

## **Improving Services for People with Learning Disabilities from Minority Ethnic Groups:**

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### **Appendix 4 Reflections on the National Survey of Partnership Boards**

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## Introduction

From the publication of Valuing People onwards, it has been recognised that people with learning disabilities from minority ethnic communities receive a relatively poor deal from existing services (Department of Health, 2001, 2004; Mir et al., 2001). Valuing People has given Partnership Boards (PB) the responsibility for leading improvements in services for people with learning disabilities from minority ethnic communities.

Dr Stephen Ladyman, Parliamentary Secretary of State for Community at the Department of Health, asked the Valuing People Support Team to prepare a report concerning the progress made by Partnership Boards in improving services for people with learning disabilities from minority ethnic communities. To assist in the production of the report, the Valuing People Support Team commissioned a national survey of Partnership Boards, the results of which have been written up (Hatton, 2005a). An additional document outlines some activities identified as examples of good practice by the Partnership Boards who took part in the survey (Hatton, 2005b).

This final document contains some brief personal reflections on the findings of the national survey, consisting of a series of questions raised by the survey that a wide range of stakeholders need to consider. These reflections are in no particular order, and are aimed to highlight broad issues of general relevance; these reflections intentionally do not concern individual Partnership Boards or local authorities.

## How important is ethnicity?

In the context of the national survey, this broad question can be asked in a number of ways.

*First, how important is ethnicity to Partnership Boards and services more generally?*

One way of thinking about this question is to look at the response rate to the survey, 51%. If the glass is half-full, then this is an encouragingly high response rate compared to most postal surveys. If the glass is half-empty, then this is a disappointing response rate given that it was a carefully targeted survey conducted at the request of a Government Minister.

Furthermore, some responses stated very clearly that strategic planning to meet the needs of people from minority ethnic communities was not a high priority for the Partnership Boards. This was often in areas where few people from minority ethnic communities were known to learning disability services, information systems were not seeking to proactively identify or reliably record people from minority ethnic communities, and existing services reactively absorbed individuals from minority ethnic communities. Poor information, small numbers of people from minority ethnic communities in the local area and a lack of engagement with local minority ethnic communities seemed to

be given as reasons for not pursuing strategic action, rather than as factors stimulating such action. Clearly, support is required for these Partnership Boards to move towards a position where there is a strong commitment towards excellence in meeting the needs of all people with learning disabilities in the local area. A lack of leadership and commitment at senior levels within services will be reflected in a similar lack of commitment from staff in all positions within services.

*Second, how important is ethnicity compared to other aspects of culture?*

In many survey responses, ethnicity seemed to be used as a synonym for race, with only non-white communities assumed to be “ethnic” and cultural issues such as religion bundled together and assumed to be relevant to specific ethnic groups. There are a couple of observations here:

1. All communities have “ethnicity”, and ethnicity is not about race or skin colour – White Irish communities, for example, often have a strong and particular ethnic identity.
2. Other aspects of culture rather than ethnicity may be very important, for example religion, which cuts across ethnic communities. For example, some Jewish communities may have very particular requirements of service supports, even though they are often counted as ethnically white. Islam is a faith practiced by people across a wide range of ethnic communities. Christianity is also practiced in very different ways by people across a wide range of ethnic communities, including white ethnic communities.

### **What resources are needed?**

Some responding Partnership Boards mentioned a lack of resources as an obstacle to improving services for people from minority ethnic communities. This is certainly likely to be the case where Partnership Boards have identified large numbers of local people from minority ethnic communities not previously known to services, and is likely to be a particularly acute issue in areas with newly arriving communities such as asylum seekers and refugees. The Government may wish to consider incentivising Partnership Boards to identify and meet the needs of people with learning disabilities not previously in contact with services, perhaps prioritising people from minority ethnic communities.

However, where people with learning disabilities from minority ethnic communities are known to services, then improvements to services for people from these communities may well be cost-neutral, and in any event are unlikely to require large increases in service resources to better support individuals. Furthermore, expertise and support should be obtainable from general local authority and NHS sources, which services for people with learning disabilities are often unaware of and certainly do not use to maximum effect.

