

**Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster BME HEALTH  
FORUM:**

**TASK GROUP ON EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENT AND  
FAMILY SUPPORT ISSUES IN BME COMMUNITIES**

**FINAL REPORT:  
SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COMMUNITY  
CONSULTATIONS**

**October 2003**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Concerns about under-achievement amongst young people and family support issues in BME communities were raised at the launch of the BME Health Forum.
- 1.2 The Education Task Group was set up to focus on the health and family support issues related to young people aged between 11 and 16, and to address community concerns about education, under-achievement and the support offered to families.
- 1.3 The aim was to bring together those currently providing services in this field, as well as community groups and individuals from BME communities, to evaluate current service- provision and issues related to access to services, information and publicity, needs assessments, etc.

## **2.METHODOLOGY**

- 2.1 The Education Task Group was made up of representatives from community and voluntary groups, as well as statutory agencies. Monthly meetings were held throughout the process, for a period of six months.
- 2.2 The Task Group discussed and agreed two questionnaires related to the issues for consultation: one for young people and one for adults. They both covered identical themes.
- 2.3 Community groups were funded to run consultation events with their users and communities. Facilitators were trained to run the consultations.
- 2.4 The consultations engaged the groups in a conversation around common themes beginning with what was going well, what were the key issues, how they were using the main services, what sort of support were they getting in education, what were the problems and what improvements they would like to see.
- 2.5 The Task Group also organised developmental training for community groups, on specific themes such as education for refugee children, special educational needs, exclusions and advocacy.
- 2.6 This is the final report of the Education Task Group, and it includes findings from the consultations as well as recommendations for future service- provision. The recommendations are drawn from what the community groups consulted said they wanted, directly or by inference.

2.7 Although this is the end of the Task Group, it is likely that the group will continue to meet under the auspices of the PCTS. The BME Health Forum will continue to lobby for the recommendations from this report to be taken up by service-providers and commissioners.

### 3. Members of the task group

The BME Health Forum would like to thank all those who participated in the Task Group, and especially representatives from community groups who held consultation events in the communities.

<b>Contact Person</b>	<b>Organisation/Group</b>
Iman Achara	Genuine Empowerment of Mothers Society
Angela Bell	North Kensington Consortium of Supplementary Schools
Lucy Clark	K & C PCG
Heather Davies	RBK&C Community Education
Clare Gardiner	RBK&C Domestic Violence Forum
Shivani Kundapur	Sure Start
Saleh Mamon	Education Consultant
Hasib A. Badri	Sudanese Supplementary School
Dr Dahbi Skali	RBK&C Community Relations Section
Carolyn Morley-Clarke	Westminster Education Action Zone
Ann Howell	RBK&C Social Services Dept (Holland Park School)
Faith Ndirangu	Ugandan Youth Support Group
Jane Gibson	KCW Health Authority/Westminster PCT
A. Salih	Westminster Refugee Consortium
C. Grizzle	New Roots
Marnie Smith	Young Carers Project
Joy Stanton	Westminster EAZ: Refugee Support Co-ordinator
Karima Koia	Al-Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Centre
Noura Mohamed	Somali Welfare Association
Bashir Khan-Haque	Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre
Saed Abdel Ghanam	Eritrean Parents and Children's Association
Reda Khaladi	Moroccan Information and Advice Centre
Doreen Davis	Pimento
Nivine Powell	BME Residents Group
Samira Ben Omar	BME Health Forum
Aisling Byrne	BME Health Forum

Thanks go to Saleh Mamon, Educational Consultant who chaired the Education Task Group, collated the data from consultations and produced the report with Samira Ben Omar and Aisling Byrne, who both worked tirelessly to co-ordinate the business of the task group and all the consultations. Our gratitude also goes to Bridget Davies for taking the minutes of meetings assiduously. Finally, we would like to thank the staff of MRCF for providing us with the venue for meetings.

### 4. CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN

A total of 9 consultations took place – 4 groups of adults and 5 groups of young people. The groups were as follows:

1. School parents at Queens Park Primary School	8 parents
2. School parents at Gateway Primary – Kurdish mothers	4 parents
3. <i>Al-Hasaniya</i> Moroccan Women’s Project	12 women & young people
4. Iraqi Community Association – Fulham	12 parents
5. Iraqi Community Association – Hammersmith	14 parents
6. Somali Welfare Association – North Kensington	21 mothers & 5 fathers
7. Young Carers Project – Caxton Youth Trust	not specified
8. Pimento – North Kensington	not specified
9. Young Carers Group – Cosway Street	not specified

