

## Chapter 2 DESIGNING, CARRYING OUT & LOOKING BACK ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

### **Themes in this chapter:**

- How the brief for this research was constructed
- When the research was done
- Who we reached with this research
- The outreach methods used
- What was successful, what wasn't
- The participant interaction methods used.
- A focus on action as an outcome of research.
- Feedback to participants

### **How the brief for this research was constructed**

The Devon & Exeter Racial Equality Council began to formulate its plans for research in the late 1990s, as the demand for its services grew and the need for action in rural areas became ever more evident. The Racial Equality Council was also alert to the need to broaden action in rural areas through partnership working, and of the need to help rural service providers to understand the issues and work out their responses.

Devon, up until that point, had figured in some leading work in the Southwest which drew attention to the rural dimension of race equality - firstly Eric Jay's *'Keep them in Birmingham'* report and then Mohammed Dalech's *Challenging Racism in the Rural Idyll*. Both of these are seminal reports recommended to the reader. Reports such as Miriam Azar's *Exeter in Black and White* had also looked in further detail at the situation in Exeter. But little had been done to dig deeper and assess why so little race equality action extended beyond the 'rural' major towns and cities into the rural districts, and what kind of responses were needed in these areas.

One of the specific recommendations in the *Challenging Racism in the Rural Idyll* report was that Racial Equality and Black and Minority Ethnic groups should 'recognise and develop activities in rural areas as well as urban areas'. So, with the recognition that both Jay's and Dalech's researches had laid the foundation of the arguments for action on race equality in the Southwest, and acknowledging the deficit of 'remoter-rural'

action, the Racial Equality Council decided to focus its research specifically on Devon's rural areas.

Hence the basis of the research brief was to:

- keep a very rural discipline by focussing specifically on the 7 rural Districts in Devon
- work with as many rural Black and Minority Ethnic people as possible to
  - find out about their situation
  - assess if their experience had a rurally defined character
  - establish with the participants, what race equality action was needed in rural areas
- work with service providing staff among the breadth of agencies operating in rural areas to ascertain what help they needed in addressing the issues raised by the research's Black and Minority Ethnic participants
- develop recommendations for action that both address the concerns of Black and Minority Ethnic people and give service providers rurally relevant guidance
- develop a business plan for the Racial Equality Council that would drive its future rural work and rural partnerships

The detail of issues to be covered with Black and Minority Ethnic participants was then developed further, with four aims:

1. to ensure that participants could have the opportunity to raise as broad a scope of issues as possible, making the research as person-centred and -led as possible
2. to enable participants to bring up issues of concern - whether race equality related or not – for as wide a range of service providers as possible
3. to illuminate the rural aspects of Black and Minority Ethnic experience of life in Devon.
4. to enable the research to act as a platform for further engagement and action as directed by the participants

From these specifications, a list of key questions and sub questions was drawn up with the Racial Equality Council, listed in Table 2.1 in the web-based appendix to this chapter ([www.DevonREC.org](http://www.DevonREC.org)). These questions were also informed by the gaps in knowledge that the Racial Equality Council (REC) had itself, and the questions with which the REC was conscious that rural service providers struggled.

The questions and sub-questions then provided the framework for the discussion with Black and Minority Ethnic participants through in-depth interviews, workshops and questionnaires. We aimed to make the opportunity to participate as accessible and as attractive as possible, by offering these different types of opportunities. The questions and formats were designed by constructing activities and guided discussion which would help participants to think through and express their experiences – many of which they might not have articulated before. An analysis framework was constructed to ensure that all information arising would be processed and cross-referenced to inform the research questions and throw up any unexpected outcomes. By careful design of this participation and analysis framework, all questions were standardized across the different participation methods, which employed different visual, narrative and debate techniques to suit the setting. Questions were framed openly, and where written techniques were used, they were posed in the form of first person prompts to enable the responses to be as participant-centred and -led as possible.

