statistics
- 31. Financial literacy and older people
- 30. Meeting the needs of older learners
- 29. The learning needs of young adults with mental health difficulties
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- 23. Fees charged to part-time adult students 2000-2001
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## Why this briefing sheet

The learning needs of all adults are based on their own life course development and experience, with its achievements, failures, frustrations, heartaches and fond moments. In delivering adult learning there is a tendency to offer programmes developed over time for the majority of the population or for those who have tended to present themselves as willing to participate in what we have to offer

If we wish to encourage more adults to participate in learning there has to be a greater awareness of the barriers to learning experienced by different groups and determined effort to overcome those barriers, including an acknowledgement that talking with potential learners over their needs, dreams, fears and aspirations is a vital element of this.

For older people the barriers are well researched - cost, irrelevance, inaccessibility, unsuitable learning environments, too much emphasis on vocational and accredited learning, narrow curriculum range and not enough faith in one's own ability to engage. For older people from different communities with different cultural, language and faith backgrounds there are other barriers – language, culture, faith and gender insensitivity, inappropriate curriculum.

This briefing paper touches on different approaches that have been developed in recent years and reports on NIACE's current work. It also explores what areas of work could and should be developed and provides some contacts and sources for those seeking more information.

## Demography

There is little statistical data indicating the level of involvement of older people from black and minority ethnic communities in any form of

learning. Crude correlations only can be drawn from demographic and education participation data that does not necessarily have common age bands and methodology. The proportions of older people from black and minority ethnic communities will continue to rise significantly over the next 20 years – more than the white population.

The 2001 census shows that for the first time there are more people in the United Kingdom over age 60 than there are children (under age 16).  
[www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/demographic\\_uk.asp](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/demographic_uk.asp))

In 2002 2.6% of the population of state pension age and above were from ethnic minority communities. (Department for Work and Pensions. (2002). *Older people : statistical information booklet - Spring 2002*. Sheffield: Department for Work and Pensions. Available to download from: [www.agepositive.gov.uk](http://www.agepositive.gov.uk))

The Annual Local Area Labour Force Survey for 2001/2 shows that 16% of the white population of the United Kingdom is over the age of 65 compared to 16.8% in the 1991 census (1991 Census Statistical paper No 2, University of Warwick Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, February 1993).

In 2001/2, of the Indian population 6% were over age 65 (1991 - 4.1%); Pakistani 4% (1991 - 1.7%); Bangladeshi 35% (1991 - 1.2%); Black Caribbean 9% (1991 - 5.7%); and Chinese 5% (1991 - 3%). (National Statistics. (2002). *Annual local area labour force survey 2001-02*. Available to download from [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk))

The 2001 National Adult Learning Survey (DfES) indicated that 49% of those surveyed age 60–69 reported some learning (25% of those age 75+). The same survey indicated that learning among most minority ethnic communities was greater than in white communities (all respondents under age 70!) – of those reporting ‘any learning’ 76% were white adults; 52% Asian; 81% Black communities and 90% Chinese and others. (Department for Education and Skills. (2001). *National Adult Learning Survey 2001*. Nottingham: DfES. ISBN 184185 652 5. Available to download from [www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk))

## Diverse approaches for diverse needs

In attempting to create relevant provision it is important to know the cultural diversity of your locality. Not only will there be a wide range of different nationalities but they will include recent asylum seekers, refugees and others of migrant status as well as people who settled in the United Kingdom much earlier in their lives either as displaced persons or for economic reasons. There will also be many 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations of older people who still retain strong links with their ‘spiritual’ homes. In some parts of the country the settlement was over two hundred years ago. You will need to understand how family structures operate and where and how care and support is provided. (Assumptions are often made about how different minority communities care for their elders that results in them not being considered for statutory and other support).

For many older people language will be an issue and you will need to consider issues of interpretation and translation. The provision of English for speakers of other languages might be considered, targeting older people. Creating activities in mother tongues may also be appropriate – particularly around the preservation and validation of roots and culture - music, dance and poetry. If you are considering translating materials into mother tongues you need to make yourself aware of the levels of literacy among the communities you are targeting.

### How to do it?

**Know your community.** What is the age and ethnicity profile of your community? Where are the diverse groups located? What community organisations exist and what do they do?