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Schools need to address the concerns of young people and parents in the BME communities, by **monitoring and evaluating the impact of their policies and practice on the well-being and educational achievement of young people, and by involving the communities more in school life.**
2. There is currently no forum or network for BME communities – for both community groups and parents – to meet and feed their concerns to service-providers and planners. **The members of this Task Group hope that the 2 Boroughs will consider setting up and funding such a network or forum to facilitate on-going feedback, communication and engagement.**
3. **Ethnic monitoring data should be collected for attainment, progression and exclusion**, to ensure that action is taken to guarantee fair outcomes and maximise achievement. Such **information should be published for the community.** With the introduction of the *Race Relations Amendment Act*, schools have new obligations in this field – information that then needs to be made available to parents
4. **Where Education Departments have undertaken an audit of the provision of study support provision after school hours and at weekends, including libraries, this should be published in an accessible format.** Librarians and other providers, such as organisers of supplementary schools and clubs, should be involved in this audit.
5. **All service-providers should review their communication strategy**, to ensure that procedures and initiatives that have impact on the life chances of young people in the community are clearly presented to people, so that they understand the rationale, and are in a position to take full advantage of the opportunities available.
6. **The communities and service-providers should give particular attention to the educational, health and recreational needs of girls and women.** Whereas boys may have easy access to recreational facilities, in some communities the needs of girls may remain hidden and not recognised. With Muslim communities, a mixed sex environment can restrict access for women and girls. Providers of recreational facilities should promote such activities among girls and females by ensuring access through activities solely for women at suitable times during the week, taking into account safety and security.
7. **To develop a volunteering scheme for young people in BME communities to overcome the exclusion felt by parents in engaging in the education of their**

**children** because of language difficulties. This could focus on interpreting services offered by young volunteers. Young people should be provided with training, and the costs of transport and subsistence should be met. This development would empower a community and enable its young people to make a social contribution to its well-being. It has potential that needs investment and can counter social exclusion.

8. The communities and service -providers should address the **concerns about drug abuse and addiction and their consequences**. The actions should go beyond drug-awareness, to preventative and recovery strategies involving multi-agencies. Actions should be kept under review.
9. The communities and service- providers should address the **issue of violence and bullying in the community**. **Training in conflict resolution strategies should be given to young people and parents**.
10. **There is a need to enhance adequate leisure and recreational facilities and youth centres, that build peer group relationships and maintain good health**. Such facilities should give some sense of ownership to young people as users.
11. Service- providers should address the **concerns of families about housing and its impact on health and achievement**. They should ensure that adequate space is available to families in well-maintained residences which allow for a stable life that can sustain and support learning.
12. There should be a **borough- wide strategy for young refugees and asylum-seekers** that deals with their needs promptly. Their educational, health and housing needs should be assessed quickly. An educational record for their background and intervention should be designed, which they should carry with them if they are on the move. Negotiations should be undertaken with the Refugee Council to develop this, so that it could be used nationally.
13. **A comprehensive strategy for parent education should be designed**, to deal with the needs of parents. **The role of parent educators attached to every school should be explored**. The programme for parent education should include engagement in school life, to support the education of their children, to help them understand health issues and how to resolve conflicts, to raise awareness of drugs and how to deal with matters if their children are exposed to that risk.

## 5. FINDINGS

These findings are inferred from discussions in the above groups, who are a representative sample of the community. They are perceptions of the individuals living within their community, and are not based on empirical research. This must be borne in mind when considering them. It can be justified that these perceptions must reflect the reality in communities to a greater or lesser extent. It must also be born in mind that on some issues there is no unanimity between the community groups, or individuals within a group; neither should this be expected . These communities are made up of individuals, who have different experiences and come to form differing opinions. Yet on

a wide range of matters there are common themes, indicating a shared reality which shape perceptions.

## **5.1 What is going well for young people**

5.1.1 For young people, the perception and reality vary geographically and across the community groups. In North Kensington, there is a sense of despair which is also palpable in the Moroccan and Afro-Caribbean communities. Where young people are a part of an organised group such as carers, the attitudes are positive and the knowledge of institutional support and networks far stronger. This may be indicative of the organised network that a project brings with it, and an indicator of the social value of a project in terms of reducing alienation.

“Nothing is going well in North Kensington for young people.  
There are very few resources/places for young people  
Other than spending time in the street.”

5.1.2 Young people in general feel positive if there are leisure facilities such as sports centres and youth clubs available for them for recreation outside school hours. Libraries and computer clubs also generate similar responses.

5.1.3 Parents' perceptions also depend on the existence of a positive community around a school, that involves them. A school with good provision and links with the community draws appreciation from young people and parents.

5.1.4 For newly arrived communities such as Iraqis, Kurds and Somalis, in spite of housing and status problems there is relief generally to get young people into full-time education which provides stability and real improvement in life chances.

Kurdish mother: “the children manage to learn English very easily – in two weeks!”

‘The parents could not talk too highly of the school. Their children were very happy in school and they felt “very safe” ... they felt their religion was truly respected and acknowledged with Eid parties; and schools used halal meat.’

‘Kurdish mothers agreed that this was a “free country where Everything is allowed”; but that this caused confusion for Their children when what they were being told at home did Not seem to match up with what they found outside. The Children are quiet at home, but then get into fights when They go to school.’

## **5.2 Accessibility and usage of mainstream services**

5.2.1 For young people, youth clubs, sports centres, libraries and internet cafes feature as the main services used. Adults use sports centres and swimming pools for younger children. Beyond these they use libraries, health centres and statutory agencies such as social services and housing, including one-stop centres. Availability of these, and access, are dependent on the area people live in.

Concern was expressed about the fact that some clubs/activities are not accessible to disabled children.