The Rural Outreach Project was funded with an initial grant of £20,000 for the research from the Regional Development Agency (RDA). A further grant of £9000 was also provided by the RDA together with a grant of £2000 from the Children's Fund Black, Minority Ethnic & Traveller Theme to support the initial costs of developing the report as a handbook for web production and hard copy publication.

### **A focus on action as an outcome of research.**

The brief for the Rural Outreach Project has always been to stimulate action in response to its findings. In addition to producing its outcomes and recommendations as a resource, the Project has been called upon over the 3 years in which it has gathered learning to share that learning with others and to inform action being taken by them.

Much happened during the 3 years of the project, in particular the arrival of the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) on the statute books and the attendant Duties upon Public Bodies. This generated much interest in the project with the desire for local information to guide service providers in undertaking new race equality measures in a locally relevant way. It was recognized that service providers had to take action before this research report was available, and that the project needed to address service

providers' need for support in the meantime, in order to encourage and maintain their interest in race equality.

Hence the project engaged in a number of activities in order to maximize the impact of the research on action in Devon, and to prepare the ground for interest in its final recommendations set out in this book. A detailed list of these activities is listed in the web-based appendix to this chapter ([www.DevonREC.org](http://www.DevonREC.org)).

### **When the research was done**

The research initiative, known as the Rural Outreach Project, began in March 2000 and was concluded in July 2003. The project was conducted by a research consultant working on a part time basis over that time (including a 6 month maternity break). In the first year, the research brief was refined in the light of a mis-match between the general assumption of the agencies involved, that quantitative data was 'out there somewhere' and just needed to be brought together, and the reality of very poor ethnicity record-keeping on the ground and the added impact of the Data Protection Act on the sharing of such data. It also became clear that there was little other research available at that point to inform the specifically rural nature of the research. Consequently, the emphasis of the research was centred firmly on its qualitative brief, and attention was shifted away from desk-study and quantitative analysis.

The majority of the work with service provider participants was done in the first and third years of the research, and the work with Black and Minority Ethnic participants was continuous throughout. At the same time, the project was called upon to share its key interim findings at a number of events in Devon held by agencies who wanted to take a closer look at race equality issues.

The project also fulfilled its brief to drive the Racial Equality Council's (REC's) business planning in Year 3, in which approx. 10% of the project's total time was spent in writing the Business and Service Plan and making the case for it to Agencies and partners. This enabled the project to translate the key recommendations arising from the 3 years of research, in concrete project plans. This also happened at a time in which the REC's race equality work in Devon faced a serious funding threat, and in which a strongly evidenced business plan enabled the concerns of the project's participants, and the work of the REC, to be successfully argued with Devon's public sector and the Commission for Racial Equality.

The final months of the project were spent in capturing the quantitative outcomes from the 2001 Census whose details were published in 2003, analysing this and the research data, and the production of this handbook.

### **Who we reached with this research**

In total, this research encompasses the experience of 170 Black and Minority Ethnic people who live or work in the rural parts of Devon.

The research has also listened to staff concerns among a range of service providers about addressing race equality issues over the course of 90 workshops, meetings and phone discussions (over 180 staff).

The full profile of the Black and Minority Ethnic participant sample in this research can be seen in chapter 4: Identity and Ethnicity.

By way of a summary, we can say that the research sample encompasses the full range of age, ethnicity, religion and language skills among the rural Black and Minority Ethnic population and is split almost equally among women and men. The sample reflects the population breakdown indicated by the 2001 Census in terms of population growth and rural dispersion. The majority of the sample are people who were born outside the UK (c.f. an even split between Black and Minority Ethnic people born in the UK and overseas, according to Census 2001 data for Devon). Immigration notwithstanding, most of the participants had strong English skills or at least good conversational abilities, but difficulties in communicating in English raised significant issues for a minority. The research has also included Europeans within its brief but the proportion of visibly Black and Minority Ethnic people in the sample is much higher than the European proportion. (By contrast, the 2001 Census data shows that the Irish and European part of the population in Devon is greater than the visibly Black and Minority Ethnic population.) The 2001 Census data also shows that 53% of the European and visibly Black and Minority Ethnic population is Christian, but the research sample focuses more on other faiths, with only 36% coming from a Christian background. 31% lived in remote rural countryside and villages, and the rest lived in small and market and sea-side towns. A few people with Traveller backgrounds are also included in this research but, due to the weight of research and development work already done on Traveller issues in the UK and Devon, Travellers form a minority of the research sample. (In-depth information about the situation of Travellers can be found by reference to the Travellers Education Service and the County Gypsy Liaison Officer. Contact details are in the resources

