The British Humanist Association

1 The British Humanist Association (BHA) is the principal organisation representing the interests of the large and growing population of ethically concerned but non-religious people living in the UK. It exists to support and represent people who seek to live good and responsible lives without religious or superstitious beliefs. It is deeply committed to human rights, equality and social cohesion, and has a long history of active engagement in work for an open and inclusive society.

2 The BHA’s policies are informed by its members, who include eminent authorities in many fields, and by other specialists and experts who share humanist values and concerns. These include a Humanist Philosophers’ Group, a body composed of academic philosophers whose purpose is to promote a critical, rational and humanist approach to public and ethical issues. The Humanist Philosophers Group is submitting a separate response to this consultation.

3 The British Humanist Association supports individual freedom of belief and speech, and believes that the Government and official bodies should maintain a disinterested impartiality towards individuals and the many groups within society so long as they conform to the minimum conventions of the society. While we seek to promote the humanist life-stance as an alternative to (among others) religious beliefs, we do not seek any privilege in doing so. Correspondingly, we reject any claims others may make to privileged positions by virtue of their beliefs.

4 The BHA has responded to Government consultations on issues relevant to equality and social cohesion, including to “Fairness for all: A new commission on equality and human rights” and the “Equality and Diversity: Making it Happen” consultation on future structures for equality institutions, to consultations on the Employment and Equality Regulations, and to calls for evidence on the proposed Commission from the Joint Committee on Human Rights. We have also made submissions to and had meetings with Ministers, MPs and Government Departments on such issues as religious privilege, discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, incitement to hatred on grounds of religion or belief, and the disproportionate influence of faith groups. The BHA is a member of the Equality and Diversity Forum, and the BHA’s Executive Director is a member of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights Task Force.

5 We approach the “Strength in Diversity” consultation on the basis of our humanist beliefs, which include a strong commitment to equality, diversity, social cohesion and human rights.

General comments:

6 The BHA welcomes the Government aim “to develop a Government wide Community Cohesion and Race Equality Strategy which will form the basis of a renewed programme of action, across government and more widely, to build community cohesion and reduce race inequalities” (Fiona Mactaggart, Strength in Diversity (SID) p.1). We also welcome
much of the content of the speech made by the Home Secretary to the Institute of Public Policy Research on 7 July 2004\(^1\) and we have included within this response some comments on that speech. Some of our comments apply equally to the Strength in Diversity consultation document and the Home Secretary’s speech.

7 However, we also have some serious concerns about the Government’s approach to equality and social cohesion.

8 Detailed comments on all sections of the consultation document follow, but we wish to highlight several more general observations. We expand on most of these points within our more detailed comments below.

8.1 We believe that a social cohesion strategy should not focus exclusively on issues of race and religion, but must cover all the other equality “strands”.

8.2 We believe that social cohesion and discrimination are inextricably linked. It will not be possible to move the social cohesion agenda forward successfully while black and minority ethnic communities continue to experience racism, discrimination and disadvantage\(^2\).

8.3 Similarly, we do not believe that social cohesion can be addressed unless the growing inequalities in wealth are also addressed. It will be necessary to address deprivation within the various black and other minority ethnic groups, but also within the majority population. We believe that inequality and deprivation are among the factors that lead to perceptions by various groups that other groups receive more favourable treatment, and to fear and distrust, and hence to segregation and hatred.

8.4 We question the emphasis throughout the consultation document on “communities”, and in particular on “faith communities”. The document seems to treat society as if it is made up of a number of distinct communities, rather than of individuals who may identify with a variety of different groups in different contexts. One individual may be a woman, a lawyer, an Asian, a Muslim, a mother, young, a Londoner, and a carer, and all of these “identities” will be more or less relevant in each of her interactions with other people, and to the views she expresses on different issues. She may of course also be discriminated against in any of these roles or identities. Her views are unlikely to have been taken into account by consulting leaders of her “faith community”. What is crucial is to bear in mind that it is individuals that have rights under discrimination and human rights law, rather than communities (although people who share certain characteristics may have the same or similar experiences of discrimination, abuse or deprivation). (See also para 14.2)

8.5 Involving communities in policy making, etc, also privileges those communities, and hence some identities over others, for example religion over gender.

8.6 We would also draw attention to the fact that while communities can bring many benefits, not least as a source of support and a sense of belonging, they can also be oppressive to the individual. Faith communities, at their best, provide individuals with much that is positive, but there is little doubt that, at their worst,


\(^2\) Strength in Diversity, para 1.6
they can be extremely oppressive. By focusing the social cohesion and equality debate on communities, and on faith communities in particular, there can be little doubt that the Government reinforces cohesion within these groups (it provides additional benefits from “belonging”), but it also reinforces the power of the community and community leaders over the individual and adds to the oppression of those who do not fully “belong”. We do not believe that this focus reinforces cohesion between communities: we believe that it is more likely to be divisive.

8.7 Social cohesion requires a commitment – by each individual – to shared values and the norms of society. We do not believe that this can be achieved without a far more open and honest debate about behaviours and practices, and the boundaries on what is acceptable behaviour within the UK. There is an understandable reluctance on the part of Government and others to debate these issues or to tackle practices within certain minority groups that are not acceptable to the majority population or compatible with a culture of human rights and equality. This is not about assimilation, since all groups within the UK would be a part of the debate, but it will be important to take into account the diversity within “community groups” and “faith groups”, rather than allowing “community leaders”, and particularly “faith community leaders” to speak for others in this debate. Those who consider human rights or gender equality, for example, to be Western constructs should listen to those people within “their” communities who value these concepts, including, of course, those who came to the UK to escape oppression of various kinds, including oppression by religious communities and their leaders. (See also paras 32.3 – 32.6 and 35.11)

8.8 We believe that segregation of communities within the UK may be growing, and while we accept that this is partly on the basis of individual choice (which must be respected), and partly a direct result of ignorance and misinformation about other groups (which must be addressed), we believe that Government policy in a number of areas contributes directly to increasing segregation. We feel that Government must take a great deal of responsibility for increasing segregation in our society, and that such policies must be re-examined.

8.9 In addition, we believe that Government rhetoric, particularly on issues of asylum and immigration, is a significant factor in increasing fear and distrust of not only asylum seekers, refugees and other new arrivals, but also of all black and minority ethnic groups, and undermines its own agenda of equality and social cohesion. We endorse the remarks made by Mary Coussey in the Annual Report of the Independent Race Monitor that “Regrettably again in the period of this report much of the media focus on asylum and immigration has been ill-informed, hostile and inflammatory. Much of the public debate is predicated on assumptions that people are entering the UK too easily. I do not doubt that this negative atmosphere can affect decision-making on individual cases, as it makes caution and suspicion more likely. As indicated in my report last year, the Government should take the lead and encourage a more balanced public debate, and also explain more about the circumstances from which people claiming asylum are fleeing.” We believe that the Government must actively counter the message of the more extremist sections of the media, rather than – as seems to happen more often – bringing in new measures as a knee-jerk reaction to populist media reporting. (See also paras 26, 35.6 and 44.1)

---

Detailed comments on issues raised in the ‘Strength in Diversity’ consultation document:

Chapter 1. Why we need a Government wide community cohesion and race equality strategy

9 We agree that diversity can be a source of strength (SID, para 1.5), and the importance of ensuring that ethnic, religious or cultural differences do not define people’s life chances and that people with different backgrounds work together to build a shared future. However, while it is evident that discrimination on the grounds of race, and some aspects of discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, and the associated divisions that lead to ignorance, fear and in extreme cases hatred, may be of paramount importance, we believe that a Government wide community cohesion strategy should not focus exclusively on race and religion.