- 5.2.2 Gender issues remained hidden in the discussions, most of the time This may be because of the lack of clear indicators in the consultation questionnaires, but also because the community groups perhaps do not discuss gender issues openly, even among themselves. An area where they were mentioned was over recreation facilities, particularly where mixed sex activities such as swimming restrict access for Muslim girls and women.
- 5.2.3 The generation gap in communication is evident. Young people have less difficulties; but adults do confront a language barrier in their daily lives when interpreter services are absent, leaflets in their language are not available and the choice of reading materials in the libraries is restricted to languages other than their own. There is misunderstanding in public services, perhaps. that both Kurds and Somalis are Arabic readers and writers, and hence these languages are not provided for as they should be. Women who are not fluent in English face the greatest difficulties when dealing with agencies, and many young people in the consultations expressed concern about the lack of support for their mothers.
- 5.2.4 Young people also get most of their information through peer group networks, and consider these to be the most reliable source. The telephone and the internet are not widely used as sources of information.
- 5.2.5 There is motivation and capacity within the communities, where volunteers could help mediate the language barrier cost effectively; but there are no incentives for this to develop through provision of training and financial support for transport costs.

### 5.3 **Quality of education**

- 5.3.1 The general perceptions about support from schools vary widely, with some young people feeling that their school offers little support, whilst others take a contrary view indicative of the fact that experience will depend on how school staff in pastoral and management positions deal with problems and the outcomes.
- 5.3.2 The picture around a primary school that is well thought of generates very positive evaluation, with children happy and safe, thriving in a multi-faith community where teachers are kind and helpful, and active in providing extra-curricular activities and are in close contact with the parents on a day- to-day basis. Such parents have anxieties about the transfer to secondary schools and the change in dynamics and culture in a larger, more impersonal institution.
- 5.3.3 Generally, there is unhappiness about the quality of education received, and a desire to see smaller class sizes to improve the attention to individual needs. This is exacerbated by the nationwide shortage of teachers, all the more strongly felt in inner city schools where the use of supply staff and teachers recruited from overseas and high staff turnover disrupts continuity in teaching and leads to

fluctuations in standards. The fact that state schools do not in general issue textbooks that can be taken home for study, due to shortage of funds and fear of losses, is a problem for young people and parents – especially families who are dependent on state benefits and cannot afford these books.

'Iraqi parents said that as the schools do not hand out text books, if the children have not been paying attention or do not understand something, they cannot do their homework correctly.'

- 5.3.4 Support mechanisms for special educational needs do exist in most schools which are required to have a special educational needs policy. Language support is provided in many cases through statutory grants. Under new initiatives, there is support for gifted and talented children. Some schools have counsellors. Where there is good practice, adults other than teachers provide support.
- 5.3.5 Attitude to homework depends on whether you are a school student, or a parent. Some school students feel that too much homework is set, while any amount set is not enough for parents. One suspects that parents want the young people to be more occupied at home, and have less time to be out with their friends.
- 5.3.6 The extent to which schools keep young people and parents informed about progress varies from school to school, with some feeling that they were not always well informed, while others felt they were. The evolving pattern of schools reporting to parents, with parents' evenings increasingly replaced by academic review days, when targets are set either six monthly or yearly, tends to be confusing. In addition, on academic review days interpreters were not provided, so some parents did not understand what was being said. The amount of time given per family for such consultations is often considered to be the minimum for adequate feedback, leaving parents dissatisfied. Such consultation may be with tutors, again leaving parents who may want to see subject teachers unsatisfied.

'One student said his teacher had told his mother at a parents' consultation that he was likely to go to gaol when he finished school. This upset both him and his mother, and no discussion or clarification was given by the teacher.'

'Iraqi parents suggested that more leaflets be handed out in community languages, explaining the education system in England – the process of exclusions, how to raise concerns, etc.'

'A majority of parents from the Iraqi, Somali and Kurdish community said that they receive letters from schools in English, but do not understand them.'

- 5.3.7 Communication from school to home poses a challenge across the diverse communities. In many families, parents receive letters and reports, but cannot understand them. Schools rarely communicate in languages such as Kurdish or Somali: they abandon the use of community languages because of lack of resources and time. There was an example of a school which used to send

letters in Bengali, but stopped what may be considered to be good practice. Parents have anxieties about pupil post and their own children conveying messages, because they are not sure if the relayed messages that are negative or critical will get to them.

‘A lively debate about lateness developed between some of the parents and the School Home Liaison Officer who had arranged the meeting. The parents felt that the school was a bit fierce on lateness. The letters sent home were frightening. They wanted a little bit more leeway.’

‘Comment from facilitator of the group: “On several occasions – e.g. the lateness issue, discussion of class placement according to age or progress, formal versus interesting/fun learning – through expressing their views, individuals and the group seemed to begin to move forward in their thinking, becoming aware of the inconsistencies of some of their own and others’ positions. It was itself a valuable exercise, but indicated that there were considerable gaps in understanding between school and some parents, which could perhaps be addressed by similar sessions where the school could explain their position, as was done with attendance.’