list at the end of this book. A link to a pdf manual on Traveller issues is also included. )

### **The outreach methods used**

The ROP's outreach began by producing and distributing a leaflet that explained the rationale for the project and asked Black and Minority Ethnic people to get in touch with us and take part. People were able to do this by filling in and returning a reply slip at the back of the leaflet, selecting the type of participation they wanted. This leaflet was circulated to a large number of agencies and individuals who agreed to distribute the leaflets to potential Black and Minority Ethnic participants, by making them available to staff, to service users, to the public or to individual contacts. We then planned to organise workshops, interviews and the distribution of questionnaires on demand.

The work of recruiting distribution outlets for the engagement leaflet involved extensive phone discussions, meetings and written communication with individuals and organisations from public, voluntary and private sectors. In most cases considerable time was spent in making chains of contact to the person in each organisation who felt they could deal with the request, plus a good deal of explanation of the project's rationale, its intended benefits and the help we sought. Wherever possible we encouraged organisations to support the distribution of the leaflet with their own communications/ cover letters by way of introduction and support. We also took agencies' and individuals' advice about other contacts they suggested as a means of reaching out to Black and Minority Ethnic participants.

We also sought to reach people by asking Faith groups and regional Black and Minority Ethnic networks if we could meet members in person to explain the project and encourage interest. Few participants were gained through these routes and feedback from contacts indicated a number of reasons why this was so. Factors included: groups' limited rural memberships; limits on organisations' capacity to communicate with members on the behalf of the project; the infrequency of occasions when rural members gathered and the difficulty of arranging appropriate occasions during which to introduce them to the researcher.

The Racial Equality Council's own members were also encouraged to help with publicising the project to potential participants, and every opportunity

was made to take advantage of public events in which the project was involved, to invite participation.

Conversations during the course of the research also indicated that, had more time been available, outreach to Black and Minority Ethnic students at private schools and to Black and Minority Ethnic health staff within the private and nursing for the elderly sectors would have been valuable.

### **What was successful, what wasn't**

Towards the end of Year 1, the project's greatest success in finding and involving participants has been through 'snowballing' of contacts – i.e. talking to people and making face-to-face/ phone contact through them and then finding further contacts again - a largely personal, verbal process. Indeed only 4 of the Black and Minority Ethnic participants in Years 1 & 2 approached the project as a result of seeing its leaflets, rather than as a result of snowballing. Consequently, in Year 2, instead of seeking out leaflet distributors as the main strategy for attracting interest, we concentrated on making verbal chains of contact, explaining the project and the participation options. We also continued to send leaflets to people who said they would pass them on personally to their Black and Minority Ethnic friends/acquaintances. The one route through which a response leaflet did work was via distribution through a Health Trust direct to Black and Minority Ethnic staff, who were able to return the slip through the internal mail. Overall, however, most of the research participants got engaged with the project and selected their means of participation purely through conversation.

Copies of the general response leaflet and the response form specifically sent to Health staff are provided in the web-based Appendix to this chapter ([www.DevonREC.org](http://www.DevonREC.org)).

On the whole the use of leaflets was not a successful gateway for securing people's agreement to participate, whether left in public places, distributed through village media, passed on through intermediaries or handed out directly by the researcher to potential participants.

