

**COMMISSION FOR EQUALITY AND
HUMAN RIGHTS:**

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

**REPORT TO THE WOMEN AND EQUALITY UNIT,
DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL
GOVERNMENT**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Government has indicated its intention to establish a new Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR). To inform that work the Women and Equality Unit (WEU) in the Department for Communities and Local Government commissioned from Elborough Consulting Limited and the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) a study that would convene ten focus groups over five separate days, drawn from a range of organisations and community groups. The WEU particularly wished the groups to include people whose voice had been little heard in consultations on the CEHR, for example certain minority ethnic groups, Muslim women and young people.

In total 144 people completed personal data forms over the course of ten events. A quarter was aged under 24 and one-eighth declared themselves to have a disability. Over half declared that a language other than English was their first spoken language, two-fifths that a language other than English was their first written language. Over two-thirds of respondents were non-White, with the largest single group, at over one-third, being Asian. Almost two-thirds of respondents were born outside the UK; over half of these had lived in the UK for over 11 years, one-eighth for less than 5 years. The largest single faith group (at one-third) was Muslims.

The focus group sessions were guided by a discussion document, intended to enable participants to:

- Explore their views about discrimination, human rights and good relations and enable them to share their own experiences
- express views about the new Commission and its work, particularly in relation to local/regional engagement and the provision of information
- identify early priorities for the Commission that would in their view make a real difference.

The report identifies the most common themes which emerged across groups during the discussions.

In discussions about discrimination, human rights and good relations four overarching themes emerged. These were (in no particular order):

1. Language barriers and the lack of provision of translated information. These were raised in relation to a number of public services, including employment services, health services, education, the local council and the justice system. Participants' experiences raised serious implications for their ability to access equitable services and enjoy their human rights.
2. Participants in several groups - including people from both recently arrived and settled migrant communities and Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual or Transgendered (LGBT) participants - described incidences of abusive and/or violent behaviour towards them. Their discussions

raised important issues about people's lived everyday experience of discrimination; key human rights issues such as the safety of victims and witnesses; and the relationships between different groups and communities in English society. People from both recently arrived and settled communities criticised the role of the media, and in some cases the Government, in fanning the flames of hostility towards immigrants and/or Muslims. Participants highlighted a number of barriers to seeking redress when experiencing abuse and/or violence, including lack of support from bystanders and potential witnesses; lack of support from/trust in the authorities (in the main the police, but also the local council and, in the case of young LGBT participants, schools); and cultural inhibitors to seeking redress and/or directly challenging abusive/violent behaviour, such as respect for age, language difficulties, feelings of shame and reluctance to complain.

3. Many participants raised the difficulties faced by individuals in challenging unfairness or abusive behaviour by institutions/within organisations. Some highlighted the general difficulties faced by individuals taking on bureaucracies; some the particular helplessness felt by those wishing to challenge the behaviour of those, such as the police and (in the case of young LGBT participants) teachers, who should themselves be avenues of redress when people were treated badly. In so doing they raised key human rights issues such as confidentiality, procedural fairness and safety, as well as issues relating to community relations and discrimination.
4. Education and youth services came up repeatedly in focus group discussions, in terms of:
 - Education as a source of adverse experience including:
 - the need for better language support, in relation to supporting both students and parents
 - the treatment of LGBT schoolchildren both by other children and teachers
 - the perceived inability of teachers and the curriculum to engage effectively with young people
 - schools failing to provide for cultural needs and to recognise and deal with culturally specific behaviours
 - disparities in treatment and expectations.
 - The impact on safety and community relations of the inadequate and/or inequitable provision of youth services and facilities.
 - Education (particularly schools) as a potentially powerful tool to challenge stereotypes and provide information:
 - educating children and young people was seen by many as the key means of promoting change in people's attitudes and addressing stereotypes, for example by highlighting positive role models. Participants felt that adverse attitudes and stereotypes held people back within all walks of life and contributed to unfair behaviour and poor relationships between different groups and communities.

- LGBT participants also saw schools as a potentially powerful source of vital information to young LGBT people.
- all the groups in which young people were in the majority raised strong question marks over the ability of schools effectively to deliver information on issues relating to equality, human rights and good relations, and highlighted the key role that could potentially be played by young people in this area.
- Schools and youth activities were seen by many as an important space/means to bring different people in communities together and improve relationships.

Whereas the discussions on discrimination, human rights and good relations had varied widely, discussions about how the CEHR should operate were less disparate with a strong emphasis placed on certain themes across the groups.

While many felt enthusiasm at the prospect of the CEHR's establishment, some clearly felt let down by other organisations and agencies and had a strong desire that the new body should be different. A common view expressed was the wish to see the CEHR actually *do* something, rather than merely discussing issues or publishing reports. There was a sense that the CEHR needed to 'get its act together' early on. It was important to some that it should not over-promise, but seek to earn and retain people's trust.

The groups emphasised that CEHR information needed to

- be simple and use plain language easily understandable to the layperson
- use a range of means of getting across to people and have various options for contact
- be available in a range of formats
- be inclusive and accessible to all – this was for many participants a touchstone issue.

Information considered useful included:

- individuals' rights
- where to go for more information
- how to go about complaining when things go wrong and who to complain to – act as a signpost service
- the performance of different services in the area in terms of discrimination and human rights
- publicising diverse role models (eg within the LGBT and Black communities) and celebrating achievements.
- publicising good practice
- publicising case studies where unfair treatment has been successfully challenged.

Several groups emphasised the human touch as a valuable aspect of imparting information, and/or felt information needed a local and not just national aspect in terms both of content and outlets. Many emphasised the

importance of having a named person to whom they knew they could go. Some participants suggested the CEHR having a single person to lead on engaging with local organisations in an area.

For participants in the Chinese, Turkish/Kurdish and Vietnamese groups the local community group/centre organising the event was seen as the key means of disseminating information. The organisational awareness testing indicated that the majority of people had fairly low awareness of most equality and human rights organisations, with the exception of Age Concern and to a lesser extent Help the Aged. Awareness of Citizens' Advice Bureaux (CABx) was high although some participants highlighted barriers to using them such as lack of interpreters and opening hours.

A strong theme of discussions was the need for the CEHR to partner with grassroots groups eg community centres, as these were accessible, knowledgeable and trusted. Some participants cautioned that establishing effective local partnerships needed a degree of skill and local knowledge and that the CEHR would need to be selective in its approach. It needed to select partners who had the ability to reach out at grass roots level and access and effectively engage people within the local community. Some groups, such as the Turkish/Kurdish and Vietnamese groups, feared that without a community engagement approach they would be invisible to the CEHR, with their needs and views overlooked by it as by other organisations and services. Many participants in different groups emphasised the precarious nature of funding for their groups and that they needed more support. Some expressed the hope that the CEHR might be a source of sustainable funding and/or advice to small groups on how to achieve such funding.

The importance of the CEHR taking into account factors such as age, and to a lesser degree gender, came out in a number of focus groups. The need to make particular efforts to engage young people, and the value of so doing, was a key theme of all the groups in which young people were in the majority. Some felt that the CEHR was unlikely to achieve this unless it tapped into the potential of young people themselves, whether by partnering with youth groups or employing young people on its workforce.

At the end of each discussion group each individual participant was given the opportunity to give those establishing the CEHR a personal message. They were asked to briefly state one priority they would like to see the CEHR concentrate on achieving over its first three years. The point made at the outset of the event to explain this exercise - that the CEHR could not do everything and that it would have to prioritise to be effective – seemed on the whole to be understood and accepted.

Although participants used different language and emphases, a number of broad categories emerged. The early priorities identified for the CEHR were, in summary, to:

1. develop a local presence and outreach to communities by funding/supporting sustainability of/partnering with community groups;

enable the views of people (including young people) in local communities to be heard and listened to (20)

2. focus on issues around race relations/multiculturalism/integration/ attitudes (of Government, media and individuals) towards people from BME groups and immigrants (14)
3. promote education (especially but not solely in schools) re positive role models and achievements/different cultures and lifestyles/value of others/people's rights (12)
4. focus on issues around accessibility of/discrimination by services (including better language provision) (11)
5. focus on issues around equitable access to employment/educational opportunities (10)
6. really do something/be proactive/keep promises/build trust (7)
7. provide individuals with clear information and advice (5).

INTRODUCTION

The Government has indicated its intention to establish a new Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR). The new commission, once established, will encompass the three existing statutory equality commissions¹. In parallel to bringing forth primary legislation, the Government has started the process for considering how the transition to the CEHR should be taken forward. Part of this process includes identifying the strategic priorities for the Commission, and its options for service delivery.

To inform that work the Women and Equality Unit (WEU) in the Department for Communities and Local Government commissioned from Elborough Consulting Limited and the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) a study that would convene ten focus groups over five separate days, drawn from a range of organisations and community groups.

The intention was that the focus groups should be loosely based on the equality strands (age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation), but should go beyond the usual stakeholder configurations the WEU has traditionally relied on, and should have a strong focus on people from Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups. The WEU particularly wished the groups to include people whose voice had been little heard in consultations on the CEHR, for example certain minority ethnic groups, Muslim women and young people.

The WEU wished the outcomes of this work to inform a number of the CEHR's Strategic Development workstreams; most notably those on Good Relations, Branding and Communication. It also saw the groups as an opportunity to inform participants about the progress on establishing the CEHR, and its anticipated work programme.

