
Increasing participation and raising achievement of black and minority group adults in post-16 education



This briefing sheet has been written in the light of recent developments since the creation of the Learning and Skills Council and the production of its Equality and Diversity strategy and more specifically the publication of the McPherson report on the death of Stephen Lawrence. The review of race relations legislation and implementation of the Race Relations Amendment Act and the proposal for a Single Equality Commission are also examined.

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Introduction

The McPherson Report into the death of Stephen Lawrence made a number of recommendations specifically aimed at both challenging racism and promoting cultural diversity. These recommendations included broadening the National Curriculum to include cultural diversity, monitoring the relationship between school admissions and levels of achievement and ‘ethnic’ origin and training OFSTED inspectors to enable them to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers endeavours in these areas. They were made with the statutory education system in mind, but have a direct bearing upon and applicability in relation to the education of adults.

In the light of the McPherson Report and recent legislation, all education providers are now expected to examine the effectiveness of their practices and procedures in the areas of recruiting, retaining, teaching and raising the achievements of adults and young people from black and minority groups.

In truth, Local Government has always had a key role in promoting good relations between people from different ‘racial’ groups, this role has now been bolstered up through the requirement of Education Departments to produce action plans which are expected to highlight how local needs are met, this of course includes ensuring that appropriate education services are provided for people who are black or from minority groups, at the right time in the right places and by the right people, and in a joined-up manner through Lifelong Learning and Local Strategic Partnerships.

Such an approach to providing educational services will facilitate the building of strong diverse communities in Britain, and support in tackling current inequalities in education and the institutional racism that the McPherson Report so accurately describes. All regions in the country are well placed through a plethora of ‘permissible’ and instructive strategies made available through the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU), Learning and

Skills Council (LSC), Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and through local government to affect change and work toward the government's desire for the creation of cohesive, equal and participating communities and individuals.

Learning providers through aiming to meet various agreed targets (through specific local performance indicators, NRU Public Sector Agreements and agreed Adult Learning Plans) have to be accountable for their action in relation to spending and levels of achievement and will in many instances have been given the task of addressing persistent underachievement among specific black communities in many parts of the country with minority group communities (African Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi particularly).

The National Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy (2001) recognises that poor access to education, health, employment and housing are all issues that affect the lives of many people who are black or from minority groups and that these issues have to be addressed alongside the inequalities of education. The estimated size of the black and minority group population in 2001 was 8% of the total population of England (Labour Force Survey, 2000-01). The percentage of black and minority group students in further education in England was 14% in 2000 (Commission for Black Staff in Further Education, 2002). In a society that has such a rich and culturally diverse population colleges, universities, and voluntary and community education providers have a vital role to play in ensuring that people who are black or from minority groups have better and more equitable access to education, employment and training opportunities.

Responding adequately and positively to racial equality and cultural diversity should not be superficial, cosmetic or short term. Information, in the form of statistics and facts that we already hold on the inequalities in education for people who are black or from minority groups are there to be utilised in informing policy, procedure and how resources are targeted.

There has been considerable research, particularly through OFSTED and the Commission for Black Staff, on the less than positive impact that the experience of mainstream education has had on people from a variety of minority groups – this has far reaching implications for those involved in the education of adults. It means education providers (the majority of whom are white) changing their

practice, thinking and behaviour. In short it means doing things differently. This includes engaging more black and minority leaders, managers, governors, inspectors and policy makers at all levels across all public bodies and organisations. Through Local Government Action Plans, various strategic documents from the LSC and NRU and of course in taking advantage of the 'permissive opportunities' available through legislation, Positive Action and Genuine Occupational qualification for example, redressing workforce imbalances, raising levels of attainment and engaging black and minority group learners is possible.

If more and different adults are to be attracted to learning, the provision of accessible advice and guidance must be made widely available too, in a range of formats to be accessed in a range of locations. Good and impartial information, advice and guidance can help people to identify and explore all available options and point them towards institutions that can offer practical support for learning and effective learning and language support.

Challenges for further and higher education institutions

Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) are charged with ensuring that high quality learning opportunities are available to meet the needs of all learners across the range of abilities and aptitudes, including the very able. In addition, it will be critical that the LSC is able to combat the disadvantages that some learners and potential learners face. Many people have experienced direct and indirect barriers to learning as a result, for example, of their race, gender, disability or age. As a result they have been excluded from the benefits that learning can bring.