Feedback from various contacts has suggested the following reasons:

- People who have been contacted through the post are often too busy and overloaded with paper-based information to respond.
- Contacts who said that they had friends/acquaintances to whom they could pass on ROP materials actually felt, when it came to it, that they

were ‘singling-out’ their Black and Minority Ethnic contacts, and felt too uncomfortable about this to do it.

- The use of a leaflet to ask individuals to contact the project with their choice of engagement was an administrative barrier between the person and their participation, which just prevented people from getting round to contacting us.
- The ROP leaflet had been adapted, lengthened and shortened for different audiences, but ultimately it may just not have been attractive enough.
- The most likely factor in the failure to attract participants through written media was reflected in their choice of participation method. Most people opted for interviews and wanted to talk about the issues in a confidential and relaxed setting. Some people had a look at the questionnaire and then decided that it raised so many issues for them that they felt it would be easier for them to reflect on and unfold their experiences face to face. Most of the interviews took 3 hours – people wanted to talk and wanted the time to feel that they were understood. For some participants, a long interview was in fact the easiest option for them in contrast to attending a workshop or responding to a questionnaire. Most interviews were done in people’s homes or at their places of work. One interview was conducted with a health worker in sentences interspersed with instructions and conversations with ward colleagues, while she was on a hectic shift. Another was conducted with a manager during an evening of business at his restaurant. People were on the whole busy, and they were glad that the research could come to them and fit in with their schedules. Verbal communication was attractive to people whereas written communication was impersonal, inconvenient and time-consuming.

Table 2.2 (in the web-based appendix to this chapter [www.DevonREC.org](http://www.DevonREC.org)) lists the starting points for each of the ‘snowball’ routes in the outreach. These ‘starting points’ were arrived at after significant work had been done to establish that they were routes that could in principle facilitate outreach to Black and Minority Ethnic audiences. The different routes are summarised under the headings:

- Black and Minority Ethnic ‘groups’
- Faith communities
- Agencies (Public Sector)
- Voluntary Sector
- The Racial Equality Council
- Unions
- Education
- Media
- Health
- Private Sector

Of the 51 snowball starting points 17 ultimately led to people willing to participate in the research. In addition to these formal lines of outreach, the researcher also had some success in approaching Black and Minority Ethnic members of the public and in restaurants directly, where it seemed appropriate to do so.

Table 2.3 in the web-based Appendix to this chapter shows the detail of the ultimate participant sources ([www.DevonREC.org](http://www.DevonREC.org)).

The table shows that the most successful lines of outreach included (in order of greatest success in terms of participant numbers)

1. Plymouth University (Seal Hayne campus)
2. Co-ordinators of the Adult English as an Additional Language Service
3. Contacts provided via Racial Equality Council members
4. Direct approaches by the researcher to Black and Minority Ethnic members of the public
5. Outreach to Black and Minority Ethnic staff through a Health Trust
6. A 10% response rate from a mail shot of English and translated questionnaires to nearly 100 foreign food restaurants, with interpreters making telephone calls to each Indian and Chinese restaurant to let them know about the research and follow up calls to encourage response.
7. Individuals known to the researcher
8. Contacts provided by the research’s Black and Minority Ethnic participants

Table 2.3 does however show that the largest number of participants gained through any one source was 23, and that a great number of lines of outreach were needed to generate the sample size we achieved. This outcome, together with the inability to reach participants through the usual sources (i.e. faith groups and the Black and Minority Ethnic voluntary sector) is a function of the lack of formally organised Faith and Black and Minority Ethnic activity in rural areas, and of the limited extent to which city-based and regional groups reach rural people.

Information about 35 people was also provided through DEREK's complainant aid service, in which case-workers provided anonymized information to the researcher.

We had also had high hopes that significant outreach would be made to Adult students of English as an Additional Language (EAL) through the Adult EAL service in Devon. This line of outreach began by piloting the use of the workshop materials with Adult EAL students in one District. The materials were then developed with Adult EAL providers to have a dual benefit of collecting research information and acting as a terms' worth of curriculum material. Plans were agreed to pilot these materials with a large group of students in another District before rolling it out for wider participation with other Adult EAL providers. Unfortunately, due to circumstances within the Adult EAL service, this curriculum-based line of outreach was never brought to fruition. However, individual co-ordinators did help with contacts which snowballed to produce a number of participants.