**Start where people are at!** Work with the community, in the community. Build up trust, develop partnerships, negotiate, determine need and respond. Relating to people ‘where they are at’ can be a very affirming process for them and an effective beginning to their learning journey.

**Build on experience of life and allow everyone to value it.** The Windrush celebrations, remembering the first settlers from the Caribbean in the late 1940’s, provided, for many older people, the first opportunity to have their working and family lives validated. It was an affirming

process which helped build bridges between generations and cultures.

**Be informed and sensitive!** – to cultural, religious and gender issues.

**Think carefully about venues.** Not everyone has experience of British schools systems – good or not so good. What is available? Where will people feel comfortable? Do you go to them or do they come to you?

**Consider language needs?** Will the activity be in English? Will you require interpretation facilities? Will you use a mother tongue facilitator or teacher? Do you wish to record any product of the activities in native language?

**Seek different ways to celebrate and express experience, wisdom and maturity.** Use dance, theatre, music, poetry, creative writing, video and sound tapes, art and crafts as appropriate.

### Some examples

#### **Liverpool City Council, Education and Lifelong Learning Service**

The service works closely with community and voluntary organisations to negotiate learning programmes with elders in the Chinese, Somali and Nigerian communities. Its curriculum includes English as Second language (ESOL), ICT, community crafts, healthy diet, cookery, keep fit, basic skills in Somali, Arabic, Quoranic and Somali, and language skills in Cantonese, Mandarin and Arabic.

Engaging with these communities is of high importance and a part of the Service's mission to support lifelong learning in a range of ways and locations. The LEA wishes to preserve culture, celebrate diversity and use the voices of people to promote the work. There is regular consultation and negotiation about learning with black and minority ethnic groups. Sustaining resources is of key importance to help to deliver and embed this work.

#### **Centre for Employment and Enterprise Development (CEED), Bristol**

The service offers a twice weekly drop-in facility, as well as ICT courses and a sewing course. There are plans to set up a story telling course in order to record local history. This might lead to an exhibition recording individual histories of minority people (mainly African Caribbean and Somali) and their settlement in St Paul's, Bristol.

#### **Bensham Grove Community Education Centre, Gateshead**

Older people from black and minority ethnic communities are represented on the centre's management committee. Adult education with minority ethnic groups in the centre features high on their list of priorities and is an integral part of their curriculum development plan.

#### **Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, Basic Skills Team**

Work is currently being undertaken to encourage participation and raise basic skills standards in older people through joint provision between local authority, colleges and community in relation to healthy living initiatives.

Recent research undertaken with regard to housing and related needs of the black and minority ethnic communities targeted older people (aged 59+). The response was disappointing.

Involving older people from black and minority communities is seen as of vital importance within Tameside. Joined up provision means that providers can respond to need in the community.

#### **Leicester City Council, Adult Education College**

Of the 15 'LiveAge' innovatory projects targeted at those age 55+, three involved black and minority ethnic learners in community based learning activities: African Caribbean community (art and ICT); Sikh community (audio cassette/reminiscence project).

**The 'BE ME' Project in Hammersmith and Fulham Nubian Life Resource Centre**

Nubian Life Resource Centre launched the 'BE ME' Project in June 2001 in partnership with The Asian Health Agency (TAHA) through Shanti Day Centre and Better Government for Older People (BGOP). BE ME was funded by the Single Regeneration Budget and is targeted at black and minority ethnic and refugee elders

**The aims and objectives of the project are to:**

- Empower elders from the black and minority ethnic communities to participate in local decision-making processes, to ensure that their voices are heard and services developed to better meet their needs
- Reduce social isolation, and address discrimination against elders, particularly in black and minority ethnic communities.
- Build partnerships with other community groups and local councils on issues affecting older people.