10 Indeed, we find it surprising that, at a time when the Government appears to have recognised the benefits of an integrated approach to equality issues, as is demonstrated by its commitment to establishing a Commission for Equality and Human Rights and, in the longer term, a Single Equality Act, it has chosen to develop a strategy that covers race and ethnicity, and to a lesser extent religion and belief, but not the other equality strands. Community cohesion and equality need to cover inequalities and tensions between groups and individuals on any grounds. The links between race and religion and other equality strands, e.g. gender and sexual orientation are well recognised, and these and other inequalities must be included in and inform any community cohesion strategy.

11 The almost exclusive focus on race and ethnicity in both the consultation document and the IPPR speech, probably results, at least in part, from the way that responsibilities are divided between Government Departments, with the Home Office having responsibilities for race, faith and belief and social cohesion within its remit, while other Departments have the lead responsibility for broader areas of equality and human rights. It is not for us to comment on whether this division is appropriate, but we do think that a more consistent approach and more discussion between Departments would be helpful. We do not believe that the Home Secretary would have devoted a whole section of his speech to religious discrimination, and made numerous references to religion and to faith communities throughout the speech, without any kind of acknowledgement that a significant proportion of the population have non-religious beliefs, that they too have a great deal to contribute to society and to social cohesion, that they too are protected by the Employment Equality Regulations and need protection in the delivery of goods and services, etc, if there were more joint working between Departments.

12 We have concerns that throughout the consultation paper the Government refers to faith and faith communities (alongside race, nationality, ethnic minorities, etc), for example in SID paras 1.2, 1.4, 1.6, 4.4, 5.3 and several others, with no recognition of the need also to consider non-religious beliefs. A strategy that seeks to address inequalities and tensions between different religious groups while ignoring non-religious groups will inevitably lead to a different set of inequalities and tensions. (We note the occasional references to ‘beliefs’ rather than faiths, (e.g. SID para 2.3) and recommend this more inclusive term be used when considering community cohesion and indeed in other contexts.)

---

13 Under the Human Rights Act public authorities, including of course the Government itself, may not discriminate on grounds of “religion or belief”, where “belief” includes such non-religious lifestances as Humanism.

14 The consultation document completely fails to address the issues that arise when working with faith communities and interfaith and multi-faith groups to the exclusion of non-religious groups. The British Humanist Association has commented on these issues in a variety of contexts, for example in a letter to Fiona Mactaggart MP in August 2003, but we summarise here some of our key concerns:

14.1 The increasing tendency of Government Departments and other public authorities to consult with faith community leaders and with interfaith or multi-faith groups that exclude the non-religious leads to social exclusion of a different group. This tendency has now been reinforced by the guidance issued by the Home Office “Working Together: Co-operation between Government and Faith Communities”, which was itself the result of an extensive consultation process that excluded non-religious groups. The Government owes a duty not just to those citizens who have a religious faith but also to those who explicitly or implicitly adhere to a non-religious philosophy or lifestance (such as Humanism) that for them plays much the same role as religious beliefs do for others.

14.2 While it is quite legitimate to consult with black and minority communities that have, for various reasons, tended towards isolation and non-participation in the affairs of the wider community, and in some circumstances to achieve this by encouraging groups defined by religious belief to take a greater part in consultations etc, the Government’s current emphasis on consulting and working with faith groups, often to the exclusion of other groups, overemphasises faith by comparison with the other factors that make up an individual’s identity, and can all too easily lead to too much weight being given to the views of faith groups and their leaders. The Government seems to see society as a whole as made up of different religious groupings, despite the fact that the majority of people with religious beliefs would see their religion as a minor aspect of their identity. We note that only 20% of the population consider their religion important to their self-identity, although the percentage is higher for black and Asian people. And, as another Home Office report says, “Any one individual may be a member of several different communities, based on geography, politics, faith, social interaction, and cultural interest and ethnicity.” One risk of overemphasising religious identity is that people, and particularly those from minority religions, are seen and encouraged to see themselves predominantly in their religious aspect. (See also para 8.4)

14.3 The emphasis on working with faith groups also reinforces the perceptions of many religious people that only the religious have values, social concerns, or anything to contribute to society. We note for example that “Working Together” states that “all the faith communities have basic values in common... community; personal integrity; a sense of right and wrong; learning, wisdom and love of truth;

---

5 http://www.humanism.org.uk/site/cms/contentViewArticle.asp?article=1484
6 http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs3/workingtog_faith040329.pdf
8 Building Civil Renewal: Government support for community capacity building and proposals for change: Review findings from the Civil Renewal Unit - Appendix 4.
care and compassion; justice and peace; and respect for one another and for the earth and its creatures.9 Of course, none of these values is specifically religious, these admirable values are at least as typical of non-religious people of good will as of the religious,10 and neither is it obvious that all these values are typical of all religious communities (although we accept that they are shared by many religious people, and perhaps particularly by those who engage in interfaith dialogue and similar activities). Similar language is very widely used by Government Ministers and others when justifying work with faith and interfaith groups.11 Many people with non-religious beliefs find such statements offensive.

14.4 There must be very serious concerns about consulting with faith community leaders who often do not reflect the views of the community they claim to represent, and who may use these opportunities not only to influence the Government with their own, often very conservative, agenda, but also to reinforce their influence within their own community.12 For an example of this, see para 22 below.

14.5 Throughout the consultation document, there are numerous examples of confusion of religious identity and cultural identity, and the problems faced by the growing number of people within ethnic minorities who do not share the religious beliefs associated with that culture, or have considerably more liberal views, are completely ignored. The BHA is sometimes approached by individuals from minority groups seeking support to help them work through their difficulties in coming to terms with their loss of religious belief. They themselves often feel that rejecting their faith seems a rejection of their culture, and they are, of course, often rejected by their community, in many cases even by their families and closest friends, many of whom fear rejection in turn if they continue to associate with the individual. However, it is significant that they sometimes also say that they lose any voice they may have had, because government and others seem only to relate to minority groups on the basis of faith and via faith leaders, rather than as ethnic or cultural groups.13 There are no forums or mechanisms for collecting the views of the non-religious or less religious people who are part of minority ethnic or cultural groups (see also para 22 below). The Government should recognise that the reasons why an individual belongs to a community which the Government defines in terms of faith may have far more to do with culture or language than with religion.

9 Working Together: Co-operation between Government and Faith Communities, para. 2.3.4
10 Religion in England and Wales: findings from the 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey, states that differences between people with a religious affiliation and those without on such questions as their responsibilities to help others/be a good neighbour, to be good/follow a moral/ethical/religious code, or to treat others fairly and with respect, were not statistically significant (p.38). Similarly, there is no significant difference as regards formal and informal volunteering (p.47).
11 E.g. Fiona Mactaggart MP, reported in the Church Times, 27 August 2004: “Every faith has different beliefs, but there is a recognition that human beings have some sense of responsibility towards one another ... That mutual sense of obligation, which seems to be a very important part of all the major faiths, is a part of this”
12 We welcome the fact that the Government is in discussion with faith groups on the preparedness of those coming into the country who have a ministering role, and the parallel work with the British Council (New Challenges for Race Equality and Social Cohesion in the 21st Century, p 13) and hope that this will help to prevent some of the worst examples of inappropriate faith leadership. However it will not address the more general issue about unrepresentative leaders who claim to speak for their community.
13 Personal conversations
14.6 For all the reasons above, we believe that Government and other public authorities should be required to consult with non-religious groups as part of any consultation with faith, interfaith and multi-faith groups, and should be prevented from funding and working with interfaith and multi-faith groups that specifically exclude people with non-religious beliefs. More generally, we believe that, whenever possible, consultations (and this would apply particularly to local consultations on issues that affect a particular area) should be aimed at individuals rather than group representatives, with public meetings, for example, to which local residents are invited, regardless of any community affiliations they may have.

15 The consultation paper, correctly in our opinion, refers to segregation leading to fear and conflict (SID para 1.8) but does not consider how the Government’s own policies contribute towards segregation.