The schools' ethnicity monitoring and EAL pupil support data also enabled us to identify a number of key schools with whom we had hoped to work. However, despite contacts with advisors and co-ordinators in the Local Education Authority and County Education Directorate, collaboration did not develop into introductions to schools.

Repeated attempts were made to reach out to Black and Minority Ethnic people through contacts within the Race Priority Action Teams (RPATs) which were being established in each District under the Community Safety Partnerships. In principle, these RPATs are intended to be the main interagency driver for action to tackle racism locally. However, many of these Teams have taken many months to develop their networks and establish a local, active profile. Towards the end of this research project significant activity developed in two of the Teams in Teignbridge and South Hams, who combined forces and then commissioned their own piece of research. They used a consultancy firm which provided a team of researchers with various language skills, who spent a short but intensive period following the snowball starting points provided by the RPATs and making face to face contact with a large number of Black and Minority Ethnic participants by visiting restaurants and following up leads. Once RPATs begin to take effect and develop relationships in the community, their potential for outreach can be significant provided that it is done sensitively and using outreach workers with language and race equality skills. The RPATs were also able to develop sustained relationships with

their research participants by attracting the interest of over 20 people who said they wanted to keep in touch and get involved with RPAT activities. Our own face to face research has had the same benefits, with 83 participants expressing an interest in future DEREK activities.

In addition to participating directly in the research themselves, many of the service provider participants were also asked to help the project to attract the interest of their Black and Minority Ethnic staff and users. Initial recruitment of service providers participants was often achieved by running workshops for multi-agency forums. Community health staff were also specifically recruited because of their particular role in working with isolated Black and Minority Ethnic patients, especially women. Considerable time was involved in finding and gaining the support of individuals within Health Trusts, but once the support of Directors of Operations and Directors of Personnel had been achieved, this line of engagement proved very productive, with many health staff eager to get involved. Most success was had in engaging service providers by providing workshops that were accommodated within scheduled staff or partnership meetings.

In chapter 12 we set out the main recommendations arising from the research. One of those recommendations relates to the need for Multi-Ethnic networks in the rural districts, which would bring together rural Black and Minority Ethnic people. These networks would serve a number of purposes, including the opportunity for people to meet and raise issues of concern in a relaxed setting. By having these networks, members would be able to collate issues of concern, discuss them and put them forward to the relevant service providers. In this way Black and Minority Ethnic people would have specific and creative opportunities to inform the development of services in their communities, and to raise issues in a way which feels 'safe' and 'positive' amongst other activities. This form of networking and opinion gathering would cut out the need for numerous, agency led and snap shot consultation exercises. Moreover, this research has demonstrated that outreach to people in rural areas requires multiple lines of outreach, extensive effort applied to 'snowballing' contacts, and a great deal of time and face to face work with individuals, because of the lack of rural Black and Minority Ethnic 'representative' groups. Many rural service providers have approached the project wondering if we have found the magic ingredient which will succeed in helping their various consultation exercises reach a significant number of Black and Minority Ethnic people in their sample. However, the project experience indicates that quick snapshot exercises in the current rural situation are unlikely to

reach Black and Minority Ethnic people because of the current lack of infrastructure or groups through which to reach people. This experience adds weight to the argument for a consultation mechanism, such as would be available through rural networks, would be geared towards the interests of those from whom the information is sought and would make feasible rural dialogue with a diverse and distinctly rural Black and Minority Ethnic population.

**The participant interaction methods used.**

Interviews, workshops and questionnaires were the three participation methods offered to Black and Minority Ethnic participants.