- 5.3.8 In North Kensington, most of the young people had problems with their education. They were helped by organisations such as Pimento, to resolve issues with services such as letter- writing, attendance at exclusion meetings, links with school and social services, and a place where homework can be done.
- 5.3.9 Not all young people have problems at school. It is difficult to establish the proportion who have trouble- free school careers against those who have minor problems which are resolved; and finally, those who are at serious risk and have their school careers blighted. Exclusion figures will provide the best guidance to this.
- 5.3.10 Where behaviour breaks down in a class due to poor classroom management, and conflict arises, some pupils who may take action to protect themselves find they are in breach of school rules and may be subject to exclusion. They feel that the school needs to act fairly, for a just outcome, and to consider the context in which particular incidents arise.
- 5.3.11 When serious problems do develop, the interventions are often late and the notification and procedures are not consistent, leading to variable outcomes which leaves all parties unsatisfied. Bullying and racism are problems that in many cases are not resolved by thorough investigations and conflict resolution, which leads the victims to fear that reporting instances may make things worse, and the perpetrators have the freedom to act with impunity. Newly arrived communities such as the Somalis seem to be more vulnerable to bullying, and parents have no idea where to look for support. Bullying is also sometimes linked to extortion of pocket money from vulnerable children.
- 5.3.12 Relationships between families and school tend to be good if the parents are involved early on, to resolve behaviour and attendance problems. However, relationships are strained if this does not happen and problems have become

more serious, with the exclusion process activated. Parents do want to work with schools to resolve problems. In the case of short- term exclusions, parents want demanding work to be set and the school to ensure that young people catch up on the work missed. For permanent exclusions, parents want full- time placements in referral centres. Schools that use mentors to reduce exclusions, using action plans, are considered by young people as employing good and fair practice.

'X is a young boy who was excluded from school at the age of 15. He was given very little help from the education authority, or social services or the school. With the help of a community group He was given counselling support and was able to find a training Course at a local college which will enable him to get a Qualification.'

- 5.3.13 Parents want very clear reasons for detention, so that they can intervene to prevent their children from breaking school rules that lead to this. Many parents do not understand school procedures which lead to exclusions. When they are informed about problems, the lack of interpreters makes the language barrier an obstacle to understanding.

'One African-Caribbean mother was concerned about her daughter at secondary school. She was given detentions, but does not always seem to know why. The mother wanted to know the reasons for the detention.'

- 5.3.14 Young people appreciate it if they are involved in peer group schemes to solve problems and conflicts. This contributes to raising self- esteem and good relationships with staff, and develops leadership skills that benefit the BME communities.
- 5.3.15 Young people find public confrontations with school staff humiliating, on such issues as lack of uniform items, because the reasons for such non-compliance could be complex and include financial difficulties in the family. They prefer that staff should have a protocol for dealing with non- compliance with such rules that is sensitive and respectful.
- 5.3.16 Young people want ownership of how their life is governed by the school rules. As they grow mature, they want to negotiate rules about leaving schools during lunchtimes. School management regulations for safety in London have moved to keep young people on the school premises during lunch times, and this can cause friction.
- 5.3.17 In some secondary schools, young people find security a problem, and would like management to consider deployment of security officers to deter unauthorised access.
- 5.3.18 Difficulties in finding school places in Westminster, where over-subscribed schools have a long waiting list, are a source of concern for parents, because children miss out on education for significant periods.
- 5.3.19 Opinions are divided about whether schools take into account cultural needs and language needs. Some feel that their schools have a lot of resources catering for

different languages and cultures; while others find that such needs are incidental to the way their school works. It is highly appreciated when religious festivals are recognised and celebrated, and dietary requirements such as Halal food are provided. Some Muslim parents feel that there is reluctance to acknowledge faith traditions such as hijab. Schools try to understand the cultural backgrounds of their students, but not always successfully.

- 5.3.20 The provision for mother -tongue teaching is highly variable, and sometimes absent. Information on opportunities to learn mother tongues is generally not available; but parents do have anxieties about the drift away from their culture and language among the younger generation, and they want some means of educating their children about their own history and culture.

'They talk to their children about their country of origin, referring to it as "home", and watch a great deal of Arabic and Kurdish TV. Some channels have subtitles which help them keep their Reading skills up to scratch. There is a Kurdish channel which is very useful, as it has subtitles in Kurdish, but they are written in phonetic English'

'The group of mothers would like the school to hold mother-tongue classes and to teach the Muslim children about their religion. The mothers kept coming back to this, saying "nobody is teaching them how to be Muslim".'

'Somali parents expressed serious concerns about the growing generation gap between them and their children; some Somali young people do not want to speak Somali and so cannot communicate well with their parents. Parents said their children watch hours and hours of television soap programmes: "the television is more of a family to them than we are".'

### **5.3 Supplementary support for education**

- 5.4.1 Most communities report the existence of supplementary schools. In some cases, these schools are restricted to the young, and teach mother-tongues such as Arabic. The use of libraries was frequently mentioned.

- 5.4.2 After-school clubs are provided by some schools. One community had no such clubs, and another group wanted this provision for young people in the 14-16 age range. Some felt that the provisions did not meet the demand. The provision is also perceived by some to be geographical, with some areas having more than others, depending on the funding.

'The young people thought that After-School clubs should include homework, but also something else to interest them and "catch" them ... i.e. keep them in the habit of being involved in after-school activities, and so "keep them off the streets".'

'Somali parents – "Our wish is to have a centre to help our children with homework and to have Somali-speaking support teachers".'