16 In particular, we draw attention to the Government’s policy of promoting faith and sectarian schools, which lead not only to children being segregated by their parents’ faith, which in many cases also means segregation by ethnicity, so that children may grow up with little contact or understanding of other communities and other beliefs, but also to increased segregation of the community as a whole as the opportunity to mix at the school gate and at school events is removed, and indeed families move to be within reach of the relevant faith or sectarian schools.

17 The Government, the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) and others recognise this issue14 15, and even recommend strategies to address it16, but the Government remains determined to increase the number of faith schools. The Government’s determination to increase ‘choice’ in education more generally, e.g. the rapidly expanding number of academies, specialist schools, etc, is also a factor in increasing segregation as some parents are far better placed to take advantage of the system and have their children educated in the school of their choice (usually with other middle class and predominantly white children) than others. Government policies in this area seem designed to encourage ‘white flight’.17

18 It may be noted that the Ouseley Report on the situation in Bradford in 2001,18 also emphasised the contribution of “monocultural schools” to social exclusion and racism.

---

14 For example, Tony Blair, giving evidence to the Liaison Committee on 6 July 2004, said: “… in relation to faith schools, for example, you could perfectly easily make the case: is it in the interests of social cohesion that you have faith schools at all? I happen to think, in the end, this is a choice you cannot take away from people and I would, therefore, say, if there is a social cohesion issue that comes out or a community cohesion issue, you have to try and manage that.”
http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmliaisn/uc310-ii/uc31001.htm


16 “Mr [Trevor] Phillips said integration could not be left to chance. He believed the government should fund US-style summer camp places for 16-year-olds where they can take part in activities with teenagers they would otherwise not meet.” The Guardian, 19 July 2004

17 “And how do they prevent their neighbourhood state schools becoming all-Asian when white parents withdraw their children, on the bizarre grounds that they don’t want their kids to be in a minority? I’ve heard nothing in this debate that addresses the white flight which is the fundamental cause of segregation in the UK.” Trevor Phillips, then Deputy Chair of the Greater London Assembly, in an open letter to the home secretary, The Guardian, 19 December 2001

19 We note that the Sixth Report of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions on “Social Cohesion” also raised issues about the impact of faith schools on segregation and social cohesion, stating for example that “the Government needs to prevent, and where necessary reverse, any tendency for faith schools to become mono-cultural. Faith schools do not apparently perceive themselves as having the potential to make a contribution to achieving social cohesion.”

20 The report of the Independent Review Team on Community Cohesion (the Cantle report) and the more recent “The end of parallel lives?” report of the Community Cohesion Panel (July 2004) devote much attention to the impact of schools segregated by faith on community cohesion, and various means of addressing these issues. For example, the Cantle report identifies “a significant problem” posed by existing and future mono-cultural schools and suggests that faith schools should offer at least 25% of places to other faiths or denominations, although it does not explain how parents will be persuaded to send their children to a faith or sectarian school that teaches a different religion to their own and, once again, it seems to exclude the non-religious even from this 25%. The more recent Report of the Community Cohesion Panel even recommends the creation of multi-faith schools to address issues of social cohesion, completely ignoring the fact that in so doing they would be creating new social divisions between religious families (of any religion) and those without religious beliefs.

20 http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs/community_cohesion.pdf
22 “In terms of community cohesion, however, a significant problem is posed by existing and future mono-cultural schools, which can add significantly to the separation of communities described above. The development of more faith based schools may, in some cases, lead to an increase in mono-cultural schools but this problem is not in any way confined to them. We believe that all schools owe a responsibility to their pupils to promote, expand and enrich their experience, by developing contacts with other cultures … or by ensuring that, as far as possible, they are represented within the school intake …. Certainly, the promotion of such knowledge and understanding about cultures outside the school would be easier where the intake had a better mix of cultures and faiths, as this would also allow friendship and parental networks to naturally develop more easily. We are concerned that some existing faith schools appear to be operating discriminatory policies where religious affiliations protect cultural and ethnic divisions.” Community Cohesion: Report of the Independent Review Team, 1 January 2003, paras 5.8.3, 5.8.4
23 “All schools should consider ways in which they might ensure that their intake is representative of the range of cultures and ethnicity in their local communities. Ideally admissions policies should avoid more than 75% of pupils from one culture or ethnic background in multi-cultural areas. They will need in any case to adopt a positive approach to the new duty under the race relations legislation. Church and faith leaders should take advantage of their special arrangements and voluntarily limit the faith intake in both new and existing independent and state sector schools. This should again be by offering, at least 25% of, places to other faiths or denominations and would immediately be more inclusive and create a better representation of all cultures or ethnicities. This would be consistent with Lord Dearing’s recent report in respect of CoE schools. It would also be consistent with the desire of church leaders to promote religious tolerance and understanding and help to embed the new discrimination legislation. In some cases, this may similarly require support.” Community Cohesion: Report of the Independent Review Team, 1 January 2003, paras 6.3.8, 6.3.9
24 “We would also like to challenge all the faith communities to consider creating multi-faith schools. These would be schools where religion was valued and the faith and practices of particular faiths could be taught without being distinctive of any one faith.” The End of Parallel Lives? Report of the Community Cohesion Panel, July 2004, para 3.4
and the fact that some 60% of 13-15 year olds say that they have no religious beliefs.\textsuperscript{25} One might ask whether these multi-faith schools would also be expected to offer at least 25% of places to other faiths and the non-religious. If so, such a policy would seem to amount to schools whose pupils are drawn from all faiths and none (which would be a positive development), but with the various faith communities exercising a greater influence over the curriculum and ethos that they do in a typical community school (which would be unacceptable). It is, of course, to be expected that a “Faith Practitioner Group” which “drew together representatives of the nine major faith traditions present in the United Kingdom, with two members of the Community Cohesion Panel, a Muslim and a Christian as co-chairs”\textsuperscript{26} should, when faced with incontrovertible evidence of the fact that “schools that are distinctive of any one faith are more likely to perpetuate divisions rather than lead to more cohesiveness in society”\textsuperscript{27} recommend a solution that maintains the faiths’ unacceptable influence on education. This bizarre proposal also demonstrates the folly of the practice of excluding representatives of the non-religious from consultations, working groups and panels working on issues that affect society as a whole: it is almost inconceivable that a group which included the non-religious could have come up with such an unlikely proposal! It would seem that the “Faith Practitioner Group” also chose to ignore evidence that multi-faith schools have tended to founder on religious disagreements that in a more secular context would be insignificant, for example shared campuses between Catholics and others in Scotland, and failed proposals for a multi-faith school in North London.\textsuperscript{28}

\begin{itemize}
  \item[21] The Education and Skills Select Committee has also addressed the issue of segregation in the wider community that results from the increase in numbers of specialist schools, including faith schools.\textsuperscript{29}
  \item[22] While there are undoubtedly demands from a variety of faith communities for state funded faith schools, it should be recognised that many, and often the more vocal of these demands are made by those who actively seek to perpetuate the influence of existing religious institutions and indeed the influence of the faith community leaders who are making the demands. Thus an Archbishops’ Council’s report\textsuperscript{30} confirmed “the crucial importance of the Church schools to the whole mission of the Church to children and young people, and indeed to the long-term well-being of the Church of England” (our emphasis). Similarly, while Muslim faith community leaders are demanding segregated schooling for Muslim children, these demands are by no means shared by the Muslim population as a whole. An Asian women’s group, for example, has stated

\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{25} 61% of 14-16 year olds described themselves as atheist or agnostic in surveys carried out for \textit{Teenage Religion and Values} (Gracewing 1995) by Leslie Francis and William K Kay.