**NIACE's work  
Mind Your Language!**

*The remarkable linguistic diversity of the UK, reflecting our complex history, includes speakers of the indigenous languages and also of the languages of our main Asian, European and Afro-Caribbean communities as well as hundreds of smaller groups of speakers of other languages. Yet the multilingual talents of UK citizens are under-recognised, under-used and all too often viewed with suspicions. Our aims must be to recognise the opportunities offered by this multilingual wealth, ensure that talent is nurtured in future generations and meet the linguistic and cultural needs of individuals and communities.*

Nuffield Languages Inquiry (2000). *Languages: the next generation*. London: The Nuffield Foundation. ISBN 1902985028  
[www.nuffield.org/language/index.html](http://www.nuffield.org/language/index.html)

NIACE, supported by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), wished to draw attention to the learning needs of older people from black and minority communities. To introduce this campaign we collected and sound taped the testimonies to the benefits of learning from older people in their own language.

The first sound tape compilation, consisting of 14 testimonies in 13 different languages, was

distributed among education providers, funders and policy makers to raise awareness. An explanatory booklet and survey form to determine current interest, skills, strategies and practices accompanied the tape.

In 2001/2 testimonies in Cantonese in Camden Town, London, and in Bengali in Bradford were collected, and the resultant compilation is currently being used in the areas to encourage more older people from those communities to access adult education. Progress is being monitored with successes and failures noted and analysed. Testimonies in Somali are currently being collected and recorded in Southwark, London.

**The *Mind Your Language* survey**

The survey enquired about awareness of issues around this agenda and requested more information about what was being done, how it was being funded, with whom, where and when. The 38 responses were in the main from those who had something to say and revealed a rich tapestry of activity, interest, and concern. That there were not more returns is indicative of the lack of work in this area and the need to promote it.

By collecting testimonies in mother tongues NIACE was drawing attention to the need to reach excluded and forgotten people by starting where they are at. The survey revealed that practitioners are doing the same, using a variety of techniques and curriculum interests to reach targeted groups. In some instances these were specifically older people; in others it was about older people's place within their family and community. Examples included:

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|----------------------------|--|
| Creative writing           | Head massage                           |
| Story telling              | Social history                         |
| Crafts                     | Photography                            |
| Assertiveness              | Hair & beauty                          |
| Child care                 | Cooking                                |
| Yoga                       | Aromatherapy                           |
| Literacy                   | Numeracy                               |
| Information technology     | Tasters in response to stated interest |
| Writing a book of remedies | ESOL                                   |
|                            | Skills for life                        |

They worked with a range of cultural, ethnic and language groups:

Bengali	Punjabi
Gujarati	Bangladeshi
Somali	Pakistani
Chinese	Arabic
Iranian	Indian
African Caribbean	Kurdish
Afghan	Nigerian
Sikh	Jewish

With a variety of settings, techniques and partnerships:

Asylum seekers	An Asian Age Concern
Islamic women	Luncheon club
The mosque	International Family
Residential college	Centre
Women's centre	

### **What is happening on the policy and context front**

There is a lot of Government attention being given to the needs of older people and encouraging them to continue to play a full role in society. Many older people require support to develop the skills required to participate fully and effectively in the decision-making processes about the lives they are being asked to engage in. One of the key drivers in this area is the Better Government for Older People (BGOP) Programme which is encouraging the participation of all older people irrespective of background.

The desire to consult older people is being experienced in a range of services at local and national level, though NHS Trusts, Primary Care teams, social care, transport and housing providers. There is likely to be some older people's consultative group or forum in every part of the country that could benefit from a wider cultural and faith perspective.

By 2006 the Government will have brought in new legislation covering equality as demanded by the European Union. This will cover some elements of age discrimination. It is also possible that by then there will be one single national equalities commission embracing all the areas currently covered by legislation and age. Such a move might make it simpler to address complex and overlapping areas of discrimination. Consultation is underway on both issues and could be a discussion point with groups and communities reached.

## **NIACE – areas of possible future work**

NIACE feels that the following areas are underdeveloped and wishes to see more work undertaken to promote the issues. It may be that there is work already underway which we look to hear about. Similarly we would like to hear from people wishing to develop any of these agendas or from those who consider that other areas not mentioned here have a greater priority.

- Learning provision for black and minority ethnic older people in care settings.
- Learning needs among older migrants, refugees and travellers.
- Highlight cultural issues around the financial 'literacy' agenda.