Invitations to apply for small grants to hold focus groups events were issued by the University of Central Lancashire and 57 groups applied. The following groups were selected, in consultation with the WEU:

- London
 - Society for the Advancement of Black Arts (Black British young people, mainly men);
 - Day-mer Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre
- Manchester
 - Chinese Health Information Centre
 - Vietnamese Refugee Information Centre
 - Youth 18 (Lesbian, Gay Bi-sexual or Transgendered (LGBT) young people from the North West region)

¹ There are three statutory equality commissions: Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), Disability Rights Commission (DRC), Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC).

- Blackburn
 - Youth Action (Muslim young men)
- Newcastle
 - North East Hindu Cultural Trust (interfaith South Asian event)
- Middlesbrough
 - Sahara Women's Group (Muslim women)
- Southampton
 - The James Wiltshire Trust (BME mental health group)
- Woking
 - Woking Borough Council (representatives of various voluntary sector equality organisations)

Annex A gives details of who attended the events. In summary:

- 144 people completed personal data forms over the course of ten events, ranging from 9 to 20 participants.
- 53% of respondents were female, 46% male and 1% transgendered.
- A quarter was aged under 24.
- One-eighth declared themselves to have a disability.
- 56% declared that a language other than English was their first spoken language - 40% that a language other than English was their first written language.
- Over two-thirds of respondents were non-White, with the largest single group, at over one-third, being Asian.
- Almost two-thirds of respondents were born outside the UK. Over half of these had lived in the UK for over 11 years, one-eighth for less than 5 years.
- The largest single faith group (at one-third) was Muslims.

The focus groups began with:

- a short 'awareness test' - a list of bodies was read out with participants invited to indicate their level of awareness of each organisation and its work
- a short presentation explaining the CEHR and its remit.

These were followed by small facilitated group discussions. This report gives the main findings of these discussions, set out along the lines of their basic structure, ie:

- Views/experiences about discrimination², human rights³ and good relations⁴.

² Described by presentation/facilitators as things which have felt unfair.

- Views about how the new Commission should operate, particularly in relation to local/regional engagement and the provision of information.
- Views on early priorities for the Commission that would make a real difference.

Many of the issues and experiences raised by individual participants in focus groups were highly personal and varied in nature, although some groups placed a common emphasis on certain issues. It should be remembered however that these are extremely small sample sizes and as such could and should not be deemed as representing ‘the views of a certain community’. Further, one of the clearest themes emerging from discussions was the great importance of recognising differences *within* communities, particularly age differences.

Rather, what this report aims to do is to identify the most common themes which emerged across the different discussion groups during the consultation as a whole. In so doing, the report draws strongly on quotes from participants. Not only does this enable the voice of those who are too rarely heard in public policy making to be heard, but such quotes give a vivid picture of the meaning of discrimination, human rights and good relations in the context of people’s everyday lives. They show powerfully that indeed for many these issues are just that, a part of normal everyday life and that the CEHR has the potential to have real meaning for many (and, conversely, the potential to disappoint).

VIEWS/EXPERIENCES ABOUT DISCRIMINATION, HUMAN RIGHTS AND GOOD RELATIONS

Four key overarching themes emerged during focus group discussions:

- for some communities, the key importance of language as a barrier to being treated fairly and accessing services and enjoying basic rights.
- incidences of abusive and violent behaviour and the barriers people faced in challenging them and/or seeking redress
- the difficulties people perceived and experienced in challenging institutions and organisations

³ Described as issues such as safety, privacy, confidentiality, dignity, respect and being involved in decisions about yourself, in relation to people’s everyday experience of public services. Some reactions to this description raised issues around differing cultural definitions of human rights: *Human rights from our point of view is more involved with political saying, coming from Vietnam it is a Communist country ... for me it’s about the right to speak and express your opinion.*

Vietnamese participant

Of course I cannot generalise about all Chinese people but I think that when Chinese people talk about human rights they also include public responsibility, duty and obligation ... it is not just about I have a right ... everyone has a duty and responsibility also.

Chinese participant

⁴ Described as how communities and different groups of people get along with each other. Some commented in discussion that ‘good relations’ was not a term with which they were familiar and/or that it had no meaning to them.

- the great importance of education and youth services (particularly but not solely the case for younger participants) as both a key aspect of adverse experience, and a potentially powerful tool for addressing stereotypes and improving relationships between different groups.

Language

Language is main barrier for Chinese, that's why we cater for ourselves.
Chinese participant.

I think the Government needs to put an organisation like a watchdog making sure all the organisations are treating with fairness all the people who have a problem with language. ... From our perspective we are not being treated unfairly because of our skin colour like the Black community but for us language is a big obstacle.
Vietnamese participant.

Language barriers and the **lack of provision of information in their own language** were among the key issues raised by the **Vietnamese, Chinese** and, to a lesser extent, the **Turkish/Kurdish** and **Muslim women** focus groups. They raised this in relation to a **number of public services**, including employment services, health services, education, the local council and the justice system. Their experiences raised serious implications for their ability to **access equitable services and enjoy their human rights**.

Participants in the Turkish/Kurdish event also emphasised the importance of **literacy barriers**, especially for older people. One raised this in relation to the **citizenship test**, seen as a key human rights issue:

I have a mother who cannot read or write the Turkish language or English – she has been asked to complete this test!

Health services

Many participants highlighted the **effect of language barriers on access to and quality of medical care**:

There was a [Vietnamese] lady at the health centre who was 86 years old and could not communicate with anyone, it was not fair for her.
Vietnamese participant.

A young Vietnamese man spoke of his experiences speaking and communicating for his disabled grandmother and his perception that language posed more of a barrier to her than her disability. Another Vietnamese older woman reported that:

I have personally been misinterpreted by my doctor before ... can't explain things, so I sometimes receive the wrong treatment.

The Vietnamese community worker in Manchester and community workers in the Woking area reported patients having to take children or friends to the GP surgery to interpret for them, sometimes on very inappropriate issues. They

commented that interpreting services were available in both areas but that professionals were not using them.

A Chinese participant highlighted that she was unable to access the information made available by NHS Direct, in contrast to some other countries with automated options to put callers through to speakers of different languages. Another Chinese participant also raised the lack of interpreters at GP surgeries, and the general lack of provision of information in Chinese languages. The English-speaking Chinese group also raised the issue of older people having difficulty in explaining their problems to doctors and nurses, resulting in them feeling isolated.

Education

Several participants told of the **effect of inadequate language provision on the quality of service received by parents, students and children within the education system.**

The small group of Vietnamese young people spoke of their experience in school/university struggling with the English language and being given inadequate support. One spoke of coming to England at the age of 10 and starting primary school unable to speak a word of English, and of his recent experiences supporting secondary school children:

They are really intelligent kids ... but because of their language they put them in a low set ... really they should be in the higher sets with language support.

This issue was also raised by one of the voluntary sector equality workers at the Woking event. She explained how her organisation goes into schools and in partnership with teachers identifies children, particularly those coming from abroad, in need of language/literacy support, with improvements in performance and confidence achieved by assistance in basic literacy skills:

This is a big issue as they can't even read the basic things. As a result, they are lagging behind. There is no infrastructure to support them. When they arrive in the country they are made to go with their age groups ... When coming from a background where English is not their first language, it's difficult to get them to operate at par with their age mates.

A Southampton participant told of coming to the UK aged 11 unable to speak English, and the effect of inadequate language support on his confidence and performance:

In school I was put in the normal class and was expected to speak like the rest of local students. And because of that my grades fell down and it took me a while to get into the system and try to understand it ... no one came to talk to me about my problems at that time. It affected my grades, my dignity.

A young Vietnamese woman who had come to England to attend university spoke of the lack of support from the university to help her improve her English, and her difficulties in getting information about her career (her English was not good enough to access website information).

A Chinese participant highlighted the problems caused by language barriers in enabling parents to support their children's education:

We have no one to explain the progress our children are making at school, we don't understand the reports.

Council services

Some participants told of **inadequate language provision by their local council**. They talked not only of the personal problems that this had caused them but also of the **feelings of unfairness** engendered by the council's failure to cater for all living in the local community.

An older Vietnamese woman told of serious problems experienced on her estate over the years, exacerbated by her language barriers to accessing help from the council. One of the participants in the English-speaking Chinese group showed a letter which he had received from the council. This gave information in five different languages but not Chinese languages, despite the fact that the local Chinese community was larger than some of these others. The other participants felt that this was therefore a discrimination issue – “*we are not treated fair*”.

The participant who raised this had been able to pursue a complaint to the council and his MP because he could speak and write English “*but what about people who can't?*”. Another commented that while she spoke English a greater command than hers was needed to pursue a complaint:

Some people they know enough English to get by but not to keep pushing for their rights ...

Employment services

A Vietnamese participant told of people she knew who had been **turned away from the job centre** and told:

I'm sorry but you have to bring your own interpreter.

Justice system

The non-English speaking Chinese group focused particularly on language issues relating to the **justice system**, raising serious concerns about key human rights issues such as the **right to a fair hearing**.

They discussed one participant's story about a friend who had been charged and found guilty of an offence⁵ but not provided with a translator:

He needed someone to explain to him what was happening ... it was very unfair ... he didn't have his side heard.