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{The End of Parallel Lives? Report of the Community Cohesion Panel}, July 2004, para 3.4 (Faith)

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, para 3.4 (Faith Schools)

\textsuperscript{28} Multi-faith plan collapses as religions ‘cannot agree’, TES, 6/12/02: “Ambitious plans to create the country’s first multi-faith school have foundered over the practical difficulties of providing distinctive education for pupils from four religions on one site… Westminster council is set to reject the scheme at a meeting later this month. Tim Joiner, cabinet member for education, criticised the multi-faith school proposals as insufficiently thought through. The council claims there were disagreements over how pupils of different religions and sexes were to be educated. Boys and girls would have been educated in separate lessons. Although the school’s Hindu, Christian and Jewish backers were happy to have both sexes mixing in the playground, its Muslim supporters were not. The multi-faith scheme also proved marginally less popular than a city academy amongst residents who responded to a council survey… heads had resisted the plans…”

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, Fourth Report of Session 2003-04}

\textsuperscript{30} Archbishops’ Council (2001) \textit{The Way Ahead: Church of England schools in the new millennium}
that "Labour’s decision to extend single-faith schools among ethnic minorities, especially in deprived areas, is a continuation of its policy of strengthening the most reactionary elements in the community. By defining ‘ethnic minorities’ in terms of their religion (as ‘faith communities’), the state has unquestioningly accepted the claims of male religious leaders to speak for all Asians in Britain. What about those who do not follow any religion, or those who do not identify themselves solely in terms of their religion?"31 The same pamphlet quotes Fabbeh Husein from Bradford College: “Faith schools are more about regulating the sexuality of the female than developing intellectual power and thinking”, and goes on to claim that “for girls, single faith schools can become yet another agency that polices their behaviour."32 The report also raises the issue of divisions between minority faiths, suggesting that “Asian communities in inner cities which are already ghettoised – with pupils already in the worst of comprehensives – are likely to be divided among themselves on the basis of religious difference … this proposal (faith schools) will entrench earlier divides and strengthen new ones.”33

23 Meanwhile, there are significant increases in the number of integrated schools in Northern Ireland, where there is a lot of evidence that segregation of children into Catholic and Protestant schools has contributed to segregation in the wider community and to fear and distrust. The recent announcement of the largest annual increase in the number of integrated schools34 was welcomed by Mo Mowlam, who said, “This is an incredible step forward for the people of Northern Ireland and indicates their desire for peace and reconciliation”; while Tina Merron, the Director of the Integrated Education Fund, said that “Northern Ireland is segregated in terms of religion, housing, sport and even the newspapers that people buy … Now children from different traditions can learn they have no reason to fear and distrust each other.”

24 It seems to us that the Government is refusing to accept the one obvious solution that would make a real difference in addressing the segregation of young people according to faith and ethnicity and hence segregation in society as a whole, namely the abolition of schools that cater specifically for particular faiths. If all children attended local community schools which accommodated and catered effectively for their various religious and other needs and the Government ensured that all schools provided high quality religious education where pupils learned about different beliefs, while concentrating on shared values rather than differences, they would learn from and about each other, and this would help to reduce the fear of the unknown that contributes so much to social division. The BHA has long advocated a policy of inclusive schools, combined with good – and inclusive – religious education.35 The various religious organisations that currently pay lip service to social cohesion while they make an ever increasing contribution to segregation could of course continue to be involved in school provision if they wished to, so long as they provided the inclusive education indicated above. If they chose to do this, they could make a genuine and very significant contribution to education and to social cohesion.

25 As indicated above, education policy is one factor that determines where people choose to live, and reinforces the natural tendency of some people to choose to live alongside

31 Londec: Undermining Education: New Labour and Single Faith Schools, p.9
32 Ibid, p.10
33 Ibid, p.11
34 “Ground-breaking increase in mixed religion schools”, Daily Telegraph, 27 August 2004
people from a similar background and culture.\textsuperscript{36} However, we believe that Local Authority housing policies also tend to increase segregation, and this too must be addressed.

26 We also believe that, although there have been some minor improvements recently with Government messages about the advantages of inward migration, the Government’s asylum policies and also the way these are promoted, often in response to racist media coverage of the issue, add very significantly to racist attitudes in society, and the Government’s rhetoric about equality, human rights and social cohesion will continue to ring hollow unless this issue is addressed. (See paras 8.9, 35.6 and 44.1)

27 The Government’s commitment to making faith communities and their leaders central to work on such issues as social cohesion is itself damaging to social cohesion. When the Government consults with faith communities to the exclusion of other groupings in society; provides funding to faith groups both for capacity building and for projects in the community, and funds interfaith and multi-faith groups that exclude the majority population that either has no religious beliefs or does not define itself by its religion, the Government itself is encouraging people to define their identity by just one factor of the many that contribute to each individual’s identity, and by the very factor that is most divisive. In so doing, the Government is making a very significant contribution to segregation of our society. This needs to be addressed by ensuring that Muslim women, for example, have a voice as women, and that the non-religious and those who do not define themselves solely by their religion within the Sikh or Hindu community have a voice separate to that of their religious “leaders”. While the Government defines people in terms of the communities they supposedly belong to, rather than as individuals with multiple identities and individual concerns, attempts to create social cohesion are doomed to failure. (See also paras 14.1 – 14.6)

Chapter 2: Promoting inclusive notions of citizenship, identity and belonging

28 The BHA agrees that in order to build an integrated society we need to promote an inclusive concept of citizenship, which also articulates the rights and responsibilities we share (SID para 2.1), and we agree that this must include respect for shared values and for the law of the land, including Human Rights and Equality legislation (SID para 2.2). However, the citizenship agenda should not be seen solely as something for newcomers or for school children. We believe that there is a need for informed debate, both within the school curriculum and in society as a whole, about what kind of society we want, and that this debate should then inform discussion about the rights and the responsibilities of citizenship. Citizenship ceremonies have some value, but are not going to achieve a great deal on their own, and without the broader debate may even reinforce perceptions of difference. (See paras 8.7, 32.6 and 35.11)

29 Education, including of young people, could play a crucially important part in achieving inclusive notions of citizenship, identity and belonging, but once again, will not succeed on its own, particularly while the experience of many people from ethnic and cultural and/or faith minorities is of discrimination and lack of respect for their human rights. We believe that it will not be possible to develop a shared commitment to values and the law of the land without very significant progress on equality and human rights. The Government and public authorities more generally have a vital role to play.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Strength in Diversity}, para 5.3
We accept the findings of the 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey which showed that, unlike the majority population, some people from minority faiths identify themselves by their faith, and that many people from Muslim, Hindu and Sikh faiths rank their faith second after their family, while Jewish people tend to identify themselves by their faith first. While fully accepting that faith is extremely important for some people, we would suggest that this identification by faith is, in part, a direct result of certain groups’ exclusion by the wider society because of their faith and/or ethnicity. We believe that minorities that feel themselves excluded, who are regularly suffer discrimination, and who experience hatred and verbal and sometimes physical attacks by extremists, will tend to identify themselves by the very thing that defines them as ‘different’. In other words, racism, hatred of religious minorities, and isolation lead people of minority faiths to focus more on those aspects of their multiple identities that isolate them from the rest of society, in this case, their faith. This in turn reinforces negative reactions from other groups, and hence reinforces their isolation.

We believe that the Government’s increasing emphasis on working with faith communities as a means of addressing social exclusion, rather than with excluded minorities defined in any other way, actually exacerbates this tendency to identify by ones faith (see also para 27 above). In this context, we note with considerable concern the figures in “Active Communities: Headline findings from the 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey” showing that the number of people who reported participating in formal volunteering in the area of religion increased by 11 percentage points (or 42%) between 2001 and 2003, from 26% to 37%, since we believe that much of this volunteering, even if meeting genuine needs in the community, is likely to be contributing to increased segregation. We welcome the increase in formal volunteering more generally, but think it very important that people from different communities work together to meet needs in the local community without discrimination, and we wonder to what extent capacity building and other statutory funding of faith organisations and the whole Government agenda of prioritising work with faith communities has contributed to this damaging increase.

Question: “How can we ensure that people feel a sense of pride in being British – without feeling they have to leave other traditions behind? How can we ensure that pride in being British is combined with respect for other people’s identities? What role can shared values play in this?”