## **Useful contacts**

### **AGE, the European Older People's Platform**

Rue Froissart 111,1040  
Brussels, Belgium. Tel. 32/2 280 1470. Fax 32/2 280 1522. Web site: [www.age-platform.be](http://www.age-platform.be)

### **Age Concern England**

National Office: Age Concern England, Astral House, 1268 London Road, London SW16 4ER. Tel. 020 8765 7200. Web site: [www.ace.org.uk](http://www.ace.org.uk)

### **Age Exchange**

The Reminiscence Centre, 11 Blackheath Village, London, SE3 9LA. Tel. 020 8318 9105. Web site: [www.age-exchange.org.uk](http://www.age-exchange.org.uk)

### **Better Government for Older People (BGOP)**

201-221 Pentonville Road, London, N1 9UZ.  
Web site: [www.bettergovernmentforolderpeople.gov.uk](http://www.bettergovernmentforolderpeople.gov.uk)

### **Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT)**

20 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4LB. Tel. 020 7379 5101. Web site: [www.cilt.org.uk](http://www.cilt.org.uk)

### **Commission for Racial Equality (CRE)**

St Dunstan's House, 201-211 Borough High Street, London SE1 1GZ. Tel 020 7939 0000. Web site: [www.cre.gov.uk](http://www.cre.gov.uk)

## Equality Direct

Service designed to give business managers easy access to authoritative and joined-up advice on a wide range of equality issues.

Advice line: 0845 600 3444. Web site:  
[www.equalitydirect.org.uk](http://www.equalitydirect.org.uk)

## Help the Aged

Head Office 207-221 Pentonville Road, London, N1 9UZ. Tel. 020 7278 1114. Web site:  
[www.helptheaged.org.uk](http://www.helptheaged.org.uk)

## Policy Research on Ageing and Ethnicity (PRIAE)

31-32 Park Row, Leeds, LS1 5JD. Tel: 0113 285 5990. Web site: [www.priae.org](http://www.priae.org)

## European Network on Ageing and Ethnicity (ENAE)

c/o Age Concern Scotland, Suite 1-C-1, Templeton Business Centre, Templeton St. Glasgow G40 1DU, Scotland. Tel: 0141 554 2211. Web site: [www.aeweb.org](http://www.aeweb.org)

Information, publications and consultation on changes to equality legislation can be found on the Department of Trade and Industry web site: <http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/equality>

## Useful publications

**Age Concern England and Commission for Racial Equality.** (1995). *Age and race : double discrimination : life in Britain today for ethnic minority elders.* Information pack. London: Age Concern England.

**Blakemore, Ken and Boneham, Margaret.** (1994). *Age, race and ethnicity : a comparative approach.* Milton Keynes: Open University Press. ISBN 0335190863

**Carlton, Shiela and Soulsby, Jim.** (1999). *Learning to grow older & bolder : policy paper on learning in later life.* Leicester: NIACE. ISBN 1862010501.

**Dadzie, Stella.** (1993). *Older and wiser : a study of educational provision for black and ethnic minority elders.* Leicester: NIACE. ISBN 1872941486

**Department of Trade and Industry.** (2002). *Equality and diversity: the way ahead.* London: Department of Trade and Industry. Available to download: [www.dti.gov.uk/er/equality](http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/equality)

**Patel, Naina.** (1999). *Ageing matters, ethnic concerns : report by the Policy Research Institute on Ageing and Ethnicity for the Ethnic Minorities Steering Group.* London: Age Concern England. ISBN 0862423260. Available to download from Age Concern web site: [www.ace.org.uk](http://www.ace.org.uk)

**Patel, Naina.** (1999). *Black and minority ethnic elderly: perspectives on long-term care.* In Sutherland, Stewart. (1999). *With respect to old age: long-term care – rights and responsibilities: a report by The Royal Commission on Long Term Care (Volume 1).* London: Stationery Office. ISBN 0101419236

**Schweitzer, Pam.** (1984). *A place to stay: memories of pensioners from many lands.* London: Age Exchange Theatre Company.

**Soulsby, Jim; Halpin, Eddie and Patel, Vas.** (1994). *Race, migration and older people in Europe : recommendations and report arising from a conference in Preston on 13th-15th September 1993, organised as part of the European year of older people and solidarity between generations.* Preston: University of Central Lancashire. ISBN 0906694418

NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training. It aims to do this for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties or disabilities, or insufficient resources.  
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