⁵ Indeed members of the discussion group were themselves unclear as to the exact nature of the alleged offence given the difficulties translating it into their language.

The group felt strongly that language played a key part in what was considered to be unfair treatment. They saw this as a serious and widespread problem, strongly agreeing with the comment that:

No one should be put on trial until they have a translator to help them.

Another participant told how (in the early 1990s) lack of early access to an interpreter had delayed her ability to prove her status to police – after a workplace raid she had been detained on suspicion of being an illegal worker:

I was frightened to death, I was crying, I couldn't express myself to the police so they locked me in a closed room ... eventually they gave me an interpreter and then believed I was a legal British citizen.

Experiencing abusive/violent behaviour

Participants in several groups, including people from both **recently arrived** and **settled** migrant communities and **LGBT** participants, described incidences of abusive and often violent behaviour towards them. They reflected on **barriers to effective redress** and their **lack of faith in existing structures** to support them. Their discussions raised key issues raised important issues about **people's lived everyday experience** of discrimination; key human rights issues such as the **safety of victims and witnesses**; and the **relationships** between different groups and communities in English society.

Increases in hostility: the role of the media and Government

Muslim participants in Blackburn, Newcastle and Middlesbrough identified the **press** as a key factor in fanning the flames of **hostility towards Muslims**. Young men in Blackburn commented:

People say Islamic terrorists. I'm a Muslim and when people say Islam and terrorist together it affects me ... the message is sent out to all of us not just individually to one of us.

With all this 9/11 stuff you can talk for hours about the media and the way they represent us and the negativity. ... when I step out of Blackburn to London, Birmingham, Preston you see people who don't know me and they are picking up on the media and Muslims ...

Participants in the Turkish/Kurdish and Newcastle groups also blamed the media for stoking up **hostility towards migrant communities** in general. A participant in the former group observed that it always reported the bad things – eg activities by criminal elements - but that it “*never brings out what is good*”.⁶ Participants in the latter group felt that the CEHR would have an important watchdog role to play in relation to the media.

When the mainstream hear about immigration we are the next people who suffer, we want to be honest and take part in the society. ... It is heartbreaking we are never accepted.
Newcastle participant

⁶ A similar point was made by a participant in the Youth 18 group in relation to portrayals of gay people in the media.

Both discussion groups at the Turkish/Kurdish event felt strongly that **Government policies** were exacerbating this scapegoating of migrant communities describing policies such as arresting, detaining and deporting people who had lived for several years in the UK, and the citizenship test, as violations of human rights:

There are people who are disabled, elderly, caretakers who look after the disabled and elderly [who] are not in the situation to comply with the requirements of this [citizenship] test. I wonder if the citizens of this country can indeed answer these questions. ... I am over 50 years old – it's getting harder for me to learn. So it does not look like I am making any progress in getting this passport ...

Some felt that the Government was also failing to clamp down sufficiently on the BNP, which had recently achieved electoral success in nearby East London, leading to increasingly public displays of hostility:

I was in the Romford Market last week and the way people were treated by local skinhead youths was not very nice and it did disappoint me greatly.

Increases in hostility: the effect on individuals

Participants from both recently arrived and long settled communities made clear the very real effect of this increased hostility on their **everyday lives**.

The three South Asian groups - in Blackburn, Middlesbrough and Newcastle - all raised the knock-on effect of 7/7 and/or 9/11. The young men in Blackburn felt that the large concentration of Muslims in Blackburn, and the segregated nature of life in the town, had minimised the effect on their everyday lives. One participant reported however feeling “*silent discrimination*” when he had visited London over the past year:

Straight away when you're on the tube people's heads turn and they're shuffling away.

The Middlesbrough women, living in a town with a much smaller South Asian population, had been affected more directly, albeit by the actions of a minority:

Things were getting better [ie community relations] and then the bombings happened and things were set back. ... Only a minority of people from British community cause problems generally everyone is okay with everybody.

However they reported serious consequences of the attitudes of that minority - for example young girls removing the hijab as they felt threatened, and bus drivers refusing to let schoolboys carrying haversacks on their buses - as well as abusive and violent incidents discussed below.

Similarly those living in Newcastle, again with a much smaller BME population than Blackburn, strongly emphasised the effect of the increases in hostility on even long settled communities:

When in the street people call “Paki”, this is getting worse since the London incident and 9/11. I had English women friends and they said they don't want to be my friend anymore – this came from an elderly lady ... abuse is more open now ... tragedy that children born here,

young British, and they are looked at as a young terrorist. I'm sorry about what has happened but we are not responsible for that.

There are more problems because of asylum seekers and refugees although I have been here for 32 years. People swear at me and say "refugee go back home, we are not going to open a bank account for you"⁷, because of the terrorism. ... People are throwing stones at me as they are jealous because their house is not as decent as me and that I am a Paki and I have such a good house.

Challenging abuse/violence: the role of dialogue

Some participants encouraged individuals to **engage in dialogue to improve relationships and understanding** between groups and communities.

A Newcastle participant explained how he approached this:

Some people get frustrated and say, "you are Pakis", I argue and tell them I am not and I explain who I am ... it is important that people know who you are ... once the barrier is broken things improve.

Participants in Blackburn highlighted the legacy of fear caused by racially based gang violence, feeling that more needed to be done to empower local people to address this:

I've had first hand experience of being beaten up by gangs but I just feel that the main problem is that there's no involvement from any community or council ... It's the people on the streets who need guidance so they can say "let's sort this out".

Participants in one of the LGBT discussion groups also called for dialogue, in this case between LGBT and straight people:

We need to work out the limits of what's acceptable [public] behaviour and what's not.⁸

Challenging abuse/violence: barriers to seeking redress

Participants highlighted a number of **barriers to seeking redress** when experiencing abuse and/or violence, including

- lack of support from bystanders and potential witnesses, raising issues around community relations in practice and human rights eg safety of witnesses.
- lack of support from/trust in the authorities
- cultural inhibitors.

⁷ Three participants in the Newcastle group reported increased difficulties in opening bank accounts.

⁸ Some participants reported abusive and violent behaviour arising from this issue, one telling of friends who had been abused at the local chippy for cuddling each other, another commenting that "it's crazy that you have to do risk assessment when walking down the street thinking "am I safe to hold my girlfriend's hand?" Straight people don't have to do that."

Lack of support from bystanders/potential witnesses

One of the Middlesbrough women reported harassment of women on buses (eg hijabs being grabbed) but commented that “*no one helps you*”. The Youth 18 event was told of a transgendered young person who was

too scared to get on the bus at the moment because a few weeks ago she was on the bus and somebody grabbed her crotch and marched her off the bus. Nothing was done about it [ie driver/passengers did not intervene]

A participant in the Middlesbrough event told of a serious assault which had taken place one morning earlier in the year:

When going to town with my son in pushchair two boys and one girl beat me and I fell with pushchair and I was kicked and have problems with my back and stomach in hospital for two days. First time I am telling you today. Did not feel able to tell anyone, felt very scared. I am told “you are a Paki go to your country”. I was weeping and crying. I went to surgery and hospital for two days, unable to walk properly.

She still suffered from back problems and had been scared that her child would be taken from her by the attackers. Again, a lack of support from bystanders was highlighted:

I was on the road and White people were on the other side of the road watching the people beating me...

The participant praised hospital staff who treated her well and “*felt ashamed of what the people did*”, with a White nurse apologising to her for the incident. Hospital staff had told her to go to the police but:

People said there is no use telling the police.

She cited the experience of a friend who had been slapped by a White girl and left bleeding and hospitalised, where the police had said that witnesses were needed for action to be taken:

Police wanted a witness – everyone frightened of being a witness.

Lack of support from/trust in the authorities

Participants discussed the lack of support they had experienced from, or their lack of faith in approaching, public authorities to help them seek redress. In the main this concerned the **police**, but issues around the **council** and **schools** also arose.

The police

Lack of **police interest in/follow-up** to incidences of abuse/violence was mentioned by participants in different focus groups, and often perceived as attributable to factors such as the ethnicity, faith, national status or age of the victim. Issues such as **trust** and **confidentiality** also came to the fore.

A Middlesbrough participant reported how somebody had assaulted an Asian girl by cutting her hair off with scissors, but that

no one followed it up seriously ... police not respecting her human rights.

A man participating in the Turkish/Kurdish event reported:

Some ketchup was on my car. I called the police they did not come. If it was an English person they would have come. They only asked me to send a letter. They treat me differently because I am a foreigner ...

A participant in the Chinese group who ran a fish and chip shop reported how bricks had been thrown through her window by local youths and that she had reported it to the police. They had not shown up for 2 hours and despite being given CCTV evidence “*they did nothing*” as the offenders were under-age. She had had to call the police to find out what was happening. The episode had clearly left her with feelings of frustration and helplessness:

They never follow it up. We didn't know where to go to follow up. ... I feel let down, no help for us. ... [we are] just keeping quiet and hoping it won't happen again...

Other participants discussed whether this was an issue of racial discrimination, one feeling that:

It is not necessarily a race issue it is a human rights issue ... human rights elements are more and more relevant

Another participant disagreed, feeling that ethnicity did play a part:

I don't think they personally discriminate against Chinese people but there is a lack of enthusiasm, they are less keen to take the case on so they tend to ignore you.