## **What are Partnership Boards doing to comply with legislation?**

Increasingly, legislation such as Race Relations Amendment Act, the Disability Discrimination Act and the Human Rights Act are placing specific responsibilities upon Partnership Boards and services used by people with learning disabilities. Relatively few Partnership Boards specifically mentioned these pieces of legislation, although this may reflect a perception of this compliance as routine and not worth mentioning rather than reflecting a lack of awareness or action. However, it is important that Partnership Boards and all relevant agencies are aware of these legislative requirements and take action to ensure compliance.

## **How can Partnership Boards work best to meet the needs of people from minority ethnic communities?**

From many of the survey responses, there are encouraging signs that Partnership Boards are taking action to raise of profile of ethnicity as an issue and to increase representation from users, family carers and professionals from minority ethnic communities. As yet, it is too soon to know which of the many changes being made are most effective – for example, does having an ethnicity subgroup or a champion on the Partnership Board seem to make a difference? Over the next few years, it might be worth looking at sharing information, evidence and learning across Partnership Boards concerning the most effective ways to make Partnership Boards work better for people from minority ethnic communities.

## **What information do Partnership Boards need?**

Many Partnership Boards mentioned the difficulties of getting relevant, reliable and accurate information on the total local population of people with learning disabilities, including those not known to services. As people from minority ethnic communities are less likely to be known to services, this lack of information is likely to have a particularly big impact on people from these communities. Many Partnership Boards also mentioned problems with getting accurate information on the ethnicity of people using services, usually because people collecting and coding the information on individuals did not routinely record information on ethnicity. Some Partnership Boards also mentioned that health and social care performance indicators did not ask for information on ethnicity, reducing the priority of ethnicity when collecting and collating information

Information seemed to be such an important issue for Partnership Boards that many of them were explicitly focusing on collecting better information before developing strategic action plans or changing services to better meet the needs of people from minority ethnic communities, particularly in commissioning specific research projects. It is important that, once these initial research projects have been completed, the agencies involved in Partnership Boards develop the resources to produce useful information (at

least involving detailed ethnicity, religion, spoken and written languages) on a routine basis. Again, good practice ideas can be shared across Partnership Boards with support from the Valuing People Support Team. The Valuing People Support Team might also want to consider discussions with the Healthcare Commission and Commission for Social Care Inspection CSCI on incorporating ethnicity and religion within the performance indicators they routinely collect.

### **How can the Learning Disability Development Fund best be used to improve supports for people from minority ethnic communities?**

Improving services for people from minority ethnic communities is now a recognised priority for Learning Disability Development Fund (LDDF) funding, although responses from the survey suggest that this may throw up a dilemma for Partnership Boards.

First, many Partnership Boards claimed that, although they had not specifically allocated LDDF funding to improving services for people from minority ethnic communities, they were taking ethnicity and culture routinely into account within general strategies, for example person-centred planning, advocacy or day services modernisation. This mainstreaming of ethnicity issues within routine strategic planning and service delivery is, for me, the preferred option for ensuring that ethnicity and cultural issues become embedded into the core of service values and activities. However, many Partnership Boards making this claim did not provide any supporting evidence as to how they were achieving this integration and how they were monitoring their effectiveness. This leaves open the possibility that these responses actually reflected inaction rather than integrated strategy concerning people from minority ethnic communities. A small number of Partnership Boards did provide convincing evidence of such integrated strategies, such as ensuring that people from minority ethnic communities were proportionally represented within new service initiatives or providing evidence that general strategies had produced particularly positive results for people from minority ethnic communities.

The second part of the dilemma is that some Partnership Boards did use LDDF money to focus specifically on ethnicity issues, but that this money was used to develop ethnically separate services in the absence of a general PB strategy concerning people from minority ethnic communities. It is a possibility that encouraging Partnership Boards to use LDDF money specifically for ethnicity issues may result in an increase in the number of short-term, ethnically separate services, rather than supporting the development of proper strategic thinking and service development in support of that thinking.

In terms of monitoring LDDF spending, it may be worth considering requiring Partnership Boards to conduct a brief impact assessment of how all their LDDF spending is impacting (or not) on people from minority ethnic communities, rather than simply reporting how much of their allocation is

being spent on ethnicity issues. This may have the effect of encouraging integrated strategies, whilst ensuring that the impact of LDDF money on people from minority ethnic communities is properly monitored.

