This submission draws from a forthcoming report on a study conducted by Peterborough Racial Equality Council in partnership with the Open University. The study explores the views of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds on what, in their experience, are the main barriers to community cohesion in their small city, and how they would build a better understanding between communities.

The principal sources of data are a survey of 450 young people aged between 14 and 19 from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, using open ended questions and free responses, followed by discussions with individuals and small groups. Individual responses are denoted by the survey number (111).

The responses reported here relate to:
- The values that all of us who live in Britain should share
- The relationship between civic engagement and social cohesion

**British values**
The survey asked; ‘If you were asked to decide upon some ‘British values’ what would they be?’ The young people were largely uncomprehending of the concept of ‘British Values’. However, they understood Islamic values, Christian values, and humanitarian values very well and demonstrated these eloquently in response to questions about ‘how to improve community relations’. However, they struggled to identify any that could be labelled as specifically ‘British’.

‘There are no such things. Values such as politeness, non-violence, non-discrimination etc. are values that should be universal. One cannot simply deem a particular group of values to be British. As a British citizen myself, I find the idea of British values to be absurd’ (311)

Others (13%) highlighted the changing nature of British society, reflected in changing values.

‘I don’t know [what British values should be] as British culture is constantly changing, so will the British values. We need global values!’ (277)

Some suggested statements of values with irony:

‘Pick on someone different to you’ (109)

‘We need to get rid of all these immigrants, they’re taking our jobs’ (127)

The most frequently expressed responses (20%) offered popular icons such as ‘fish and chips’, ‘drinking tea’ or ‘the Queen’. Respect for people and helping them irrespective of background were stated as aspirational values by 15%, but ‘tolerance’ was not sufficient.

‘Tolerance – is that how much you can take of something?’ Asked A.

In the vision for society held by these young people, there are many values beyond tolerance.

**Social cohesion and civic engagement**
The young people were asked; ‘What is the biggest barrier to community relations in the city?’ and ‘What could be done to improve relations between communities and faith groups in the city?’ 25% of respondents perceived the greatest barrier to be the segregation or lack of communication between different groups within the city. A further 18% specifically cited language barriers, indicating that funding for English / ESOL classes and EAL specialists should be a government priority. Correspondingly, the suggestions for improving engagement given by 28% involved the organisation of some kind of activity in which young people from different communities would come together. School and informal social encounters did not seem to fulfil this purpose but
organised gatherings, social events, and sports tournaments, did. A further 19% proposed
interfaith events and festivals.

The other main barrier to cohesion was deemed (by 21% of respondents) to be ignorance, or lack
of understanding about each other’s cultures, leading to stereotyping and judgemental attitudes.
A further 15% specifically cited overt racism. This barrier, all agreed, should be addressed by
better teaching about different cultures and faiths in schools and community settings. It should be
noted that this cohort of young people had already received the standard input of ‘citizenship
education’ through Personal Development Education or PSHE, but they believed that a much
deeper and better informed understanding of different beliefs was required to change attitudes.

‘We can definitely teach more about all religions and cultures – to get an understanding of
everyone’s faith and culture. I think it would bring us closer as a community’ (413)

The summary above is taken from a much longer report of the study which will be published by
the Open University later in the year.

4 September 2017