However over the course of the discussion he came to agree that human rights was the key aspect:

a lot of the Chinese population think they have been discriminated against when the shop has been broken in or they have been beaten up, but a lot of the time it is not a race issue it is a human rights issue.

A Working participant recounted that he had reported a homophobic death threat to the police several months ago and had received no response. He felt the police “*are not visible in the community.*” Some participants in the Youth 18 event had had their faith in the police increased by the visible efforts made by Manchester police to recruit employees from and make links with LGBT communities:

They have a float at Mardi Gras where they dress up as stereotypical gay people but have police hats on. ... having floats at Mardi Gras it shows a connection which people can have with these big organisations...

A participant in the other Youth 18 discussion group reported:

A guy chased one of our members [in a city centre] and was giving all this abuse, we called the police and it took about half an hour for them to come and at the end of the day nothing

gets done about it. It's just the fact that nothing gets done about it. It creates a sense that we're not safe...

This participant saw age not sexuality as the most relevant factor:

It was as if [the police] weren't even bothered, I think it was mainly because we are all young.

However a participant in the other discussion group attributed the failure of the police to attend an incident of threatening behaviour in a hotel towards a lesbian woman to the fact that it was a Saturday night - the police were simply too busy.

Two LGBT participants felt that reporting such incidents to the police at all was pointless:

If something happens to me you either stick up for yourself or just get on with it. I never get it reported, there's no point.

If every time something happens you make a statement about it you'll always be down at the police station.

Another felt that more needed to be done to “*protect gay and lesbian people ... uphold the laws on hate crime.*” He attempted to avert abusive incidents by going elsewhere to socialise as he did not feel safe:

I would never go out to a pub in Warrington, you get people gobbing on you just because you wear a pink T-shirt.

Participants in one of the Blackburn discussion groups showed more faith in the police as an avenue of redress, arguing that if an incident went unreported the individual would find it hard to challenge something else that consequently happened:

It's the same as in the playground – if you don't do something about it the first time people will say “how can we help you if you don't tell us what happened?”

Some participants in the Middlesbrough group of Muslim women emphasised on similar grounds the importance of reporting hate crime, but the woman who had been seriously assaulted had not felt able to do so, for a number of factors including:

I trust hospital staff but not the police.

Another participant suggested that because of this lack of trust⁹ people should have a base in the local community where they could report such incidents, emphasising the importance of confidentiality:

Somewhere local and known [but] not the mosque.

⁹ A participant at the SABA event also raised the issue of trust - his mother had been beaten during the Brixton riots – with his consequent lack of trust reinforced by his own experiences of stop and search (see below page 22).

The importance of confidentiality was also stressed by an LGBT participant. She had been reassured by a recent meeting where a policeman had explained to her group the procedures for confidentially registering online incidences of homophobic attacks.

The council

A Vietnamese older woman recounted strong frustration with her local council as well as the police. She described a lack of effective response over 20 years to the difficulties she (and other families from minority ethnic groups) had experienced with local children which had continued into the men's adulthood (eg throwing eggs at her window, shouting at her on the streets). Her attempts to gain redress had led nowhere:

I have reported it to the council but nothing has been done about it ... they focus on my house because I am foreign looking ... I want to be re-housed because of it. Sometimes the police get involved but nothing really happens ... I get angry, the council should be involved to make an area better.

As noted previously, the participant felt that language barriers had contributed to her difficulties in achieving action from the council and made it inaccessible as a source of redress.

A Southampton participant highlighted lack of BME councillors as an issue affecting trust:

you do not get a chance to get in there.

School

Participants at the Manchester LGBT event reported incidences of persistent abuse at school from other children. Rather than providing redress, they told of a failure by schools to **treat the victims seriously and with respect**.

One participant reported persistent physical abuse by other children:

On the way home people would wait for me and beat me up, I had my nose broken.

Another participant reported an inadequate response to bullying:

My mum couldn't understand why the school weren't doing anything about it.

Another told of

general abuse shouted at me from everybody in the playground, words like dyke which I didn't even know what they meant back then ... it was worse for the lads, a boy at school who had just come out, he had his clothes flushed down the toilets...

She also felt that her school could have done more to support herself and other such pupils:

I found out after I left school that a community group had been sending information to the school about conferences and giving them the chance to do something - but the school never did anything.

Cultural inhibitors to challenge and seeking redress

Some participants reported cultural inhibitors to seeking redress and/or directly challenging abusive/violent behaviour, such as **respect for age, language difficulties, feelings of shame and reluctance to complain.**

The lady in Middlesbrough who had been seriously assaulted reported

feeling shy to tell anyone I was beaten.

A Chinese woman slapped by an elderly lady in the toilets in MacDonalDs was inhibited by the age of the assailant from doing anything in response. A woman in the Turkish/Kurdish group reported that her lack of English inhibited her ability to challenge hostile behaviour on a bus:

He gave me a bad look ... he stepped really hard on my toes. Because I could not speak English, I could not do anything, or defend myself.

A male Newcastle participant highlighted a factor potentially deterring women from reporting:

If my wife and daughter had a problem they wouldn't tell me because we would have a fight [ie he would fight the abuser].

Participants in this group reported other cultural inhibitors to challenging poor treatment generally:

We don't want to go and complain we feel it is wrong to go and complain.

If I do anything do I get bad publicity for my family and community? ... We keep a lot of things inside ourselves. English people don't care about their country – Indian and Bangladeshi people are proud of their country.

CHALLENGING INSTITUTIONS

I am thinking, if we have a commission for equality then they would be equally strong to take on another institution.

Chinese participant

Many participants raised the difficulties faced by individuals in challenging unfairness or abusive behaviour by institutions/within organisations. Some highlighted the general difficulties faced by **individuals taking on bureaucracies**; some the particular helplessness felt by those wishing to challenge the behaviour of those, such as the **police and teachers**, who should themselves be avenues of redress when treated badly. In doing so they raised human rights issues such as **confidentiality, procedural fairness and safety**, as well as issues relating to community relations and discrimination.

Challenging institutions: the police

We always go to the police if something goes wrong, but where do we go if the police does something wrong? We don't know where to go.

Day-mer participant

Participants in the non-English speaking Chinese group expressed anger at police raids on minority ethnic businesses which they felt were commonplace, with assumptions made that workers there were “illegals”. (The group pointed out that White British workers were not expected to take their passport to work.)

Direct discrimination and mistreatment by the police was reported by participants in the Turkish Kurdish and young Black British groups in London. It was most strongly emphasised in discussions among the Turkish Kurdish group, who saw police behaviour as a breach of their human rights.

Some raised issues around stop and search:

They say they stopped you because they felt like it.

SABA participant

When I ask “why do you stop me?” they give you no reason.

Migrants are seen as potential criminals. They are stopped for no reason. They do this in public and it is humiliating.

Day-mer participants

A SABA participant commented that awareness needed to be raised of stop and search rights:

I just read in the paper about them but most kids don't know their rights

A Turkish Kurdish woman told how a minor fare dispute with a London Underground official had ended with the official calling in the police. Accompanied by sniffer dogs, they threw her belongings on the ground and started searching them:

When they saw my sign-on book they said “oh you are a refugee so we will deport you”. I was very afraid. ... Now I don't even use that station. I felt very powerless. I felt that I had to do what the police were telling me to do as I am under immigration control. ... They didn't treat me like a human being. The first question was whether I was Arab or not. I was using a train station near where Arabs live. Why does he need to know if I am Arab or not to treat me with respect?

A woman in the same group agreed, highlighting stereotypical attitudes:

They said “look she is a refugee but look at the perfume in her bag, it's very expensive”. Although we study human rights here, there is no help from the police. ... My mother needed help but there was no help.

The young Black British group did not feel reassured by efforts to recruit more Black policemen:

*The Black policemen are the worst ... [they] show off as they need to prove themselves to the White officers. They have to try harder, they feel like a substitute not part of the team.*¹⁰

Challenging institutions: school

There's nothing stopping them ... from going "run faster you little gay" ... what can you do if you want to complain about a teacher?

Youth 18 participant

Participants in both LGBT discussion groups described incidences of **insensitive behaviour** by teachers and failure to respect LGBT children's **dignity and confidentiality**.

One participant told how the school's insensitive approach had damaged family relations:

My mum only found out because she went into school to find out why I was getting bullied and they just told her straight out "she thinks she is gay". ... the way the school reacted had an effect on the way my whole family dealt with it.

Another told how, after a close friend accidentally 'outed' her to a teacher, her treatment by her headteacher exacerbated her problems with other children and affected her wellbeing and education:

The biggest bully in school overheard and within ten minutes absolutely everybody in school knew about it and was talking about it. ... I got called to the head mistress and the words out of her mouth were "what is this nonsense?" Then they said I had to tell my parents that night or they would tell them ... After, I was stopped from changing in the girls changing room for PE, it was horrendous. ... They treat you like a pervert even though I was only about a 12 or 13 year old girl with very mixed up emotions. ... I was basically segregated from everyone else, and I got that for another three years.

A participant in the other discussion group commented that while she had experienced some very supportive teachers during her education, this had not been the case at the faith school she had been attending when she first came out:

The teachers were worse than the pupils ... I was always having the Bible read to me ... there is so much which happens [at school] which doesn't come out into the public.

¹⁰ Age and not just ethnicity was stressed by this group as a significant underlying factor:

Older people in the [Black] community don't respect us. ... I asked the [Black] bus driver a simple question but he told me to get off the bus.