We respond to this question with another: should we expect people (and we note that the unspoken part of the question posed is that it refers to new or relatively new arrivals in the UK) to feel a sense of pride in being British? We do not require the “indigenous population” to feel pride in their British identity, but simply that they conform to the norms of British society and the law of the land or, as stated in the report of the Life in the United Kingdom Advisory Group: “To be British seems to us to mean that we respect the laws, the democratic political structures, and give our allegiance to the state … in return for its protection.” We have deliberately omitted part of this quotation - “as commonly symbolised in the Crown” – since we believe that we should not expect those who have recently arrived in the UK to demonstrate their allegiance to the Monarchy, when the rest of the population is not required to do so. Any such requirements actually discriminate against

31 Active Communities: Headline findings from the 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey, http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/acuactcomm03.pdf
32 Strength in Diversity, para 2.2
migrants with republican views: we do not require the indigenous population to jump through these hoops.

32.2 Similarly, we do not feel that social cohesion, or being a good citizen, depend on pride in being British, or on feeling that one’s identity is British, and to suggest that this is necessary may contribute to people’s feelings of alienation. People should not be made to feel that their sense of identity with the country they or their parents or grandparents came from is any kind of barrier to being a good citizen of the UK.

32.3 Social cohesion does, however, depend on shared values and respect for and commitment to certain frameworks, including respect for the laws of the land, including human rights and equality legislation. Rather than focusing on the symbols of Britishness, although this has some value, we believe there needs to be a proper debate about what these shared values are: a debate that involves all groups in society. It is absolutely essential that this debate is not led by faith community leaders, although they should, of course, contribute to the debate.

32.4 There can be little doubt that there are conflicts between some religious beliefs and practices and not only the values of the wider society, but also the law of the land. We can understand why the Government and other authorities, including the police, are reluctant to tackle these issues, but it must be recognised that addressing these issues is crucial to any attempt to promote social cohesion. Perceptions that there is one law for the “indigenous population” and another for certain black and minority ethnic groups, or that certain groups can get away with things that “the rest of us” cannot, are very likely to can add to prejudice and discrimination. The Government should also recognise that it is completely unacceptable to allow “religious authorities” to impose their beliefs and values on people within their communities who are committed to the values of the wider society. We are pleased to observe that the media are now more likely to report some of the human rights abuses that take place, and hope that this will make it

40 We agree with the statement by the Home Secretary that “... our common allegiance to the laws, to parliamentary government, and to the practices of free citizenship, will always be vital. The role of government is to ensure the framework of law and order within which diverse expressions of our identity can flourish free from the fear of racism or discrimination. It is this commonality which allows cultural diversity within an institutional unity ...”. New Challenges for Race Equality and Social Cohesion in the 21st Century, p. 6

41 To quote just a few examples: the BHA hears anecdotal evidence of child abuse within Madrassahs and similar child abuse within the Hassidic Jewish community, but if parents raise these issues they are threatened with ostracism by their community and Social Services are unwilling to do anything about it. We know of parents who, when they complain, are told that UK law does not apply within the confines of the Mosque! We are also aware of employment practices within various minority communities that amount to something very close to slave labour, with no action by the relevant authorities, and although the police now sometimes act on allegations of forced marriage, including children being raped, this issue does not receive the attention it deserves. The police have only very recently made so-called “honour killings” a priority, and still do little about marital rape and domestic violence, or about lesbians being “cured” of their sexual orientation by rape and forced marriage.

42 For example, the Observer reported in February on the suffering of child brides who are forced to marry in Britain, citing the case of a 14 year old girl. The article states that “the police believe that a central problem in convincing the local community to report these marriages is the belief that they are acting in the best interests of their community.” Also that “Guidelines concerning child protection and forced marriage were given to every police station and social service office in 2001, but officials admit they frequently fail to reach those on the front line. Similarly, the BBC reported that “Lawyers ‘ignore forced marriages’”, quoting the Law Society as saying that “Solicitors are afraid of
easier to have honest and well-informed debates on these issues.

32.5 Similarly, while we agree that it would be wrong to ban the expression of identity through the wearing of religious symbols in public institutions like schools no-one should have a requirement to wear such symbols imposed on them by their community or religious leaders, as happens far too often. We mention in passing that there are far too many examples of religious symbols being displayed (rather than worn) in what should be secular places, just one example being the display of fixed crosses in public authority owned crematoria, which some people of other faiths or non-religious beliefs certainly find offensive, and far too many secular bodies, including public authorities, that begin their meetings with a prayer.

32.6 Although many people refer to common or shared values, there seem to have been very few attempts to define exactly what these common values are. We know of only one attempt to develop by consensus a set of values acceptable to all, namely the development of the statement of values by the National Forum for Values in Education and Society, which is appended to the National Curriculum. It may be noted that the preamble to this statement states that “The only authority for these values is the authority of consensus” but also that “These values are not exhaustive. They do not, for example, include religious beliefs, principles or teachings” – which means, of course, that they exclude the most contentious issues. They do, however include the statement that “we value truth, freedom, justice, human rights, the rule of law and collective effort for the common good”, which we believe would be a good starting point for a rigorous debate about the values and minimum standards of behaviour that are acceptable within the UK. (See also paras 8.7, 28 and 35.11)

33 Question: In what ways can we promote British citizenship for all, particularly among young people?

33.1 The symbols of British citizenship, e.g. the union flag, citizenship ceremonies as part of naturalisation ceremonies or for young people reaching a particular age, etc, may have their place, but are only symbols, and are meaningless without a shared understanding of what citizenship entails.

33.2 We believe that the citizenship curriculum in schools should be extended to include more about the legal system, including core principles such as democracy, human rights and equality, with a genuine and open debate about their implications for particular community groups and for society as a whole. It is

being branded racist if they intervene to stop forced marriages.” We were pleased to see the Chief Executive of the Law Society quoted as saying that “Protecting people from forced marriages is a question of human rights and not a matter of different cultural traditions”

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3576755.stm


44 Even the Report of the Life in the United Kingdom Advisory Group (http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/0/reports/life_in_the_uk.Maincontent.0002.file.tmp/life_in_the_uk.pdf), which places considerable emphasis on common values, speaks of “traditional values of mutual tolerance, respect for equal rights and mutual concern” (para 2.7) or “human rights, the values of toleration, fair play, freedom of speech and open government” (para 3.3) but does not say how these values were derived or to what extent it believes they are shared by different communities in the UK. It seems clear to us that there are some faith communities, or perhaps more specifically faith group leaders, that would have considerable difficulty in “signing up” to certain of these values.

45 Statement of values by the National Forum for Values in Education and the Community, http://www.humanism.org.uk/site/cms/contentviewarticle.asp?article=1310&splash=yes
obviously a subject that needs to be taught sensitively, but the key issues do need to be addressed.

Chapter 3: Eradicating racism and extremism

34 The BHA agrees that racism and extremism have no place in Britain (SID para 3.1) and that more needs to be done to address discrimination, racist abuse, harassment and crime motivated by racism and hatred.

35 Questions: “How can we ensure that all communities see racism, racial and religious harassment and hate crime as unacceptable and are able to act to drive them out?” And “How can we most effectively respond to the threat from political and other forms of extremism, including understanding and tackling its causes?”