LSCs are building equality of opportunity into all policies, programmes and actions, working closely with key equality organisations including the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality, Disability Rights Commission and the Commission for Black Staff in FE.

In particular the LSC will be expected to:

- Continue to redefine and measure the impact of its National Equality and Diversity Strategy - widening participation and promoting inclusion and carry out its statutory duty under the Race

Relations Amendment Act as an accountable public body.

- Consult widely on all of its equality strategies with appropriate bodies and specialist organisations.

The LSC will need to draw on good practice including developing strategies setting out priorities which will be likely to include challenging stereotyping and under-representation of women, black people, particular age groups and other people facing disadvantages in particular occupations. This is both an internal organisational challenge as well as an area for development when looking at the groups, projects and initiatives that are supported financially both at the centre and through the 47 LLSC regional arms.

The LSC will in addition to this be expected to develop and implement a range of recommendations put forward through the Commission for Black Staff in FE in its final report which was published in July 2002. These include:

- Providing clear and decisive leadership by modelling best race equality practice as an employer
- Addressing the under-representation of black people on its staff and taking systematic steps to make its workforce fully representative by 2009
- Ensuring that its national and local councils, chief executive, national directors and senior staff receive high quality race equality training as required by the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000).

Such changes are, of course, challenges for us all irrespective of our sector and the nature and needs of our adult learners, but colleges and universities may face particular challenges in increasing participation of members of black and other minority communities as compared to local education departments who (potentially at least) *know* their learners. Similarly higher and further education institutions need to review their provision and staffing profiles to address the lifelong learning needs of all learners, focusing on the educational entitlement that all adult learners should have. If we are to achieve the widening of participation in lifelong learning, the under-representation and underachievement of black and minority ethnic communities should be a priority for all educational

organisations. Many have not yet begun to seriously implement equal opportunities policies on issues such as the recruitment of black and minority learners, discrimination and harassment, staff recruitment, retention and development, and training and curriculum development and review. If higher education is to realise its 50% participation target by 2010 and genuinely enrol new and different learners in the process, all of these issues will need to be thought about and planned for.

If there are institutional factors that inhibit the access and achievements of black learners, it is important that institutions identify what these are and deal with them openly. The McPherson report has highlighted the fact that unintentional racism can and does affect the way organisations operate, as well as the way people treat each other. The report describes 'institutional racism' thus:

'Institutional racism' is the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.' (p. 321)

It is neither acceptable nor practical for organisations to ignore institutional racism. Imagining that it does not affect their lives or the lives of their learners by adopting a 'colour blind' approach to the development of policies and practices, clearly ignores the specific needs of learners as well as the experiences and views of people who are black or from minority groups.

Colleges and universities need to take the issue of race equality seriously if they genuinely wish to widen learning opportunities and participation for all. The experience of those organisations that are well down the road to tackling these issues is that they reap the benefits from implementing race equality policies and practices. This can be seen in terms of improved retention and achievement and better community understanding and relationships.

Conclusion

Improving access for black and minority communities requires substantial intervention by education providers and government, and the development of innovative approaches to teaching

and learning. Learning providers should have greater regard for promoting equality of opportunity in what is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world

Gathering intelligence about the diversity of local communities, current performance in equal opportunities and gaps in provision, is the key starting point to developing an effective race equality strategy. The Strategic Area Reviews to be carried out by Local Learning and Skills Councils (as documented in 'Success for All') will be a useful instrument to this end. Beginning in April 2004 the reviews should look at provision, retention and achievement in the area covered for different groups of learners and address gaps. In terms of black and minority learners it will be important to press for sufficient disaggregated data to reflect differences between minority groups.

Information gathered through strategic reviews should be used to set targets and performance indicators which cover race and any other local factors. Comprehensive monitoring systems will need to be put in place to measure progress and performance in relation to targets.

Being proactive in this way is both equitable, in acknowledging the damaging and excluding effect that racism can have on black people, and practical, in response to current and forthcoming statutory requirements which require the development of a joined-up approach to meeting the needs of learners (and successfully attracting funding).