Semi-structured interviews	Unstructured interviews – including phone calls	Questionnaires	Workshops
38%	13%	25%	24%

Most people opted for **semi-structured interviews** (i.e. interviews in which the researcher made sure the discussion covered the research framework but which enabled the participant to lead the flow and breadth of conversation and bring up issues of interest to them). These interviews typically lasted for 3 hours and provided in-depth information.

The **unstructured interviews** were conducted largely on the phone, and in particular at the beginning of the research, with people who wanted to make a quick, focussed input.

The **questionnaires** were provided in English, and also in Chinese and Bengali to those participants who asked for them or to whom we felt it was prudent to offer the option. A copy of the questionnaire is available in the web-based appendix to this chapter ([www.DevonREC.org](http://www.DevonREC.org)). Questionnaires were distributed to participants with a cover letter which introduced the project. In the distribution of the questionnaires to foreign food restaurants, copies were supplied in Bengali and Chinese together with English copies where relevant, and cover letters were also translated. Interpreters were also employed by the project to make phone calls prior to the arrival of the letters to raise interest, and two weeks after the mail-shot, to offer thanks and encourage maximum response. As it happened, all but two participants chose to use the translated questionnaires and reply in that language. Only Chinese respondents chose to use the translated questionnaires and most of

these respondents used the translated form but wrote the answers in broken English. Similarly we noted that several of the Asian respondents with limited English skills also chose English as their means of communication with us. This may be accounted for by several possibilities:

- first language literacy skills may have deteriorated during the time that people had lived in the UK
- some participants' first language reading skills may be stronger than written skills
- some participants may have had low first language literacy skills ( this was a key issue experienced in the course of the Equal Voices Project conducted by Portsmouth University in Portsmouth).
- Some participants welcomed the sight of a familiar text but were keen to show willing by responding in English
- Many Asian restaurateurs are not Bangladeshi in origin

The **workshops** involved a variety of visual, group discussion and pair activities, which were designed to provide an element of interest and fun, to encourage debate and to stimulate the creation of recommendations for action. Depending on the size and language abilities of the participant group, different numbers of facilitators were used to ensure that discussion was properly supported and information recorded. As far as possible, discussion aids were picture rather than text based, and techniques such as Objective Oriented Planning (see the web-based Appendix to chapter 11 – [www.DevonREC.org](http://www.DevonREC.org)) were used to support participants in exploring issues and creating recommendations to address those issues. A curriculum linked version of the workshop process was also developed for use with adult students of English as an Additional Language. Whilst we had planned to offer workshops to individuals which would bring them together in a locality, we found that most individuals opted instead for interviews. Workshops tended to be organised instead, where groups of people, e.g. adult English as an Additional Language students, Further and Higher Education students and staff, and asylum seekers and professionals were already gathered.

Service-provider participants contributed to the project through phone conversations, meetings and 7 workshops. The workshops were organised by obtaining invitations to run the workshops with Inter-Agency Forums and in staff team meetings. It had become clear very early on in the research that most service-providing staff struggled with knowing how to respond in the rural setting to race equality and that, therefore, a systematic

audit of organisational practice was inappropriate. Instead the focus of the work with service providers was to develop an understanding of their difficulties and of the support they felt they needed to address race equality issues in rural areas.

### **Feedback to participants**

All participants in the research, who provided us with contact details, will be sent a Summary Report of the research. The full details of the research are also available in the form of this handbook on the Racial Equality Council's (REC) web site [www.DevonREC.org](http://www.DevonREC.org) and it can be purchased as a hard copy. The REC also intends to respond to the many participants who expressed an interest in future REC activities, and to keep them informed of the new projects and initiatives being developed.

### **Appendices**

This handbook and supporting tools ✂ can be accessed at [www.DevonREC.org](http://www.DevonREC.org)

The Appendix to this Chapter is web-based and includes:

- Table 2.1 The research questions framework
- Table 2.2 Snowball starting points
- Table 2.3 Successful lines of outreach to participants and participation type.
- Response leaflet
- Health Staff response leaflet
- Questionnaire
- Restaurant mail-shot translated cover letter