35.1 We believe that the most important factors in racism, racial and religious harassment and hate crime are ignorance and fear, and that therefore segregation of different communities and, most importantly, segregation in schools are key factors that must be addressed. (See also paras 16 – 24)

35.2 Another important factor is perceptions that other groups are being more favourably treated. We note, for example the findings outlined in the Sixth Report of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions on “social inclusion” which identified public perceptions of unfair treatment as a crucial factor in creating racism. It also identified as a key learning point from an anti-racist youth development organisation that “single group funding is in most cases detrimental to the development of cohesive communities” Similarly, the Community Cohesion: Report of the Independent Review Team recommended that “Funding bodies should presume against separate funding for distinct communities, and require collaborative working, save for those circumstances where the need for funding is genuinely only evident in one section of the community and can only be provided separately. Funding should allow for this change to take place over a period of time.” This is a vital point, and we therefore recommend that capacity building and other funding of local groups that only work with one community should be phased out, except in exceptional circumstances, and then only permitted in the short term. Where local groups are funded to provide a service to the community as a whole, it will be essential to ensure that they do this without discriminating on any grounds other than need, and, in the rare circumstances where it may be appropriate to fund faith groups to provide such services, without proselytising. Funding should be

46 The lack of an open discussion about how to allocate funds is leaving councils open to criticism that they are favouring one area over another even if the criticism is ill founded. Rodney Green, the Chief Executive of Leicester City Council, said: "Wherever you go in the community they are absolutely convinced that that area has been favoured for many years and this area has been underplayed, and so we have a constant backdrop of criticism, negativity and self-pity that regeneration has favoured all the other communities. This works particularly badly in the white working class outer estates which see community cohesion as something that has an unfortunate bias towards more recent arrivals of persons from abroad and see their own white working class culture being taken for granted, and I think if we are not careful both in the substance of deployment of regeneration resources and (just as importantly) the communication about the fairness of it to change the perception, this can turn itself into being a problem." Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions - Sixth Report, para 41

47 Ibid, para 77 (Peacemaker Case Study)

withheld if these criteria are not met.

35.3 The BHA believes that legislation prohibiting incitement to hatred on grounds of religion or belief should be introduced by the Government, but we have very serious concerns about the suggestion that this legislation should be modelled on the law prohibiting incitement to racial hatred.

35.4 In 2003, the House of Lords Select Committee on Religious Offences heard compelling evidence that racists have been so inhibited by the law on incitement of racial hatred that they have cynically switched to inciting hatred against Asians as Muslims rather than on race grounds and have thus avoided prosecution, so there is a clear need for legislation. But the new legislation must not be based the model of the race hate law (i.e. on the Public Order Act model) which would restrict free speech. The problem with the Public Order Act model is that it puts the emphasis on the words used, rather than their context or likely effect, and there is no doubt that in some cases the words used in, say, a serious article on public policy, could incite hatred if shouted on a street corner in an area where feelings are already running high. It is essential that any such law focus exclusively on protection against incitement of hatred of people, without imposing unacceptable restrictions on legitimate criticism of beliefs and practices. It must also protect people with non-religious beliefs as well as the religious. We note with great concern that the Home Secretary, when discussing this issue in his speech, talks only of religion (e.g.: “debating each other’s religion”, and “this gap in the legal protection for faith communities”) with a complete disregard for the possibility that people with non-religious beliefs may also be victims of incitement to hatred on grounds of their beliefs.

35.5 When the House of Lords debated the Select Committee report earlier this year the British Muslim Research Council, Justice and the British Humanist Association jointly issued a briefing proposing an alternative formulation for legislation on incitement to hatred on grounds of religion or belief – the same formulation that was originally suggested by the BHA in a submission to the Select Committee.

The BHA formulation focuses on the effect and/or intention of the offender, and

49 The relevant paragraph of New Challenges for Race Equality and Social Cohesion in the 21st Century, (p.12) reads: “Since 1997 the Government has introduced tougher penalties for racial and religious hate crime and the Crown Prosecution Service has reaffirmed its policy of prosecuting these crimes vigorously. In 2001 we tried unsuccessfully to introduce an offence of incitement to religious hatred. One of the main arguments against introducing this legislation was a concern that it would prevent people debating each other’s religions. This just isn’t the case and people’s rights to debate matters of religion and proselytise would be protected, but we cannot allow people to use religious differences to create hate. If anything the arguments for this extension of the law have grown stronger since 2001. I hope to fill this gap in the legal protection for faith communities as soon as the legislative opportunity arises.

50 The BHA’s proposed formulation for a law on incitement to hatred on grounds of religion or belief, endorsed by the British Muslim Research Council and Justice, is:
1. It is an offence for a person publicly to use words or behaviour or to display any material:
   a) by which he incites or intends to incite hatred against persons based on their membership (or presumed membership) of a religious group, or
   b) in such manner and circumstances that a reasonable person would think that such hatred is likely to be stirred up.
2. For the purpose of section 1:
   a) “religious group” means a group defined by reference to religion or belief or the absence of any, or any particular, religion or belief
   b) “presumed” means presumed by the offender
   c) “membership” in relation to a religious group includes association with members of that group.
therefore avoids the serious risks to freedom of speech of the Public Order Act model.  

35.6 While firmly committed to freedom of speech, we believe that the way that issues of race, immigration and asylum are reported in some sections of the press are profoundly damaging to race equality and social cohesion, and that the Government has a responsibility to work with the media to improve reporting. We would hope that change could be achieved through a voluntary code of conduct, but we believe that there may be situations, e.g. press reports that amount to incitement to hatred and sometimes to violence (whether on issues of race, asylum, sexuality or indeed paedophilia) where the law may have to be used. The July 2004 report of the Community Cohesion Panel also highlighted the issue of media reporting, especially newspaper journalism, and we endorse several of their proposals, e.g. placing trainee journalists with faith communities as part of their training (although we would suggest that the report’s proposals give too great an emphasis to faith communities, and too little to other groupings and to black and minority ethnic communities more generally). The Cantle Report also emphasised the role that the media can play in promoting – or destroying – social cohesion, and highlighted the positive impact of some local newspapers. We endorse their recommendation that “discussions be held with a range of regional newspaper editors (and media representatives) to establish a voluntarily code of guidance, facilitated by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and their representative bodies, on all aspects of community cohesion,” although we wonder why this should not be extended to include the national press.

35.7 With the provisos about the disproportionate influence of faith groups outlined above (e.g. in paras 14.1 – 14.6, 27 and 31), we broadly agree with the approach and recommendations of the July 2004 report of the Community Cohesion Panel “The End of Parallel Lives.”

35.8 Thus, we endorse the statement that there is “insufficient recognition that community cohesion affects all communities and is not only about urban areas nor does it only relate to black and minority ethnic (BME) communities” and that white communities need to be much more engaged with this agenda and that their needs, both social and psychological, also need to be addressed.

35.9 We also strongly endorse the recommendation that “a suite of policies be developed in response to segregated neighbourhoods to try to ensure that the choice of a mixed environment is seen as both desirable and attainable,” noting once again that one of the most effective ways of achieving this would be the replacement of faith and other specialist schools with high quality education that meets the needs of local children, including those of different faiths, in every

51 The BHA’s submission to the Select Committee on Religious Offences can be seen at: http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/ld200203/ldselect/ldrelof/95/2071807.htm, while the joint BHA, BRMC & Justice briefing for the House of Lords debate in April 2004 is at: http://www.humanism.org.uk/site/cms/contentViewArticle.asp?article=1678


55 ibid, para 2.3

56 ibid, para 2.5
community school. (See paras 16 – 24)

35.10 We agree with the Report that there are “dangers in bringing the community cohesion and race equality agendas together” because community cohesion is much wider than simply race equality (see also paras 8.1 and 9 – 13 above). Treating the two issues as one also reinforces perceptions that the only groups to benefit from community cohesion strategies are black and ethnic minorities. Work on both areas must, of course, be adequately resourced, and we mention here the concerns about adequate resources which we expressed in our response to the Government’s White Paper on the proposed Commission for Equality and Human Rights, and about the need to ensure that there is no regression in the powers of the proposed Commission and adequate resources, including for race equality work.