### **How do we best serve the needs of asylum seekers and refugees?**

A small number of Partnership Boards specifically mentioned working with asylum seekers and refugees. People in these categories can represent a challenge for usual ways of working as they often do not arrive into relevant established communities and their presence can be relatively short-term. As a result local services often do not have existing staff teams with relevant language skills or knowledge of these communities; uncertainty about length of stay may also present challenges to existing service systems. It may be that national guidance is needed for Partnership Boards on this issue.

### **How do we best serve the needs of Traveller and Gypsy communities?**

A small number of Partnership Boards also specifically mentioned working with people from Traveller and Gypsy communities. Although these people are usually in well-established communities, these communities can be relatively mobile; uncertainty about length of stay may present challenges to existing service systems. It may be that national guidance is also needed for Partnership Boards on working effectively with people from Traveller and Gypsy communities.

### **Are different strategies and supports needed for Partnership Boards in different circumstances?**

The Valuing People Support Team and the Learning Disabilities Task Force have been very effective in raising the issue of people with learning disabilities from minority ethnic communities at a national level, through events, the publication of guidance and a leadership training programme. The Valuing People Support Team has also encouraged networking across Partnership Boards within regions, to share ideas and good practice to improve services for people with learning disabilities from minority ethnic communities.

However, the findings from the national survey suggest that Partnership Boards are highly diverse with respect to services for people from minority ethnic communities, and additional networking and support might be best targeted at Partnership Boards in a similar position, even if they are geographically far-flung. Findings from the national survey would suggest there are at least five positions that Partnership Boards find themselves in:

1. Urban, highly ethnically diverse. More than 40% of the local population may be from minority ethnic communities, typically associated with high levels of deprivation. All supports for people with learning disabilities need to be routinely designed on a multi-ethnic basis.
2. Urban, with a substantial proportion of well-established and recognised minority ethnic communities, often associated with relatively high levels of deprivation. Some minority ethnic communities may be better identified and served than others, and specialist services for people

from some minority ethnic communities may have arisen in an ad hoc way over time, rather than as a result of strategic planning.

3. Urban with a relatively small population of people from minority ethnic communities, associated with varying levels of deprivation. People from minority ethnic groups are likely come from diverse communities with few or no large, stable, well-established minority ethnic communities. People from minority ethnic communities are fitted in a reactive way into existing services with pockets of good practice dependent on the interests of individual professionals, rather than services being strategically planned to meet the needs of people from minority ethnic communities.
4. Small unitary authorities with a relatively small population of people from minority ethnic communities. These authorities are in a similar position to (3), except the fewer resources associated with being a small unitary authority often result in a lack of broader local authority infrastructure to draw on when considering people from minority ethnic communities, and a corresponding lack of priority given to these groups.
5. Large, mainly rural, authorities with relatively small and/or scattered populations of people from minority ethnic communities, with varying levels of rural deprivation. People from minority ethnic groups are likely come from diverse communities with few or no large, stable, well-established minority ethnic communities. People from minority ethnic communities are fitted in a reactive way into existing services with pockets of good practice dependent on the interests of individual professionals. Retaining relevant skills in the workforce is difficult, as is strategy designed to pro-actively identify and plan services for people from minority ethnic communities.

### **Broadening the scope of service activity**

The examples of good practice provided by Partnership Boards were quite revealing about the relatively narrow scope of activities currently undertaken with respect to people from minority ethnic communities. For example, no Partnership Board mentioned examples of good practice in the areas of children, employment, education and lifelong learning, a place to live, or benefits. Five or fewer Partnership Boards mentioned examples of good practice in the areas of compliance with legislation, transition, health, person-centred planning, direct payments, and leisure, friendships and relationships. Partnership Boards most frequently mentioned examples of good practice in the areas of making Partnership Boards more effective, information, supporting family carers, advocacy, day service modernisation and increasing the diversity of the workforce. It is clear that Partnership Boards need to broaden their range of activities to make a real impact on the daily life experience of people with learning disabilities from minority ethnic communities.

## Moving from planning to action

Many of the Partnership Boards responding to the survey were currently at the start of a cycle of improvement concerning people from minority ethnic communities. This cycle was starting with Partnership Boards collecting information, changing the operation of the Partnership Board and developing strategic action plans; fewer Partnership Boards reported on changes to service supports as a result of these activities. In future monitoring of Partnership Board performance, it will be crucial to ensure that information is turned into strategy, which is then turned into changes to service supports that will result in improvements in the lives of people with learning disabilities from minority ethnic communities.

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