Challenging institutions: the council

Participants in the Middlesbrough, Newcastle and Chinese groups described their feelings of powerlessness and frustration in relationships with the council, whether in terms of **poor services** or perceived **unfair/disrespectful treatment** from staff. Several highlighted the **inadequate support structures** for individuals wishing to complain about/seek redress from such bureaucracies; some particularly highlighting concerns about **confidentiality**.

A Middlesbrough participant described the many years of poor services she felt her two disabled children had received from social services and others, and the feelings of frustration and helplessness this had engendered:

I have tried again and again to get things for them – other people with disabled children get things. I have now given up, nobody listens to me, they do not listen to what I want. ... I want my children to go to college but I have problems getting them in and out of my house because there is no proper access for them and I can't get alterations done and I can't get transport to take them to college. ... Social workers have been involved but they don't listen to what I want. ... White people with children with similar disabilities have the opportunities my children don't have, I feel strongly discriminated against.

Participants in both Newcastle discussion groups reported perceptions that the planning process operated locally worked unfairly against minority ethnic groups. One alleged the council had 'swept under the carpet' differential treatment of a BME employee. A Bangladeshi man in the group raised the attitudes of council staff:

Those who work in the [local] government do not use these words [ie such as 'Paki'], they use their anger in a different way, I can understand their body language saying "go away you Paki".¹¹

A participant in the Chinese group had pursued at length a grievance he had had with the council regarding a private planning matter. He had had support and information from British neighbours on complaints procedures but had concluded that individuals were powerless in the face of such institutions:

I still got nowhere ...it is very difficult to get into an institution, it's a closed shop, no way you can break through. ...

Others in the group agreed on the difficulty for individuals, even if they had a good command of English, to achieve redress:

We have got other things to think about we have got our children, we have got work, sometimes you just have to leave it and carry on with life.

¹¹ A Turkish/Kurdish participant also raised the effect of the body language as well as the direct words used by staff, in this case at Jobcentres.

A Newcastle participant also felt individuals needed more support:

it would be useful if someone feels they want to make a complaint – there needs to be an independent body or person who says “yes we will support you to take this forward” or “no, it cannot happen”.

Another felt people from Black and minority ethnic groups in particular lacked avenues of redress:

[they] do not have anyone to go to, to say that they have been treated badly. There’s no one telling them not to do that.

Another feared that confidentiality was unlikely to be respected in complaints about the council/MPs:

Most of us in our experience know that [they] have the ability to stitch anybody up if they want to. ... When people are vulnerable your life and income depends on it – what is the safeguard...

The perceived ineffectiveness of formal channels and such fears over confidentiality meant that many used informal means to pursue matters:

At the moment a lot of people rely on a member of the community or someone with political power to put this to the Council, and wait to see if they will put in a good word for you and say “leave it with us”.

Challenging institutions: mental health services

I’ve come across elderly people with mental health problems who are not treated with respect.

Newcastle participant

A Black carer, an older woman, in the Southampton group raised the difficulties mental health users and carers faced in **challenging their treatment**:

I have been to [Mental Health Review] Tribunals and the people in the Tribunals don’t listen to our views, they don’t listen to the patients and carers. ... They think that if you are educated less than them they speak above you. They use different language. ... Patients are not given dignity. ... [they are] treated like a pack.

Other members of the group strongly agreed that MHR Tribunals were a particular area of concern, and that this was exacerbated by the lack of BME members and of appropriate training.

Challenging in the workplace

Three female participants highlighted their perception that there was a lack of effective redress where **employers or potential employers** treated individuals unfairly, citing personal experiences relating respectively to pregnancy (several years ago) and sexuality (two incidences). The former saw such incidents as difficult to challenge:

I have fought about discrimination in the past due to pregnancy but I feel that in the end I didn't get anywhere, people usually find a way of justifying why you haven't been given the job.¹²

An LGBT participant described the behaviour of her manager (at a bar where she was working) towards a lesbian job applicant, a friend of hers, and her own reaction to this:

[the applicant] overheard the manager saying "we can't employ her, she looks like a bloke" ... she wasn't bothered about being mistaken for a lad but still they wouldn't give her a job. So I walked out and quit over that, I wasn't going to work for an employer that doesn't treat people fairly.

Another described abusive behaviour she had experienced in the workplace, with a poster put up with her picture and the word 'dyke' written above and below it. She felt that her manager had been personally supportive, but mechanisms to deal with it formally appeared to have been lacking.

Challenging private sector services

Discriminatory behaviour and insensitive attitudes among private sector service providers were raised by two participants, on the ground of sexuality and disability respectively. The former, a Woking participant, reported instances of hotels openly refusing to accept gay weddings. A blind participant raised insensitive and disrespectful attitudes:

They have not allowed me in [to my gym] because I didn't have my carer ... There is no respect and they are not tolerant ... People don't realise there are people who are disabled and need less help. ... I know people who have been tilted out of pubs. When I have gone out with my friends some of them have been told to go out because of health and safety.

She and her discussion group felt that challenging such behaviour and attitudes should be handled with caution. They felt that a tolerant approach which respected other people's views was more likely to effect change than a confrontational approach "going in all guns blazing", which would result in people 'switching off'.

EDUCATION/YOUTH SERVICES

Education and youth services came up repeatedly in focus group discussions, in terms of:

- Education as a source of adverse experience

¹² This was echoed by some of the young men in Blackburn who although they had not personally experienced discrimination felt that it would be hard to tell if employers were actually putting equal opportunities into practice in recruitment rather than it being a paper policy, a participant commenting that if he encountered discrimination: "I'd just think, "it's happened, what can you do?"

- The importance of, and lack of provision of, effective and equitable youth facilities
- Education (particularly schools) as a potentially powerful tool to challenge stereotypes and provide information
- Schools and youth activities as an important space/means to bring different people in communities together

Education as a source of adverse experience

*Teachers need to be trained to deal with today's issues affecting young people.
SABA participant*

As shown in the preceding sections, education was raised by several participants in different focus groups as a source of adverse experience, in connection with

- the need for better language support, in relation to supporting both students and parents
- the treatment of LGBT schoolchildren both by other children and teachers.

In addition, the group of Black British young people in London focused most strongly on school education – far more strongly than they did on the police - as the key area needing attention and improvement. Issues relating to this were also raised by individuals in other groups. Between them they raised:

- the perceived inability of teachers and the curriculum to engage effectively with young people
- schools failing to provide for cultural needs and recognise and deal with culturally specific behaviours
- disparities in treatment and expectations.

The Black British participants felt strongly that many teachers needed to improve their performance. They felt that they did not respect or care about pupils and lacked both interest in their job and the ability to motivate pupils.

The teachers don't really teach you they just get their money and go. They don't care if you enjoy it.

There are some lessons you go to and you know that teacher is not interested.

There is only one or two teachers that are good – the rest are just getting paid. ... Fix teachers and root out the bad ones.

Both they and some of the Blackburn participants felt the school curriculum as currently taught failed to engage young people.

I think a lot of the stuff you learn at high school is patronising, they talk down to you, there's no discussion.

Blackburn participant

Some Black British young people felt that teachers needed an enhanced understanding of culturally specific behaviours:

It seems like Black kids are seen as aggressive. I come from a big, noisy family, I was chatty and when I am asking questions I am chucked out of school...

You end up going home to the estates where you end up smoking weed and all that. But if it's a White kid who is asking questions and is all hyped up they are told to "calm".

A Southampton participant who moved to the UK as a child described the failure of his school to identify and support his culturally specific needs, highlighting the need for staff training:

Because I am a Black man I dress and do some things that some of the kids would not do and them sort of things were picked on ... which made people to label, stigmatise, be stereotypic. ... Staff in schools, mental health organisations etc need more training to improve things, make them more aware, more understanding about different cultures.

A Newcastle participant working in the education sector perceived disparities in treatment and expectations, with Asian families concentrated in lower performing schools in poorer areas:

Parents have the right to a lot of things but don't exercise their rights. Their expectations of schools are low. ... There are very low expectations from schools. Parents are not invited for parental interviews. Schools would not be able to get away with that in affluent areas.

A Woking participant also highlighted that the vast majority of "below standard" schools included Asian pupils, feeling that not enough was done to communicate with Asian parents and help them to support their children and improve their life chances.

The need for Youth services/facilities

Several participants in different focus groups highlighted the impact on **safety and community relations** of the inadequate and/or inequitable provision of youth services and facilities.

A Youth 18 participant explained the difficulties LGBT teenagers had in accessing age appropriate and safe activities:

You have to be really careful of how you promote youth groups in case someone turns up and says "I'm gay" but actually batters everyone up. Around here [in Manchester] people think "let's go to the gay village" but then you've got the whole issue of underage drinking ... there's a real lack of activities for under 18s where they can feel safe. I didn't have anywhere else to go when I was underage so I did just go to the gay village every night, so I was putting myself at risk so that I could feel alright and fit in.

A Turkish/Kurdish participant commented that:

There is no place for the children to play, all children's play areas have been closed. Children express their anger by getting into gangs but blame is shifted onto foreigners.

A young man in the other discussion group echoed this view:

The youth are split into groups and they create trouble. You don't feel safe. Before, we used to go to youth clubs. But now there is nowhere to go at night. There are no places for us to mix.