Ultimately all adult education providers should act in the spirit of current and future proposed legislation (particularly the proposal for a single equality commission and the European directive to have legislation in place around age, sexuality and religion by 2006). Such legislation acknowledges that given the nature of the often-submerged mass of discrimination(s) faced by adult learners that we should on the one hand abide by the law, taking advantage of what is permissible, whilst at the same time being active in promoting cultural diversity for all learners.

What you can do next

- Read *Engaging Black Learners in ACL* by Lenford White (NIACE 2002) and *Good Practice Guide 'Colour Blind'* by Alyson Malach (NIACE, 2001)
- Familiarise yourself with equality legislation, particularly the RRAA 2000 – summaries of which can be found on the CRE website
- Know your responsibilities vis-à-vis your organisations policies
- If you are black or from a minority group join the Black Practitioners and Learners Network (BPLN), there are four regional networks, contact Liselot Den Ouden on 0116 204 4217
- Work with the Commission for Black Staff in FE on developing positive action initiatives
- Gather intelligence about your communities and what education services are being provided in your area and use the outcomes to set recruitment targets for black and minority group learners
- Resource staff development that enables staff at all levels to gain a better understanding of race equality issues
- Establish links with black and minority organisations and agencies to support your work with these groups
- Examine your policies and practices for effectiveness and efficiency.

References and Further Reading

Adult education in a multi-ethnic Europe: a handbook for organisational change. Compiled and edited by Stella Dadzie. Leicester, NIACE, 1999. ISBN 1 86201 078 1 £50.00

Black staff in further education : summary report of the Commission for Black Staff in Further Education. London, Commission for Black Staff in Further Education. July 2002. www.feonline.net/feonline/display?id=7727

Colour blind: a practical guide to teaching black adult learners. Alyson Malach, Leicester, NIACE, 2001. ISBN 1 86201 096 X. £40.00

Ensuring equality of opportunity. Rosemary Clark. Raising Quality and Achievement Programme. Association of Colleges, 2002. www.rqa.org.uk

Equality and diversity impact measures.
Learning and Skills Council, 2002
www.lsc.gov.uk/news_docs/ImpMeasures.pdf

Equality in practice : a guide to mainstreaming
Learning and Skills Council, 2001
www.lsc.gov.uk/news_docs/Equality_in_Practice.doc
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National equality and diversity strategy 2001-2004. Learning and Skills Council, 2002
www.lsc.gov.uk/news_docs/Widening.pdf

A new commitment to neighbourhood renewal : national strategy action plan. Social Exclusion Unit, 2001.
www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk/publications/reports/html/action_plan/index.htm

Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. Chapter 34. London, Stationery Office, 2000.
ISBN 010 543400 0 £5.30

The Stephen Lawrence inquiry: report of an inquiry by Sir William McPherson of Cluny.
London, Stationery Office, 1999

Success for all : reforming further education and training. Department for Education and Skills, 2002. ISBN 184185851X
www.dfes.gov.uk/learning&skills/pdf/successforallr.pdf

Useful contacts

Commission for Black Staff in Further Education
Association of Colleges, 5th Floor Centre Point
103 New Oxford Street
London WC1A 1RG
Contact: Wally Brown, Principal, Liverpool Community College, Tel: 0151 2523456
www.feonline.net/feonline/home?zone=586

Commission for Racial Equality
Elliot House, 10-12 Allington Street
London SW1E 5EH
Tel: 0207 828 7022
Web Site: www.cre.gov.uk
Email: info@cre.gov.uk

Equal Opportunities Commission
Arndale House, Arndale Centre
Manchester, M4 3EQ
Tel: 0161 833 9244
Web Site: www.eoc.org.uk
Email: info@eoc.org.uk

Network for Black Managers
Secretary: Robin Landman
Deputy Principal
Hackney Community College
Tel, Mobile: 0797 1554229
Website: www.feonline.net

NIACE Black Practitioners and Learners Network (BPLN)
21 De Montfort Street
Leicester LE1 7GE
Tel: 0116 204 4200
Website: www.niace.org.uk/Research/BPLN

Race Equality and Diversity Unit
Home Office
50 Queen Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9AT
Tel: 020 7273 4000
Website: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/dob/reu.htm

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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