- 5.4.3 Community provision is varied. The Islamic Centre teaches Koranic Arabic classes and English. Kurdish and Eritrean centres provide sporadic tuition. Some communities have their own centres such as the Bengali Community Centre.
- 5.4.4 A school which provides affordable private tuition at £15 per term, and teaches English, is called the Butterfly School and was selected for praise. Some groups had access to counsellors, but most did not. Some young people felt that one-to-one home tutors were needed.
- 5.4.5 Some young people felt that there was no community provision to enhance and enable parents to support education.

### **5.5 Awareness of new initiatives**

Most young people and adults had very little knowledge of the existence and rationale of national initiatives such as Connexions, Excellence in Cities and Sure Start. This effectively means that they are excluded from these services, which have the potential to benefit their families. It seems clear that what is common knowledge among professional providers is not filtering through at the community and family level in some communities.

'No one in the group was aware of any of these initiatives; they had to be explained. No one was using them in their families.'

### **5.6 Ambitions of young people and support for them**

5.6.1 Young people have wide -ranging aspirations that include achieving positions in the fields of sports, business and the professions. Jobs and economic security have a high priority. Many have role models in their communities and networks, but equally there are others who have little ambition because the adults in their families have no jobs and their self- esteem and confidence are dented by low expectations.

'Young people in the consultation events said their ambition was to be: professional skateboarder, brain surgeon, bank manager, to complete 'A' levels, to finish school and find a job, a footballer, or pilot.'

'One member in the group said that support in further education was not available as the school assumes everyone will fail, so the advice is on re-takes.'

'One youngster said that in his school and outside adviser comes in to the school and interviews each 14-year old individually. Then a plan is worked out to suit their educational likes, as well As career path needs. This was agreed as a useful tool to help Them see clearly where their future is going.'

'Iraqi young people: "we need more careers advisers who understand our background.".'

5.6.2 There are increasing numbers of young people progressing to further and higher education; but this seems to vary across the communities, with newly arrived communities still lagging behind.

5.6.3 The quality of advice seems to be highly variable across the two boroughs. In some locations, there is a general lack of career advice. Other young people feel that career options focus on low paid jobs. Young people in different schools get advice at different stages, some at 14+ and other at 15+. Most parents and young people want good advice at an earlier stage, with high expectations about career development, further and higher education and training courses. Again, parents who are not fluent in English have difficulty in understanding career guidance and in contributing to encouraging their children to make the appropriate choices.

5.6.4 Both parents and their children are aware that BME young people will be discriminated against, even if they gain qualifications, and that their earnings will be below those of white young people, all things being equal.

5.6.5 Parents feel the cost burden of higher education prohibitive and the absence of student support allowance in K&C was a problem for families.

## **5.7 Factors affecting educational achievement**

5.7.1 Housing is one of the most important issues that comes up when factors determining educational achievement are discussed by the community groups. Low quality housing, with overcrowding, offers little privacy and space for study, and creates tensions within the families that are detrimental to emotional and mental health. Furthermore, if families have to live in temporary accommodation, their insecurity is heightened and household movement is disruptive to the stability that education requires.

'Somali parents said one of their main problems was the poor housing that they felt affected their children's prospects. As many Somali families are large, with many children, they live in very cramped conditions. Many families mentioned that their children literally take turns at the table to do their homework. One mother said her children take turns at the table, and have to wrap up in blankets as their heating system is very old and the flat is very cold. Because it is a council flat, they have been waiting a long time for the heating to be fixed.'

5.7.2 Poor housing and poor diet because of financial hardship create health problems. Information about health-care is not widely available, including alternative types of health-care. With younger people who are maturing sexually, education about safe sex needs to be available.

5.7.3 The stresses generated by poverty and poor housing may in some cases result in family violence, and may compromise mental health. Families at risk need coping strategies to help them deal with such predicaments. Some

fathers may see in violence a corrective measure; but some young people may reject, this leading to conflict within families. Family education about non-coercive resolution of conflicts without resort to violence seems important. Wider support for families and parenting needs to be taken into account

- 5.7.4 Drugs seem to be another issue that is at the forefront. The cycle of abuse and addiction that can link to crime to feed the habit worries the communities. Such incidents would damage education and life chances irretrievably. Although drug -awareness is being taught in schools, parents need to have the capacity to deal with such problems if they arise in their families. Good practice that exists in Southwark was mentioned, where organisations such as Faces in Focus offer counselling, peer work, information, advice, sexual health workshops and drug awareness programmes.
- 5.7.5 School admissions are difficult to obtain. This is especially so with young people who are 15/16 years old and would have to be admitted to KS4. This may be due to the reluctance of schools to take in this age group as it may affect their position in the school league tables. School admissions are also difficult after the academic year has begun: in areas where schools are oversubscribed they are impossible. If young people are placed in schools far away from home, the question of safety and security during travel looms.

## **5.8 Refugees and asylum- seekers**

- 5.8.1 Refugees and asylum -seekers get little information about schooling, and their children are not likely to be placed in the school they want. Parents do not know the admission procedures. For all age groups, school admissions are difficult to get when the nearest schools are full and over-subscribed, and admission is sought in the middle of the academic year.
- 5.8.2 For young people who are 15/16 years old, it seems extremely difficult to get a place in school. If they are placed in schools in other boroughs, far away from home, travel itself is costly and their safety and security can be at risk.