35.11 However, we believe that there are also dangers in the increasing tendency, by Government, the CRE and others, to bring the race and faith agendas together. We do of course recognise the close links between racial discrimination and religious discrimination for certain ethnic and religious groups and that religious discrimination is a very serious issue for Muslim and certain other minority ethnic and religious groups, and that must be addressed. As noted in paras 35.3 – 35.5 above, we also believe that incitement to hatred on grounds of religion or belief must be addressed, although we reject the Public Order Act model for legislation on this issue. But it is very important to recognise that discrimination on grounds of religion or belief is not only important for groups that may also be discriminated against on grounds of race. In particular, we observe that religious groups, and indeed individuals, often discriminate against people with different religious beliefs and against people with non-religious beliefs, and in some cases also incite hatred against people with different beliefs. There is also a growing tendency, reinforced by the Government’s focus on faith communities and interfaith and multi-faith groups, for the various faiths to combine to discriminate against the non-religious. The Government’s exclusion of the non-religious from consultations, etc, and its discrimination against humanists and others with non-religious beliefs in a variety of contexts, ranging from marriage law to charity law, legitimise this discrimination by the religious. It is essential to recognise the links between race and religion in those areas where they exist, while also treating discrimination and incitement to hatred on grounds of religion or belief as separate and important in its own right, and also recognising the important progress being made through cooperation and collaborative work between various faith groups and groups representing the non-religious. But the growing tendency to brush over the all too common antagonism between people of different faiths in the interests of a multi-faith approach is superficial, and avoids dealing with very real issues that can only be addressed by a genuine and honest debate (see also paras 8.7 and 32.3 – 32.6 above).

35.12 We agree that all Government Departments should consider the impact of their policies on community cohesion, and draw up action plans to promote community cohesion and race equality. It is important that all funding streams should embody the need to improve cohesion. The BHA is particularly concerned about separate funding for particular communities, as there is growing evidence that capacity building and other funding for groups that work only with one community can

---

57 ibid, para 2.5
58 http://www.humanism.org.uk/site/cms/contentViewArticle.asp?article=1721
increase segregation. While there are situations in which it may be appropriate to fund a community group to work with an otherwise excluded minority, we believe that grant conditions should, in all but exceptional circumstances, stipulate work across community boundaries. (See also para 35.2)

35.13 We agree with the Home Secretary that the “significantly higher increases in the rates of stop and search of people from Asian and black communities [are] a cause for concern” and that we have to ensure that we exercise those powers in a way that engenders the support of all communities and so that no-one feels singled out, and we endorse the establishment of a Stop and Search Action Team to address the issues. We feel that perceptions, particularly amongst young people, of unfair targeting by the police adds very significantly to distrust of the police and also makes it difficult to recruit individuals from various black and minority ethnic groups into the police force to address the existing imbalance.

35.14 We disagree profoundly with the recommendation that “faith communities need to be much more involved in all aspects of social policy” and that “interfaith work should be supported by the statutory agencies, particularly local authorities”. There is, of course, justification for including faith communities in consultations, but only as part of wider consultations that give an equivalent voice to all sections of the community, including non-religious people, and, in view of the evidence that faith community leaders are by no means representative of the relevant communities, only if a considerable effort is made to establish the views of all groups within those communities (see also paras 14.1 – 14.6 above). We also believe that interfaith organisations should only be supported by the statutory agencies, including local authorities, if they can demonstrate that they include non-religious beliefs in their membership and remit.

35.15 We believe that much of the current emphasis on working with faith communities is a direct result of conflating faith and culture, and to some extent also race and ethnicity. It is important to ensure that the voices of different groups are heard, but the Government urgently needs to reconsider its approach.

36 Question: “How can we build on the progress that has been made and ensure that the duty on public bodies to promote good race relations makes a real difference in the way that public bodies deliver race equality and social cohesion?”

36.1 As noted above (paras 8.1, 9 – 13 and 35.10), we have concerns about bringing the community cohesion and race equality agendas together to the exclusion of other issues. While achieving community cohesion depends in part on race equality, community cohesion is a much broader agenda.

36.2 Race equality requires an appropriate balance of education, promotion and enforcement, and we believe that the positive duty on public authorities to promote race equality and good relations will be a crucial lever for change in this area. It is essential that the proposed Commission for Equality and Human Rights is given the power and the resources to take over the work that has been begun by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) and that the work of the local Race Equality Councils (RECs) is strengthened within the new Commission, with an expanded

60 New Challenges for Race Equality and Social Cohesion in the 21st Century, p 15
role that covers all the equality strands and human rights.  

36.3 At the same time, we believe that the positive duty on public authorities, which the government has already agreed should be extended to gender and disability, should be further extended to the other “strands” of equality legislation, namely religion or belief, sexual orientation and age, and also to human rights. We are firmly convinced that a positive duty to promote equality (across all 6 strands) and human rights is the most effective way of addressing equality and human rights issues, but that it is also key to changing perceptions that equality is only really an issue for black and minority ethnic groups. This perception plays an important part in fuelling divisions and resentment, and addressing these perceptions is a crucial part of developing social cohesion.

36.4 Given appropriate powers and sufficient resources, the planned Commission for Equality and Human Rights, will be able to drive the equality agenda across all the equality strands and human rights, and thus lay the foundations for community cohesion.

36.5 Similarly, the role of the RECs should be expanded to cover all the equality strands, with the necessary resources being provided.

36.6 Developing community cohesion will then be dependent on all public authorities having defined responsibilities for developing community cohesion so that they can build on achievements relating to equality.

Chapter 4: Tackling inequality and opening opportunities for all

37 Question: “How can we more effectively target policies to tackle the specific disadvantages experienced by different sections of the population, within a strategy that delivers equality for all?”

37.1 We accept that resources must be targeted on those groups that experience the greatest inequalities, but we also feel that perceptions that discrimination law and equality initiatives of all kinds only benefit particular groups, and that these groups are therefore unfairly advantaged at the expense of others (and perhaps particularly the more disadvantaged sections of the majority white community) undermine the effectiveness of this work. (See also para 35.2)

37.2 For this reason, we believe that it is important to increase the focus on equality for all and tackling disadvantage wherever it is found. In particular, we believe that the growing recognition that we all have multiple identities, and may all experience discrimination and abuse, has the potential to change attitudes to equality issues. As the “Fairness for All” consultation document on the proposed Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) emphasises, there is an urgent need to mainstream both equality and human rights, and demonstrate their relevance to the whole population.  

37.3 We believe that the earliest possible introduction of a Single Equality Act to simplify, harmonise and “level up” protection across all the “strands” of equality

---

62 For the BHA’s response to the Fairness for All consultation on the proposed Commission for Equality and Human Rights, see http://www.humanism.org.uk/site/cms/contentViewArticle.asp?article=1721

legislation, and to cover education, goods and services as well as employment matters is a vital part of achieving equality and tackling disadvantage.

38 **Question: “What more should be done to embed race equality in the delivery of public services?”**

38.1 As already noted, we believe that the positive duty on public bodies should be extended to cover all the “equality strands” and human rights. We believe that the public sector still has a great deal of work to do before it could claim to achieved a culture of equality and human rights, and that this will not be achieved until their performance in these areas is routinely measured in inspection and audits.

38.2 It must also be accepted that the planned CEHR will only be able to achieve the “step change in how we promote, deliver and enforce equality and human rights” if it is given the enforcement powers and resources to do this. It remains to be seen whether the Government has taken this on board. (See also paras 36.2 – 36.5 and 37.2)

39 **Question: “What further actions can we take that will ensure public sector workforces are representative of the communities they serve?”**

39.1 We agree that it is vitally important to ensure that public sector workforces are representative of the communities they serve, and would emphasise that this representation needs to extend to all levels, including the most senior. This can only be achieved by a combination of education and rigorous application of equality legislation, and the advice and support (and if necessary enforcement powers) of the existing Equality Commissions and eventually the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights. We believe that obligations on the public sector should also apply to public services that are outsourced to the private or voluntary sector, thus also building a bridge to the private sector.