A young Woking participant also highlighted cuts in funding to youth centres and the impact on young people not involved in organised religious activities:

The facilities are there for young people who want to attend a place of worship, but for those young people who do not ... there is nowhere for them to go. It is difficult for them to express themselves, it's difficult for them to campaign or lobby for themselves ... There is nothing for the youth to do, nowhere to go, if they are three or four they are perceived as a gang and told to move from public places because they are intimidating.

The vital role played by meaningful youth activities was strongly emphasised by the group of young Black British Londoners:

There is nothing productive to do. We keep going back to the estates. We are like we are living in a prison. We just go out for a few minutes but we always go back. It's like going back to a prison block.

There are not as many youth clubs and people are now standing in the streets as they have nowhere to go.

One participant described the powerful effect on his outlook on life of attending a youth training activity where he had been taught to be a team player – he had since become a youth worker. Participants in the group highlighted an absence of funding for such services and workers. They felt this left young Black men deprived of mentors to help them widen their horizons and progress. Some felt incentives should be offered to persuade young people to take part in such activities, for examples certificates to underline achievement.¹³ Some felt that youth activities should be opened at various times, one pointing out that this could have other benefits:

In the USA there is midnight basketball. It's known that you are most likely to offend between 10 and 12 midnight. So basketball is used as a distraction.

A participant in the Youth 18 event explained that her group's lack of funds meant that they were located in a general youth building, raising problems regarding safety, confidentiality and privacy:

When people go in they're usually with friends so won't be comfortable picking up homosexual leaflets.

Participants in Blackburn felt strongly and talked at length about how unequal provision of youth facilities had undermined community relations and Asian young people's safety and feelings of being dealt with fairly:

Since we've been young we've always been playing in the backstreets, trying to find a back alley where there isn't a car parked or a dustbin so we can play footy for ten minutes in

¹³ A participant in the Blackburn group also emphasised the importance of certificates and accreditation, pointing out that in Youth Action “we gain certificates, skills and confidence which can be taken into life.”

peace. Since we were young we always hoped for a football pitch, they've built one ... but it's in [the White community's area] ... we might get beaten up so we don't go there, so it causes tension. How come them lot are privileged having a footy pitch and in our community all we get is a big pitch with dirt on it that you can't play on? ... we didn't feel safe there because we might be in danger, so we just played on the streets.

Another observed that

Because we have nowhere to play it encourages us to hang around on street corners which is classed as anti social behaviour.

When the discussion moved to human rights another participant connected again with this issue:

The example before we haven't got a playing facility, that's a breach of human rights because the opportunity is not being distributed fairly because lots of boys and girls play sport to escape reality, but then some don't have that opportunity. That's a form of discrimination of human rights, it's not fair, it's not equality.

Education as a means of challenging stereotypes and providing positive information

Participants in a range of different focus groups identified educating children and young people as the key means of **promoting change in people's attitudes** and addressing stereotypes, for example by **highlighting positive role models**. Participants felt that adverse attitudes and stereotypes held people back within all walks of life and contributed to **unfair behaviour** and **poor relationships** between different groups and communities. LGBT participants also saw schools as a potentially powerful **source of vital information to young LGBT people**. However all the groups in which young people were in the majority raised strong question marks over the ability of schools effectively to deliver information on issues relating to equality, human rights and good relations, and highlighted the key role that could potentially be played by **young people themselves**.

Addressing stereotypes and highlighting positive role models

The group of young Black British Londoners felt strongly that stereotypes and attitudes around race and age, held both within and outside their community, were holding them back – for example contributing to their difficulties in gaining the experience necessary to find a job.

There are some Black bad youths but we shouldn't all be painted with the same brush.

As a Black person you feel like you are begging for a job.

They felt that members of their own community needed to challenge its definitions of success and broaden young people's aspirations, feeling strongly that educating Black children about a broader variety of role models was vital:

There are no role models the best thing I know is like a footballer, an MC or a runner. ... So that's what our generation grow up thinking we want to do. I don't know any doctors or lawyers who are Black who come from where I live.

An older woman in the Vietnamese focus group highlighted the importance of Vietnamese children being educated about their language and culture.

Participants in one of the Youth 18 discussion groups strongly emphasised the importance of positive role models, both for LGBT young people and to educate straight people:

If there was more advertising [with] non straight couples people would see that this is their normal lives – these are real people – families can have gay parents or kids and still be normal, it's just getting people to understand that these are real people.

Participants in the Turkish/Kurdish group felt education within schools to be a vital means of breaking down hostile stereotypes about migrant communities:

This should be somehow incorporated into the education of students in schools and it should be part of the lessons somehow, anyway.

What the colleague said is very right ... We have to show people the benefit of the migrant and the refugee communities so that when they reach the age of 30-35 years their attitudes to the migrant will be different.

A Working participant emphasised the importance of involving young people in the activities of people with disabilities to improve attitudes. This was echoed by participants at the Southampton event. Both discussion groups emphasised the effect of adverse stereotypes and stigma on the employment prospects of people with disabilities:

If you have a mental health problem and are blind, people already start to worry. ... [but] someone with blindness has better prospects of getting a job than someone with mental health problems.

There should be education in schools this is where all the problems are. ... That's the place to catch them. They are really interested and are really accepting at that age.

A young man at the Blackburn event also emphasised the importance of 'getting them young':

Through my youth work I see that the older generation are stuck in their ways and it's very hard to change this ... Young people are easily led, so to teach them about integration at an early age will have long term effects. ... the youth are the future and you can teach them stuff you can't get through to old people.

Working participants warned against concentrating only on younger people:

I actually think there is a lot of work being done with younger people, but more effort needs to be made for older people as I think they are of a set mind frame, which may need changing. I think a lot more work is needed with the older generation.

You are never too late to learn.

One Youth 18 participant suggested:

lifestyles should be taught [in school] like [comparative] religion so that people know about different lifestyles.

Another felt however that leaving it to school age would be too late to address stereotypes and change attitudes:

It should start as young as nursery ... start it at a young age where views can be influenced rather than teaching 13 year olds who have already made their own views.

Another agreed that reaching children at a young age was important, suggesting that cartoons and videos would be more effective than

somebody just telling you, this is right and this is wrong.

Education and information for LGBT young people

Participants in both discussion groups at the Youth 18 event discussed the importance of improving the quality and quantity of **information available to LGBT young people**.

One discussion group raised the issue of suicide rates among LGBT teenagers, one participant emphasising the potential impact of better education and information:

It is vital that education is taught because it's their generation that we are trying to make it better for ... the next generation don't need to go through the heartache which we've been through. ... [school aged children] are the age groups which are affected by it the most, so it should be the education system that should lead it. Then it will affect everywhere else as well.

Everyone knows how hard it was coming out because the information wasn't there. ... [we need to] give [school age children] the information so that they are not alone. ... learn you're not strange ...

Participants in both Youth 18 discussion groups highlighted and strongly criticised the practical difficulties in accessing information, such as restrictions in schools and libraries on images showing same sex couples/overly restrictive controls on school/library computers:

The fact that you can't use school computers to look up words like gay. That seems to me a fundamental breach of your human rights. ... You would probably have to go to the council [to get information] but that's dead embarrassing, being the only person having to explain why you want to look up that word.

When the legal age to have sex is 16, we should have the same rights as a heterosexual to find the information we need when we are that young.

A participant who had grown up in a rural area emphasised that this was particularly important in such areas where access to printed information on issues and support services relating to LGBT people was severely limited.

Effective education on equality, human rights and good relations

Participants in all groups with young people in the majority raised strong question marks over the ability of teachers/schools to deliver effective

education and information around equality, good relations and human rights, and emphasised the potentially powerful role that **young people themselves** could play.

Participants in the Youth 18 group commented negatively on teachers' competence to educate children about LGBT issues:

You got a piece of paper [in PSP] and had the chance to write down a question in confidentiality which the teacher would then answer anonymously. They answered everyone else's question but they didn't answer mine about "what if you fancy other women?" That would have been the chance to help me but instead it sent me out the message that you just keep your mouth shut.

*It's not a case of not getting information from teachers, it's that many of them don't know the real facts.*¹⁴

Participants in one of the Blackburn discussions groups warned that the way in which such issues were put across to children needed careful thought. The group discussed the human rights sessions they had been given in PSP at school, all agreeing that the sessions had been forgettable and ineffective:

It's one of those things that teachers are forced to do and the pupils see it as an hour off rather than work. Someone just comes and preaches to you rather than discussing it. ... I'm not saying it was a bad thing it's just I don't remember it.

Some stressed the potentially powerful role that young people themselves could play in helping improve such education:

I think it would be a really good idea for us to go back to schools and talk to and educate the current pupils and staff and say this is what happened to me, but I'm still here now and I'm proud to be what I am.

Youth 18 participant

In the youth groups we need to tell the young people who are leaving school that integrating is good. ... we have to show them that they have to be open minded.

Older and younger people might have different ideas about what are important issues. I'm not saying that one or the other is wrong but it's important to get the issues across and not ones that are out of touch. ... Young people are important for other young people to talk to. ... when the big words start coming out I don't understand so it's no good.

Blackburn participants

Education and youth activities as a means of bringing people together

Many participants emphasised how **school and youth activities** could be an important, though by no means the only, means of improving relationships by **bringing communities together**.