'Iraqi young people: "the biggest problem we face is getting a place at school, especially if we are aged 15-16 and if we have not arrived in September.'"

- 5.8.3 Furthermore, their education can be disrupted by a series of temporary accommodation in hotels and the dispersal policy. There are no mechanisms or systems to ensure that there is continuity in education and information for those professionals who may deal with them.

'Somali parents: "temporary accommodation means either moving school, or travelling a long distance to stay in the same school.'"

'Iraqi young people: "some of us live in hostels with our families for long periods of time.'"

- 5.8.4 Agencies need to deal with cases quickly. Families need to be helped to rebuild their lives; but clearly defined support is not readily available. Support for young refugees depends largely on agencies, advocates and networks: if one has just arrived in the country, these would be take time to establish.
- 5.8.5 There is considerable empathy for refugees and asylum –seekers; but there are worries that pressures on institutions to provide for them would impact on the education of other children. Asylum -seekers with lack of fluency in English are placed in age- related classes, which makes progress difficult; and the teacher time required may be at the expense of other children.
- 5.8.6 Young people may also develop resentment of extra help given to new arrivals who are refugees and asylum –seekers, against whom indignation would grow because of the media publicity that they receive better housing and benefits.

‘Iraqi parents felt that children from refugee and asylum-seeker families are allocated into their year group depending on their age and not on their language ability, sometimes with no support offered. It takes them time to catch up, and can create bad feelings in the class’.

## **5.9 Key Issues for the community**

5.9.1 Gaining a good education is considered by young people and adults to be the highest priority. Decent schools, which provide good education, are valued. All want learning to be more interesting and engaging. Some parents do have views on the curriculum, which is demonstrated by the fact that they feel that in primary schools children are not fully stretched; and in the early secondary school lessons are not challenging. They worry that for 11-16 year olds there is not much to do beyond the school. They prefer the traditional approach to teaching, which reflects their experience in their home countries.

5.9.2 Study support outside school time is valued; but more homework clubs are needed and some young people would prefer one- to -one home tutors. Parents cannot afford home computers - children use library computers that are in short supply. There is awareness that their children should not lose out in the race to acquire new skills in IT. There is a demand for IT facilities within the community to be situated in a library or on housing estates, to help with study after school and at weekends

5.9.3 There is a need for high quality advice for young people about moving on to further and higher education and jobs. The work of personal advisers in the Connexions Service will be crucial here once it is fully in place.

‘Young people felt that even though they were consulted about future careers, most of the options discussed with them were in low-paid jobs.’

‘Somali parents: “some of our children go to college with no problems, but the cost of university makes it almost prohibitive because of all the extra expenses.”’

- 5.9.4 Parents have anxieties about the loss of linguistic, cultural and religious identities; and the developing generation gap, with children speaking English and distancing themselves from their heritage, needs to be addressed with sensitivity. The pressure for such gaps to widen is inevitable as young people internalise behaviour and attitudes picked up from living in London and being exposed to consumerism and the media. Maintaining their mother- tongue at home is increasingly difficult, and they see their children losing their ability to speak it fluently and being unable to read or write it. The opportunity to learn the mother- tongue is crucial, and valuable in terms of sustaining linguistic diversity. Cultural projects for theatre and drama in community languages that make young people aware of the histories and culture of their communities is important to counter the dangers of euro-centrism in a global world.
- 5.9.5 Young people realise how important parent education is – to educate a parent is to educate generations of children. Parent education has many aspects. Language -learning needs to be provided for families who do not speak English. Parents need to know about the workings of the education system: More information needs to be published in different languages explaining it, and processes such as exclusions. Parents need to know how schools are managed, so that they can deal with people in different professional roles. Parents’ rooms in schools, where parents can meet to discuss issues with each other and staff, can create a greater sense community. Home liaison workers who are bilingual can strengthen meaningful communication with the school.
- ‘Parents explained how they were unaware of their children’s behaviour at school until they were about to be expelled ... Everyone agreed that there should be someone responsible For communicating with families at the beginning of the Problem, rather than the end of it’ (consultation with Moroccan parents).
- ‘A Somali father felt that there should be more support for Somalis. He claimed that a Somali teacher would come into school to interpret, but that the school did not want this.’
- 5.9.6 There are ever- present anxieties in both young people and adults about getting trapped in a cycle of drug abuse and addiction, and their consequences on educational achievement and life chances. Although young people do receive lessons on drug awareness and schools may deal with cases of drug usage, parents feel left out and are not trained in how they should cope with drugs in both preventative and curative ways.
- ‘Somali parents were very worried about drug-taking at Holland Park and other schools. Drug awareness is taught, but there is no advice given to parents.’
- 5.9.7 Young people want access to adequately resourced leisure facilities and youth centres, which build peer group relationships and maintain good health. They want opportunities to participate in the decisions that affect them as users, as to when they open. They want places where they can socialise without feeling intimidated. They want social events for all age ranges, to build and sustain peer group relationships and networks. Such facilities would address parental

concern about street culture; and the involvement of young people would also develop their social and leadership skills. Such provision needs to be available evenly across the boroughs and, if charged for, affordable. In the longer term, such provision, if of a high standard, may also reduce street crimes precisely because it would engage young people. Young people see the need for networks beyond the immediate family, which would provide resources for different types of groups with different needs based on culture, disability, etc.

