

Foreword

Racism is a subtle and complex phenomenon ... Whatever its subtle disguises and forms, it is deeply divisive, intolerant of difference, a source of much human suffering and inimical to the common sense of belonging laying at the basis of every stable political community. It can have no part in a decent society.

Bhikhu Parekh

The Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain
The Runnymede Trust, 2000

If you are invited to write a foreword to a book, it is likely that you will agree with much of what the book says, and this is no exception. The elimination of racism and promotion of good relations between different races and cultures is one of the most challenging issues facing all of us today. In producing such an important book based on new methodology and real knowledge of the subject, Sam Magne has made a major contribution to broadening our understanding. The experiences and perceptions it contains are real and often make for uncomfortable reading.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the murder of Stephen Lawrence – a tragedy that brought about the Macpherson recommendations and amendments (in 2000) to the Race Relations Act 1976. Without the possibility of changing the past, the Devon and Exeter Racial Equality Council has looked to learning from past and present experience and to brightening the future. For some years it has been appreciated that, in an increasingly Multi-Ethnic Devon, there was call for researching the gap between the needs of Black and Minority Ethnic people here and those of local service providers. Through the generous financial support of the South West Regional Development Agency, we stepped up to this challenge and this handbook is the result.

For most people, an increasingly diverse society is not so much a threat as a challenge. The need is to rise to that challenge, and deal with unthinking dominance and structural defects in our society far more profound and at a much higher level than the personality of practitioners and managers. This demands wisdom of a kind that can only be achieved through knowledge and understanding of the backgrounds, hopes and fears that exist among Black and Minority Ethnic people.

Public bodies and their staff have newly revised and heightened duties for preventing individual and institutional racism. This handbook contains

insights into the points where those duties and the real experience of Black and Minority Ethnic people converge, illustrating the effects of complacency and its consequences, providing ways forward, reliable procedures and real solutions for clients, staff and society at large.

Any person whose view is that people should be treated in the same way as anyone else is not being sufficiently thoughtful. A more subtle approach is called for, based on a deeper appreciation of the complexities of operating in a multi-ethnic society. In the light of the Macpherson Report findings, I hope people will read this handbook with open minds and reflect on the important messages it contains.

There is a wealth of information, guidance and good sense in this pioneering work. That makes the handbook not only interesting of itself but potentially of great value to practitioners and managers in performing their day-to-day work. It must be a high priority to ensure that the political and organisational will is found to put the detailed lessons into practice to demonstrate commitment to the values of fairness, respect for human dignity and inclusiveness.

Above all, this handbook will help people at all levels cope with an ever-changing world of increasing diversity and complexity. I commend it to you.

Tanvir Ahmed
Chair
Devon Racial Equality Council

Cover note:

This Handbook *Multi-Ethnic Devon* contributes a rural insight to an influential time in race equality, following the Parekh Report on *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*. The Handbook's Devon-earth cover and the colour-shades of the leaves are symbolic of the local source and great ethnic diversity informing its contents.

Author’s note: “Black and Minority Ethnic”

Race equality matters when people find themselves isolated, vulnerable to abusive behaviour and overlooked as a result of prejudice and failures in society to accommodate diversity. The participants’ experiences conveyed in this Handbook illustrate just how much it matters and that we need to be able to talk about it in order to bring about positive change. The tool of appropriately descriptive language, however, to describe the people for whom the impact matters most, is elusive. Politically loaded and culturally sensitive terminology comes in and out of favour. No term is available that can comprehensively describe the huge diversity of ethnic identities that bring a wealth of heritages, culture and language to Devon’s demography. There is no one particular ethnic identity around which to construct a phrase that will keep the reader in mind of the individuals and families who know that their ethnicity is marked out in the landscape by difference. In this diverse demography, ‘Black’ does not suffice alone as a description and nor does ‘Black and Asian’ reflect the plethora of ways that individuals from Britain and around the world chose to describe their identity (see chapter 4). This handbook has settled for the term ‘Black and Minority Ethnic’ in the absence of a better phrase, with the recognition that the substance of the realities that this research has the privilege to share, must transcend the reservations over terminology.

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