Participants at the Newcastle and Middlesbrough groups stressed the importance of schools as a social space:

¹⁴ This participant's teacher had given incorrect information regarding the age of consent.

You need to start with the children. ... You could ask the school to be the host of a multicultural event, to do food, music etc. It is positive to reach children through schools.

In school food brings people together when they bring different dishes together.

A young woman at the Youth 18 group spoke positively of a hate crime conference in a school where different groups had discussed their experiences of hate crime.

The young men in Blackburn emphasised the lack of opportunities for Asian and White children to mix socially, partly because of the structure of Muslim children's lives:

We had to go to the mosque so we couldn't go out to play until after 8, by which time all the White kids have been out to play.

Even at weekends when you can integrate we just stick with our Muslim friends – you don't make new friends just for the weekend. ... It's just the life that's been built into our culture and society.

One participant described the segregated nature of local youth clubs based on their geographical location in 'the Asian area' and 'the White area', commenting that a key benefit of Youth Action was its more central base. This attracted people from different parts of the borough, with the consequence that "*I've met quite a few people from other religions.*" The group strongly felt that more proactive efforts were needed to provide opportunities for integration locally. A participant in the other discussion group who studied in Leeds felt a better job was done there, citing activities such as a family fun run:

It's great to go down to it and see all the people from different backgrounds together and that's down to the council.¹⁵

Participants in both the Blackburn and Vietnamese discussion groups emphasised the important role of sport and music:

I can talk to any young person about footy, cricket, music. Older people don't have that.
Blackburn participant

When I play sport I do not think about your skin or your character. [also re] music ... it does not matter about your skin.
Vietnamese participant.

Another young Vietnamese participant described communities being brought together by a children's drama project:

It was great you had a Vietnamese kid with a Chinese kid and a Muslim kid all working together and not sat at home watching the TV. They all get along very well and they played very well but it was a really short project and I have not seen anything like that since ...

¹⁵ The Woking group also gave several examples of successful activities bringing together different parts of the community.

HOW SHOULD THE CEHR OPERATE?

Whereas the discussions on discrimination, human rights and good relations had varied widely, discussions about how the CEHR should operate were less disparate, with **strong common themes** emerging across the different focus groups.

A focus on results

There was a real desire among groups that the CEHR should achieve something of meaning to them – though some felt sceptical that it would. While many felt enthusiasm at the prospect of the CEHR's establishment, some clearly felt let down by other organisations and agencies and had a strong desire that the new body should be different. Many saw the fact that grassroots focus groups were being held as a very positive sign.

A common view expressed was the wish to see the CEHR actually *do* something, rather than being a talking shop or issuing long winded reports.¹⁶ Some individuals made the need for the new body to actually 'do something', or variations on that theme, their top priority for the CEHR (see below page 41).

There was a sense that the CEHR needed to 'get its act together' early on:

You do not want to be back here in 3 years asking the same questions, let's do it once and do it right.

Blackburn participant

It was important to some that it should not over-promise, but rather should seek to earn and retain people's trust:

Trust is very important, doing what they promise.

Chinese participant

If something is bad it will spread quickly, if it is good it takes more time to spread the word.

Newcastle participant

Information

The groups emphasised that CEHR information needed to

- be simple and use plain language easily understandable to the layperson
 - a participant in the Working event who worked on a disability helpline particularly praised the DRC's method of using case studies as a means of getting across complex information.
- use a range of means of getting across to people and have various options for contact

¹⁶ The CEHR's 3 yearly state of the nation report, which was mentioned in the presentation, was singled out by some as the sort of thing that had no meaning or relevance to them.

- eg internet, posters, leaflets, broadcast and print media (including those operating in languages other than English), meetings, discussion events (eg on TV), telephone helpline
 - many emphasised however the need for **helplines to be properly staffed** so that people were not kept hanging on and on

you feel helpless waiting so you end up giving up – helpline makes you feel helpless.
Chinese participant.

- be available in a range of formats and inclusive and accessible to all
 - including young people in general, people with a range of disabilities, non-English speakers (translated materials and language lines, information on what to do if material is not in your language), people living in rural areas and LGBT young people
 - the latter facing restrictions on computers in schools and libraries and difficulties using home telephone lines, and needing to be able to seek and receive information in a safe, confidential and private manner

if you are picking it up you don't want it to say U R Gay. It's about being able to get the information without being beaten up for it.
Youth 18 participant.

Given the problems widely reported in receiving understandable information from other services, accessibility and inclusivity of information was clearly for many participants a **touchstone issue**. It would indicate to them from the outset whether or not they could have any faith in the CEHR to deliver for them.

Information considered useful included:

- individuals' rights

I think if you asked people now "what are your rights as a UK citizen?" they would not know.
Vietnamese participant.

- where to go for more information
- how to go about complaining when things go wrong and who to complain to – act as a signpost service
- the performance of different services in the area in terms of discrimination and human rights
- publicising diverse role models (eg within the LGBT and Black communities) and celebrating achievements.
- publicising good practice (eg the activities in Manchester and the North West to support LGBT people, identifying a cohesive area for others to learn from)
- publicising case studies where unfair treatment has been successfully challenged.

An equality worker in Woking also felt it would be useful to have information for organisations on their obligations and the consequences of not meeting them.

Local engagement

There was an overlap between issues around information and regional/local working:

- several groups emphasised the human touch as a valuable aspect of imparting information –
 - many stated that the consultation event had been very valuable and that the CEHR should try and do more of this type of grassroots event
- many felt information needed a local and not just national aspect
 - in terms both of outlets – eg local newspapers and radio, shops, town halls, community centres, police stations, employment centres, schools, colleges, youth groups, places of worship
 - and content – eg a central newsletter which could be adapted to different areas so that it included local as well as national issues.

Many participants in different groups emphasised the importance of having a **named person** to whom they knew they could go. For participants in the Chinese, Turkish/Kurdish and Vietnamese groups the **local community group/centre** organising the event was seen as the key means of disseminating information. Some participants suggested the CEHR having a **single person to lead** on engaging with local organisations in an area.

The organisational awareness testing indicated that many had low awareness of equality and human rights organisations, with the exception of Age Concern and to a lesser extent Help the Aged.

I do work in the community and I have heard the names of these organisations and the only reason I know what they do is because I understand the title of the organisation – not because I have a direct contact with the organisation or they have contact with us or the community. There are services there for equal rights but they are not proactive within our community.

Vietnamese participant.

People don't go anywhere [when they need advice] – we don't know where to go to.

Middlesbrough participant.

However from the awareness testing and from discussion groups it was clear that awareness of Citizens Advice Bureaux was high. This did not necessarily mean that people would access services. Participants in the Chinese and Southampton groups raised barriers such as lack of interpreters and/or BME volunteers/staff, limited opening times and long waiting times. However positive experiences were reported in some groups.

It was clear from discussions that in the view of many participants the CEHR should partner with **grassroots groups** eg community centres as they were

accessible, knowledgeable and trusted. This was seen as an important means of the CEHR having a local presence, knowledge and a human face, and avoiding being a faceless centralised body. Some cautioned that establishing effective local partnerships needed a degree of skill and local knowledge and that the CEHR would need to be **selective** in its approach. The CEHR needed to select partners who had the ability to access and effectively engage people within the local community.

I would like to see [the CEHR] support community groups so that they can outreach into the community ... they have the understanding already, the trust already, and the information already to outreach.

Vietnamese participants

You can find out which organisations are respected rather than just use any organisation. ... Some [disability groups] are very political and if you don't think in the same way or don't like the way they do things you will not get help.

Southampton participant.

Talk to the community not just workers. Middlesbrough participant.

In Turkey [human rights workers] are based on the streets not in a room – they are where people can see them.

Turkish/Kurdish participant.

Some groups, such as the Turkish/Kurdish and Vietnamese groups, feared that without a community engagement approach they would be invisible to the CEHR and that their needs and views would be overlooked by it as by other organisations and services:

we have nothing like a newspaper or magazine that has been translated for us ... I do not know how to use the computer ... we have no radio station either we need to be heard ... this is the first time I have been consulted about anything.

Vietnamese participant.

Many participants in different groups emphasised the precarious nature of funding for their groups and that they needed more support. Some expressed the hope that the CEHR might be a source of sustainable funding and/or advice to small groups on how to achieve such funding. Participants in several groups expressed the view that there was unequal and unfair allocation of funds between different ethnic/faith communities, sometimes pointing to their group/community's lack of funds as contrasted with those made available to other groups. Similarly a Woking participant felt LGBT people were not currently getting "a fair share".¹⁷

¹⁷ In the other Woking discussion group, a few participants felt that an approach based on human rights was the only hope for the CEHR to avoid being drawn into allegations of unfairness: *I think the only hope that the Commission has is to focus on what is a common understanding of human rights as you [described it] in the introduction and what it is really about and one will hope that something seriously comes from that...*

It is about the individual ... treat everybody as they would be treated rather than treating everybody the same ... that approach is central ... otherwise I assume there will be competition for rights, competition for money.

Another participant however expressed scepticism at this notion, feeling it more important that the CEHR concentrate on issues such as racial discrimination in employment.

The importance of engaging young people

The importance of the CEHR taking into account factors such as **age**, and to a lesser degree **gender**, was emphasised strongly by participants in a number of focus groups. The need to make particular efforts to engage young people, and the value of so doing, was a key theme of all the groups in which young people were in the majority. Some felt that the CEHR was unlikely to achieve this unless it tapped into the potential of young people themselves, whether by partnering with youth groups or employing young people on its workforce.