39.2 We believe that it will also be necessary to build equality (and human rights) into the remits of the statutory inspectorates and audit bodies, so that performance in these areas is regularly measured and reported on. (See also para 38.1)

39.3 The public sector needs to accept that it is a role model for the private sector.

40 **Question: How should we work with the private sector to promote race equality?”**

40.1 We believe that the focus should be on equality across all the “strands”. We are aware that the CBI, as the representative of private sector employers, has expressed the view, for example in its response to the “Fairness for All” consultation that the sector cannot cope with any more equality legislation, and in particular with a Single Equality Act. We, however, are firmly convinced that a Single Equality Act would not only simplify matters for the private sector, but would enable private sector employers to implement equality initiatives with significantly reduced risks of resentment from managers and employees. For the first time, organisations and individuals would perceive equality as something that affects and can benefit everyone.

---

64 In its response to the “Fairness for All” consultation the CBI said (para 28) that “CBI members strongly believe that this [a Single Equality Act] would represent further regulatory burden that is not welcome in the short to medium term.”
Chapter 5: Building cohesive communities

41 We endorse much of the content of paragraphs 5.1-5.4 of the consultation document. However, while we accept that faith communities can play a role in bringing together people from different faiths and cultures, we emphasise again that this must not be at the expense of reinforcing divisions between those with religious and with non-religious beliefs. Neither can it be allowed to give faith communities a disproportionate influence on Government or local policy, or their leaders, who are rarely democratically chosen or accountable to their followers, a government-backed reinforcement of their authority over their communities. (See also paras 14.1 – 14.6, 27 and 31 above)

42 We agree that engaging with young people is key, and also endorse initiatives to bring together young people outside schools in youth clubs, sports and other initiatives. However, while the segregation of children in faith and sectarian schools, which often also results in segregation of children by race or ethnicity as well as by their parents’ religious or non-religious beliefs, remains (see paras 16 – 24), the impact of out of school activities will be minimal. We also believe that, as for other statutory funding of work in the community, funding streams for youth work, including funding of voluntary organisations, should also embody the need to improve cohesion. We believe that funding of youth activities for single communities and/or for single faith groups will result in increased segregation, and should be limited to those very exceptional circumstances where a clear need for segregated provision in the short term can be demonstrated. Similarly, we deplore the increasing tendency to support and fund interfaith or multi-faith youth work that excludes young people with non-religious beliefs. We mention in passing that we include in this category voluntary organisations such as the Scouts and the Guides which receive significant amounts of public funding in spite of their policy of systematically excluding both children and youth workers who do not believe in a God. Statutory funding should not be allowed in cases of such blatant and unacceptable discrimination.

43 Question: What more can we do to build relationships and understanding between people from different backgrounds?

43.1 We have commented on this issue in various sections above, but would emphasise the importance of addressing issues that increase segregation, in particular the segregation of children in faith and sectarian schools, with the consequent segregation of the wider community as families move to be near the relevant school. (See paras 16 – 24)

43.2 Education is obviously an important tool, and we believe that the citizenship curriculum should be extended to include more about relevant institutions, and more on equality and human rights, and include genuine debate about the core values of our society. (See paras 8.7, 32.3 – 32.6 and 35.11)

43.3 We also believe that inclusive Religious Education in schools, in which children from families of all faiths and beliefs learn about each other’s beliefs, and concentrate on shared values, could contribute a great deal. (See para 24 and the BHA policy document A Better Way Forward.65

44 Question: How can we ensure that we have an open debate around how to properly manage migration and prevent abuse of asylum which doesn’t fuel

65 ‘A Better Way Forward: BHA policy on religion and schools’
http://www.humanism.org.uk/site/cms/contentViewArticle.asp?article=1589
prejudice against black and minority ethnic communities?

44.1 We do not believe that the challenges of immigration and asylum are as separate from the issues of social cohesion as the consultation document implies, since there can be little doubt that negative attitudes towards refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants, fuelled by the media and Government statements, increase discriminatory attitudes to black and minority ethnic communities more generally. The Government must take a great deal of responsibility for the way the public debate on immigration and asylum impact has fuelled prejudice and racial hatred. Policy decisions and statements by the Government have far too often seemed to be little more than knee-jerk responses to irresponsible headline grabbing stories in the popular press. (See also paras 8.9, 26 and 35.6)

44.2 We are convinced that there is an urgent need to develop and resource a comprehensive strategy on immigration and asylum that turns the sentiments expressed in paragraph 5.7 of the consultation document into something approaching reality. Considerably greater resources then also need to be given to explaining the policy to the public, including information about the reasons why people have been forced to flee from their own countries, and celebrating the contribution that refugees and other new arrivals make to our society.

44.3 We also believe that there should be an informed public debate about the role of the media in fomenting fear and hatred of asylum seekers, refugees, and others who legitimately enter the country, with a view to developing either a voluntary, or if necessary a statutory code of practice (see also para 35.6).

44.4 Schools could also do more to tackle negative attitudes on asylum and immigration. We recognise that many of the attitudes of children are a result of parental influences and influences from the wider community, and that many schools do good work in addressing these, but feel that schools require more support and guidance to bring all schools to the level achieved by the best. We are of course also aware that many children and young people, especially those who attend schools where they mix with people from different ethnic groups and with different beliefs, have very positive attitudes towards migrants and asylum seekers, as has been shown by school campaigns to allow their classmates to remain in the UK. Such campaigns are an admirable expression of cohesion and bonding across frontiers, but also illustrate the damage done when such children live under the threat of removal and are then forcibly removed.

44.5 We welcome the intention to provide practical support to overcome barriers to integration of new arrivals to Britain, both for the new arrivals and the local community that receives them. The practical support associated with the new citizenship ceremonies is a small step in the right direction, but we do not believe that this, or the ceremonies themselves, can achieve very much on their own. There is also a risk that these ceremonies reinforce perceptions that refugees and others coming into the UK have to prove their suitability for UK citizenship, without there being any associated responsibilities on the “community that welcomes them”. We look forward to the publication of a new “strategy for the integration of refugees into British society that will emphasise the need for personalised programmes of support during the first crucial weeks after a person is granted refugee status” which we believe is long overdue. We hope that these

66 *Strength in Diversity*, para 5.7
programmes will be adequately resourced.

45 **Question: What more should we be doing to support integration of new arrivals – and to involve existing citizens in this as a two way process?**

45.1 The Government should recognise that, with few exceptions, refugees will need practical support for more than the first few weeks.

45.2 We believe that the Government should also devote more resources to providing practical support to asylum seekers while they are going through the process of applying for asylum and refugee status. We believe that many of the Government’s existing policies towards asylum seekers are quite unacceptable on humanitarian grounds, but also that they have the additional effect of legitimising racist attitudes to asylum seekers amongst the general population. If the Government treats asylum seekers the way it does, they should not be surprised that so many people react to asylum seekers and refugees as a threat, and feel that they have society’s, if not the government’s, tacit approval to vilify and harass them. Neither should the Government be surprised if these negative attitudes to asylum seekers and refugees spread to include other new arrivals and to black and minority ethnic communities more generally. (See also para 44.1)

45.3 We believe that where significant numbers of new arrivals (whatever their legal status) move into an area, there should be significantly more discussion with the local community about the needs of the new arrivals and the needs of the local community, and how both will be met. With many new arrivals moving into areas of considerable deprivation, practical support for new arrivals should be matched by practical support for the existing population. The local population will often see itself in competition with the new arrivals for resources, and it will be important that the local population sees direct benefits of welcoming the new arrivals. While some services may be required specifically for the new arrivals, we believe that wherever possible additional services should be provided on an integrated basis. For example, if the increase in the population requires a new or enlarged medical facility this should cater for the existing population and the new arrivals together. (See also paras 8.9, 26, 35.6 and 43.1)

46 **Question: How can we ensure that, in the true spirit of civil renewal, public service reforms consistently build cohesion and foster understanding between people of different cultures?**

46.1 As suggested in the consultation paper, and in the 2004 report of the Community Cohesion Panel, we believe that all Government Departments need to consider the impact of their policies (and their public statements) on community cohesion and race equality, and that all funding streams embody the need to improve cohesion. We are very pleased to note that, for once, the question refers to “different cultures” rather than “different faiths”.

Hanne Stinson  
British Humanist Association  
September 2004

---