- 5.9.8 Both young people and parents are worried about bullying and violence. Fears extend to mugging, assaults and theft of mobile phones. When bullying takes place in schools, the victims feel that reporting will lead to further bullying. All schools have bullying policies; however, young people need to feel that they will be dealt with fairly.

'Some of the young people in the group mentioned how they had suffered racial harassment in the street, or by neighbours, because they were refugees.'

- 5.9.9 Better council response to harassment and illicit drug use on housing estates. Support for young people who have fallen into drug addiction, to assist them to gain self-respect and an alternative life style. They want confidential counselling services, so that they can share problems that they have outside their family network

- 5.9.10 Controlled access to housing blocks, including shared access. Better building maintenance; better cleanliness in building; better housing to counter damage by over-crowding and poor maintenance. To ensure safety of travel to and from school and outside school hours, they want safer streets (well lighted and monitored by CCTV) and better transport, with separate cycle lanes.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 Many of the wishes of the communities do not stand out as distinctive from those of other communities in the country. This is only to be expected. Members of the BME communities have the same social and human needs as others, the same desire for a good quality of life, and chances to advance themselves. They are also subject to the same postcode lottery that the population in general is, where locality determines the quality of services.

- 6.2 Although the perceptions vary by geographical location and age and ethnicity, there is significant common ground. This seems to indicate that the real experience of different groups has a common element, but is also distinctive in many ways. The needs of a well-settled BME community are different to some extent from those who have settled recently. A good example of this is the Somali community, which is recent in settling in this country and seems to be very vulnerable, with poor access and language support.

- 6.3 The diversity in the community leads to equal diversity in needs; so provision and response should be highly differentiated, and social policy must to be sensitive to this, with proportionate provision to meet needs, and differential allocation of resources in relation to these.

## USEFUL CONTACTS AND ORGANISATIONS:

### 1. Consortium of Supplementary Schools in North Kensington

The Consortium of Supplementary Schools provides information and support to community-run supplementary schools in North Kensington. Assistance is provided with fund-raising, funding advice as well as general information and advice.

**Contact:** Angela Bell

**Telephone:** 020 8962 5720

### 2. Community Empowerment Network

CEN was established in 2000 with a grant from the National Lottery Charities Board, in order to provide advice, counselling, support, representation and training for people experiencing mistreatment and disadvantage in education, especially exclusion from school.

Community Empowerment Network. 107 Trinity Road, London SW17 7SQ

**Contact:** Gerry German

**Telephone:** 020 8767 5591

Outside office hours: 020 8715 7092

**Website:** <http://www.compowernet.org/index.htm>

### 3. ACE

The Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) is an independent advice centre for parents offering information about state education in England and Wales for 5-16 year olds. We offer advice on many topics like exclusion from school, bullying, special educational needs and school admission appeals.

**Exclusion line:** 020 7704 9822

**General advice line:** 0808 800 5793

**Website:** <http://www.ace-ed.org.uk/T>

### 4. Refugee Support Project, Westminster Education Action Zone

The Refugee Support Project offers support to parents from refugee backgrounds living in Westminster.

**Contact:** Joy Stanton

**Telephone:** 020 7641 6391

### 5. Refugee Council

The Refugee Council provides advice and support to unaccompanied refugee children. The Council employs around 30 advisers who travel all over the country to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The Children's Panel of Advisers represents many different countries and languages. Advisers work with children and young people who are under 18 years old when they arrive in the UK and people between 18 and 21 who are the main carers for younger brothers and sisters. A drop-in service is also provided in Brixton, London.

**Opening hours:** Mondays 10am – 3pm

**Contact telephone:** 020 7582 4947

## APPENDIX 1:

### Chapter 2 BME HEALTH FORUM- EDUCATION TASK GROUP

## COMMUNITY CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE

### AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE EDUCATION TASK GROUP

- To focus on the health and family support issues related to young people between 11-16 years of age and to address community concerns about education and under-achievement and support offered to families.
- To bring together those currently providing services in this field, as well as community groups and individuals from BME communities, to evaluate the current service provision and issues related to access to services, information & publicity and needs assessment etc.
- To produce an action plan and a report with recommendations to be followed up by the BME health forum and relevant agencies and service providers.

### GUIDE ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE

After consultation, we have designed this questionnaire to help us to gather information across a range of community groups.

The information gathered needs to be consistent so that we can clearly identify community concerns and aspirations.

#### **This version of the questionnaire is for an adult audience**

The questionnaire provides boxed themes with prompt questions to help with the conversation. Any additional information should be attached to the questionnaire.

Any anonymous case study, which can illustrate examples of good or poor practice, would be very useful for policy makers. TWO examples per community group would be enough.