While several people in the Middlesbrough and Newcastle events highlighted places of worship and community leaders/elders as useful and important links for the CEHR, the Blackburn group as a whole and a female participant in Middlesbrough felt that engagement at this level would be insufficient. Differing organisations/strategies were needed if the CEHR was to make links with Muslims of different ages and genders.

You've got to argue what influence the Mosque has on young people nowadays.
Blackburn participant.

Age came through as a key factor regarding the Vietnamese community. An older woman participating in the non-English speaking Vietnamese discussion group felt that *"language is a very important issue for those of us aged thirty and above, but it isn't for the younger generation"*. In fact this was not borne out by the younger participants themselves involved in the English-speaking discussion group, who raised it as a major issue. In the non-English group, the discussion was completely dominated by two women elders. A participant in the younger, English-speaking group noted that:

When you come into consultation you have to ask people who are quite mature, but you do need opinion from the young people ... the old people do feel very much in control of decisions in the community.

A participant in the Chinese event echoed this:

Culturally we don't challenge older people.

Some Blackburn participants and a Woking participant felt that a completely separate strategy would be needed by the CEHR in relation to young people – eg branding, communications, information and engagement – capable of appealing to young women as well as to young men.

To the outsider [CEHR should] almost look like two organisations as they do one thing for young people and another for older people. ... Religion is crucial but our hobbies and interests are the same... To be effective you need to target young people regardless of religion.
Blackburn participant.

Some felt that methods such as texting and online discussion forums would be more effective than traditional communication strategies, but that the CEHR needed to guard against seeming patronising:

If you try to be cool it will fail young people will see through it.
Blackburn participant.

They felt the 'Ask Frank' campaign and STR8 UP were examples of getting this difficult balance right.

The Youth 18 group emphasised the importance of activities and fun (eg a parade) as an element of the CEHR's branding, information and communications work, and the need to avoid being 'PC' which would turn people off:

If it's just talking about it people will get bored.

The fun stuff can help [avoid being too PC], it makes people more comfortable.

As mentioned in the preceding section sport and music were seen by many young participants as helpful tools for engaging young people. Participants in Blackburn encouraged the CEHR to piggyback on external relevant activities citing those around the World Cup (such as the red and white flags and the Blue Peter World Cup slogan competition). These were seen as unforced and non-artificial means of increasing feelings of togetherness and raising interest and awareness. Participants in the Middlesbrough group also mentioned positively the national outbreak of England red and white flags during the World Cup.

The Black British young people's event was organised as an MC competition, preceded by a focus group discussion. Participants spoke about the importance of music in their life, and their raps in the competition (on the theme of discrimination) eloquently demonstrated this:

Most Black kids I know they say they are doing music. Because it's deep, it's the only way we can express ourselves – it's a way to escape the trap.

They stressed that they would never have come to the consultation without the music competition to draw them in, feeling that the CEHR needed to learn from this if it wanted to engage ordinary young people. One participant felt that to be effective the CEHR needed to work through people with whom they could empathise:

If you had someone from the young Black community telling us, it might be better.

Participants at the Blackburn event stressed the importance for effective youth engagement of the CEHR partnering with groups that were youth led:

It's important to have young people in charge because we can understand the young people that come. The majority of us play football and computer games but if you were to talk to a 40 year old they wouldn't know what the latest console games are....A 40 year old would talk about politics or whatever.

Another participant suggested that this had implications for the CEHR's own workforce¹⁸:

they should have young people as staff. If young people help young people their understanding will be better. ... you can do all the work but if there is a slip in communication, they're not gonna come back. Most people have the right issues that they want to discuss but most fail in trying to communicate them.

Blackburn participant.

KEY MESSAGES AND PRIORITIES

At the end of each discussion group each individual participant was given the opportunity to give those establishing the CEHR a personal message. They were asked to briefly state **one priority** they would like to see the CEHR concentrate on achieving over its **first three years**.

The point made at the outset of the event to explain this exercise - that the CEHR could not do everything and that it would have to prioritise to be effective – seemed on the whole to be understood and accepted. A variety of views were expressed during the priorities exercise. Some issues were raised only by one or two individuals or, in a minority of cases, expressed in overly vague/all encompassing terms to categorise.

Although participants used different language and emphases, a **number of broad categories** emerged. Many of these issues had already been covered in the earlier discussion, the results of which have been set out in the report above.

The early priorities identified for the CEHR were, in summary, to:

1. develop a local presence and outreach to communities by funding/supporting sustainability of/partnering with community groups; enable the views of people (including young people) in local communities to be heard and listened to (20)
2. focus on issues around race relations/multiculturalism/integration/ attitudes (of Government, media and individuals) towards people from BME groups and immigrants (14)
3. promote education (especially but not solely in schools) re positive role models and achievements/different cultures and lifestyles/value of others/people's rights (12)

¹⁸ Some participants in other groups also raised the profile of the CEHR workforce and the importance of it being representative of and/or 'in touch' with people across the community: *They should employ people from different communities who can deal with people coming in with all sorts of different needs.*

Middlesbrough participant.

It should have ... people with real life experience.

Turkish/Kurdish participant.

4. focus on issues around accessibility of/discrimination by services (including better language provision) (11)
5. focus on issues around equitable access to employment/educational opportunities (10)
6. really do something/be proactive/keep promises/build trust (7)
7. provide individuals with clear information and advice (5).

ANNEX A WHO ATTENDED THE EVENTS?

In total 144 people completed personal data forms over the course of the ten events. Figure 1 shows the numbers broken down by event with the number of participants ranging from 9 to 20:

Figure 1

Chinese Health Information Centre	15
Vietnamese Refugee Information Centre	10
Society for the Advancement of Black Arts	15
Day-mer Community Centre	19
The James Wiltshire Trust	9
Youth Action	9
Woking Borough Council	20
Youth 18	13
Sahara Womens Group	18
North East Hindu Cultural Trust	16

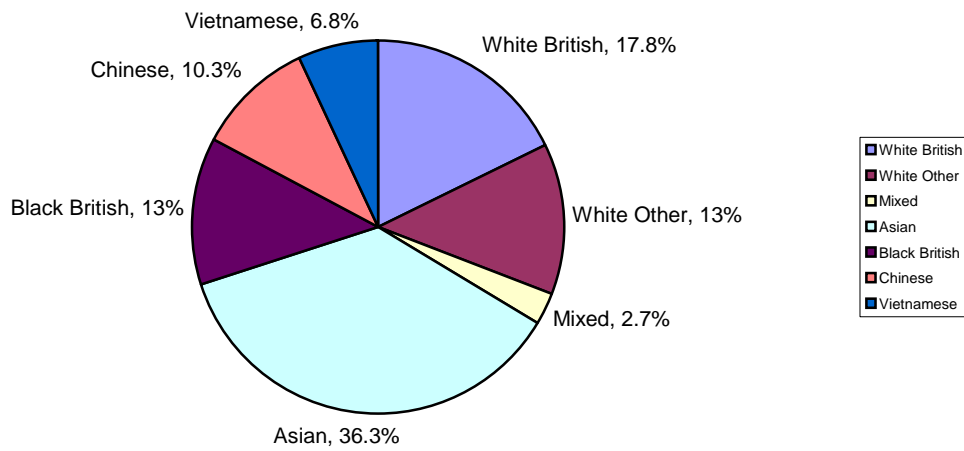
Analysis of the personal data forms showed that:

- 53% of respondents¹⁹ were female, 46% male and 1% transgendered.
- A quarter were under 24, in keeping with the remit to ensure that the voice of young people was heard in the events.
- One-eighth declared themselves to have a disability.
- 56% declared that a language other than English was their first spoken language
 - 40% that a language other than English was their first written language.

Figure 2 gives the ethnic breakdown of respondents and shows that over two-thirds of respondents were non-White, with the largest single group, at over one-third, being Asian:

¹⁹ The word respondents is used as not all participants chose to answer all of the personal data questions.

Figure 2



62.5% of respondents were born outside the UK. Figure 3 gives these respondents' length of residence in the UK and shows that over half had been resident for over 11 years, and one-eighth for less than 5 years.

Figure 3

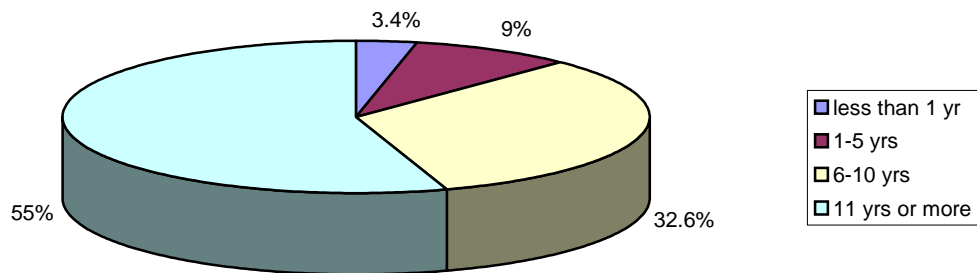


Figure 4 gives the declared religious belief of respondents, and shows the largest single group (at one-third) to be Muslims, followed by No religious belief (nearly one-quarter) and Christian (one-fifth):

Figure 4