For any queries please contact.  
The BME Health Forum Manager  
On 020 7150 8128

### CONSULTATION DETAILS

Community Group

Facilitator

Date of consultation

Venue

Number of Participants

Deadline for return of questionnaire

**16 JANUARY 2002**

**Return to (where possible either in Diskette Form or by e-mail)**

BME Health Forum Manager  
c/o Westminster Primary Care Trust  
15 Marylebone Road  
London NW1 5JD  
Tel: 020 7150 8128  
Fax: 020 7150 8105  
E-mail: amjad.taha@westminster-pct.nhs.uk

**COMMUNITY CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE-page 2 continuation**

**Looking at the young people in the community, what is going well?**

**What are the key issues for the community group?**

**What improvements would the community group like to see? What services would you like to see provided in the future?**

**COMMUNITY CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE-page 3 continuation**

**What services do you use? Are the accessible? How do families contact agencies? Are cultural and language needs met?**

**What support do you receive from schools? How do you communicate with the school? How does the school communicate with you? Do you feel that the schools take into account your language and cultural needs? Are there any problems?**

**Are you kept well informed about your child's progress? Are you happy with the quality of learning at the school? Are you satisfied with books issued, homework set and support, language support, mother tongue teaching etc?**

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE-page 4 continuation

**Have you had any problems with your child's education such as poor behaviour, truancy and exclusion? Have you been involved by the school in solving these problems? Have things improved or got worse?**

**What are your ambitions for the young people? Have any young people in the community made to colleges, universities and jobs? Have schools involved you in key decisions at the age of 14 and 16, which would affect future careers? What kind of support does the community need?**

**Are there any other issues such as housing, health, violence, drugs and immigration problems that are affecting the education of young people in the community? What support does the community need?**

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE-page 5 continuation

**What kind of support is there for education in the community? Homework clubs, supplementary schools, counsellors, school mentors, home school liaison workers. Are there any gaps? What needs improving?**

**From your personal experience or those you know, are there problems faced by refugee and asylum seeker families with children about their education? Are these children placed in school quickly? Do they get support in finding out what their needs are? Is their education affected by movement and dispersal policy? How can the support be improved?**

**Is the community taking full advantage of new initiatives such as Sure Start, Connexions, Excellence in Cities (mentors, learning support assistants) etc? Has the community been fully informed?**

**COMMUNITY CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE-page 6 continuation**

**Are there any other issues in the community?**

**CASE STUDY 1**

**CASE STUDY 2**

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMUNITY**

## APPENDIX 2:

### COMMUNITY CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE – to be completed by young people

#### AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE EDUCATION TASK GROUP

- To focus on the health and family support issues related to young people between 11-16 years of age and to address community concerns about education and under-achievement and support offered to families.
- To bring together those currently providing services in this field, as well as community groups and individuals from BME communities, to evaluate the current service provision and issues related to access to services, information & publicity and needs assessment etc.
- To produce an action plan and a report with recommendations to be followed up by the BME health forum and relevant agencies and service providers.

#### GUIDE ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE

After consultation, we have designed this questionnaire to help us to gather information across a range of community groups.

The information gathered needs to be consistent so that we can clearly identify community concerns and aspirations.

This version of the questionnaire is for young people.

The questionnaire provides boxed themes with prompt questions to help with the conversation. Any additional information should be attached to the questionnaire.

Any anonymous case study, which can illustrate examples of good or poor practice, would be very useful for policy makers. TWO examples per community group would be enough.

For any queries please contact.  
The BME Health Forum Manager on 020 7150 8128

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BME Health Forum Manager  
c/o Westminster Primary Care Trust  
15 Marylebone Road  
London NW1 5JD  
Tel: 020 7150 8128  
Fax: 020 7150 8105  
E-mail: amjad.taha@westminster-pct.nhs.uk

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE-page 2 continuation

**For the young people in the community, what is going well?**

**What are the key issues for the young people?**

**What improvements would the young people like to see? What services would young people like to see provided in the future?**

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE-page 3 continuation

**What services do young people use? Are they accessible? How do young people contact agencies? Are cultural and language needs met?**

**What support do young people receive from schools? Do you feel that the schools take into account your language and cultural needs? Are there any problems?**

**Are you kept well informed about your progress? Are you happy with the quality of learning at the school? Are you satisfied with books issued, homework set and support, language support, mother tongue teaching etc?**

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE-page 4 continuation

**Have you had any problems with your education such as poor behaviour, truancy and exclusion? Have you been involved by the school in solving these problems? Have things improved or got worse?**

**What are your ambitions as young people? Have young people in the community made to colleges, universities and jobs? Have schools involved you in key decisions at the age of 14 and 16, which would affect future careers? What kind of support do young people need?**

**Are there any other issues such as housing, health, violence, drugs and immigration problems that are affecting the education of young people? What support do young people need?**

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE-page 5 continuation

**What kind of support is there for education in the community? Homework clubs, supplementary schools, counsellors, school mentors, home school liaison workers. Are there any gaps? What needs improving?**

**From your personal experience or those you know, are there problems faced by young refugee and asylum seekers about their education? Do these people get placed in school quickly? Do they get support in finding out what their needs are? Is their education affected by movement and dispersal policy? How can these young people be helped?**

**Are your families taking full advantage of new initiatives such as Sure Start, Connexions, Excellence in Cities (mentors, learning support assistants) etc? Has the community been fully informed?**

**COMMUNITY CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE-page 6 continuation**

**Are there any other issues for young people in your community?**

**CASE STUDY 1**

**CASE STUDY 2**

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMUNITY**