Ethnic Minority Communities and Sport  
Background information

In 1989 the English Sports Council introduced its first policy targeting people from ethnic minority communities. This was followed in 1992 by a statement that recognised existing inequalities of opportunity in sport for people from ethnic minority communities and acknowledged a duty to work towards the elimination of racial disadvantage and discrimination in sport, and promote good race relations.

There are a wide variety of ethnic minority communities in England, each having different needs and aspirations. However, whilst the issues affecting participation in sport by individual ethnic communities may vary, the effects of racial disadvantage and discrimination will be felt in all communities. As a society we now recognise that racism and discrimination in all their forms: direct and indirect, institutional and individual, overt and subtle, are important factors in accounting for the poor representation and exclusion of ethnic minority communities in sport.

In addition, the Government has advocated the importance of sporting participation in reducing social exclusion among ethnic minority communities. Three recent reports “Minority Ethnic issues in Social Exclusion and Neighbourhood Renewal (Cabinet Office), A Sporting Future for All (Dept for Culture, Media and Sport) and Report on Arts and Sport (Policy Action Team 10) highlight the particular issues affecting and influencing the participation and non-participation of people from ethnic minorities in sport, and give examples of projects tackling racism through various sporting initiatives.

The adoption of a sports equity policy regarding ethnic minorities is not only morally and ethically fundamental to the work of all responsible sporting organisations in our multiracial society, but also a legal requirement (See Legislation section).

Partners

Sport England’s key equity partner for racial equality is Sporting Equals. Sporting Equals is a national initiative funded by Sport England and the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE). In conjunction with its partners, Sporting Equals aims to change our society into a place where ethnic minorities can influence and participate equally in sport at all levels, as players, officials, coaches, administrators, volunteers and decision makers and where the governors and providers of sport recognise the value of a fully integrated and inclusive society. Sporting Equals is working to raise awareness and understanding of racial equality issues and their impact upon sport, and establish a sporting environment where cultural diversity is recognised and celebrated.
Sporting Equals has developed the document, ‘Achieving Racial Equality; A Standard for Sport’. This is a tool for national governing bodies and sport organisations to use in planning and developing initiatives that will help them realise racial equality in their sport or organisation. The standard can be used to evaluate progress, set levels of achievement and plan improvements. It is based on three levels of achievement (preliminary, intermediate and advanced) covering three areas of action at each level (commitment, policy and planning; participation and public image; administration and management).

**Research and statistics**

Research conducted by Sport England concerning the participation of ethnic minorities in sport in England can be found in the ‘Sports participation and Ethnicity in England National Survey (1999-2000)’. This survey reveals that many of the issues that influence the participation of the general population in sports also influence ethnic communities’ participation. However, there are also issues relating specifically to each of the various communities across England. These have had a strong influence in dictating which sports are undertaken, inhibiting people wishing to participate in certain sports but currently do not, and have contributed to the negative experiences encountered by people from ethnic minority communities whilst participating in sport.

Sport England has also developed the **Sports Equity Index**. This shows the relative propensity for different socio-demographic groups to participate in sport. It provides the evidence base to underpinning sports equity policy and initiatives in England. The information provided by the index highlights that ethnic minority communities cannot be dealt with as a one homogenous group. It also shows that the cultural needs and socio-economic status of each community influences its level of participation in sport.

Advice for organisations on how to collect information on the participation of ethnic minorities is included in the Sporting Equals publication *Achieving Racial Equality, A Standard for Sport* and the Sport England publication *Making English Sport Inclusive: Equity Guidelines for Governing Bodies*. Outline guidance is also provided in the section ‘Achieving Equitable Provision’ at the end of this section.

An essential publication for Local Authorities to follow when addressing the issues concerning racial equality is the Local Government Association’s “Promoting Racial Equality Through Sport – A Standard for Local Authority Sport and Leisure Services”. Developed in conjunction with Sport England and Sporting Equals, this standard provides clear guidance on the necessary steps leisure providers must take.

Sport England advocate that the information in all of these documents can be adapted and used by a variety of sporting organisations but also emphasise that, as ever, consultation with the local community is the most important factor when planning to provide sporting opportunities for either specific groups of for all.
Guidance for action planning

Foundation

Most recent research indicates that a healthy majority of young people from all ethnic minorities felt that there was nothing that deterred them from participating in sport at school. However, the high incidence of ethnic minority populations in areas of socio-economic deprivation and inner city neighbourhoods means that young people from ethnic minority populations are likely to experience restricted access to quality specialist sports facilities and activities.

Though the National Curriculum requires schools to ensure the equitable delivery of Physical Education within their timetables, legislation does not extend to the equitable delivery of extra curricular school sport. This, coupled with historical research revealing cultural differences in the value placed on physical activity as a leisure activity (Sports Participation and Ethnicity in England Survey 1999/2000), highlights the need for further work designed to ensure equitable opportunities positively promoted to people from ethnic minorities at foundation level.

Participation

There are a number of ‘barriers’ that preclude many people from different communities from participating in sport, either on a regular basis or indeed at all. These barriers exist as a result of people’s attitudes and/or a lack of information and education about the various community groups and the factors that influence participation. Below is an overview of the issues that providers of sport should be aware of and should account for when aiming to provide a more equitable service to communities. It will be seen from these that achieving equitable provision requires not only working for increased participation and input from ethnic minority communities, but addressing those attitudes that create perceived and actual ‘barriers’.

Socio-economic factors

As stated previously, the socio-economic status of all people will influence the type and the frequency of their participation in sport. It does, however, have a marked influence on the participation rates of ethnic minority communities, as 70% of all English ethnic minority residents live in the country’s 88 most deprived districts. Therefore, to encourage participation amongst ethnic minority communities in many areas, it is essential to address financial considerations.

Sport specific stereotyping
Unfortunately, many myths still prevail about the suitability of particular sports to people from particular ethnic backgrounds. Notions that Black people cannot swim and Asians are weak and easily injured should be dispelled, as there is no statistically significant research or information to support this view.

Sport England’s research shows that whilst users of swimming pools from Black and Asian communities is lower than average (Sports Hall and Swimming Pools Survey 1999) leading many to believe that swimming is not popular amongst black and Asian people. However, swimming ranks as the sport most people from ethnic minorities would like to participate in despite not currently doing so. (Sports Participation and Ethnicity in England, 1999/2000).

Gender

Research confirms that the gap between men’s and women’s participation in sport is greater amongst some ethnic minority groups than amongst the population as a whole. Over 40% of all women from ethnic communities surveyed gave home and family responsibilities as the reason they did not participate. Once again a consideration of the timing of sessions, childcare facilities and other factors, outlined in the section on the participation of women and girls, is crucial to the delivery of equitable opportunities in sport.

Racism

Direct, indirect and institutionalised racism are still, unfortunately, important factors influencing the participation and progress of people from ethnic minorities in sport. All sporting organisations can employ a number of measures to ensure that people from various ethnic backgrounds feel welcome and secure whilst participating in sporting activities. These include a public commitment to outlaw racism, transparent, simple and publicised complaints procedures, images showing multi-cultural participation, and initiatives to encourage people from ethnic communities into roles in administration, decision-making and coaching.

The report of The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson was published on 24 February 1999.

The Macpherson report defines institutional racism as:

The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.
Cases brought under the Race Relations Act 1976 already provide examples of both direct and indirect discrimination on racial grounds, often arising out of unintentional prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness or stereotyping.

**Performance and excellence**

Research has found that the representation of ethnic minorities in elite sport is proportionate to the population as a whole. However, further analysis reveals that representation across sports is uneven, with only athletics, netball and hockey attracting a significant proportion of people from ethnic minorities. The Black Caribbean population is well represented at elite levels, whilst the Asian population is under-represented, particularly Asian woman. Success in sport is also influenced by a number of factors that are pertinent to the situation of England’s ethnic minority population. An affluent background, support from parents and an independent or private schooling are characteristic of many elite performers, but not of the majority of people from ethnic communities in England. Sport England are therefore keen to ensure that progression to representative sport is influenced by the individuals talent and that talented athletes from ethnic minority communities will have as good a chance to make elite level sport as anyone. Progress has been made, with many governing bodies of sport introducing equity policies and action plans that are committed to addressing this issue. Sport England acknowledges that this must extend to all governing bodies and the implementation of action plans is a key recommendation.

The failure of many athletes to progress to elite level sport may be, in part due to the scarcity of coaches from ethnic minorities and the lack of role models for ethnic minority athletes in many sports. Sport England, SportsCoach UK and Sporting Equals are all addressing this through proactive and positive work.

**Management and organisation**

The documents mentioned in the Research and Statistics section provide clear guidance on how to address the many and varied issues concerning ethnicity and sport. Sport England advocate that all sporting organisations should aim to demonstrate their commitment to racial equality through the production of an equity statement, and begin to implement it in practice through focussed targets in their equity action plan. Larger organisations should seek to sign up to the Racial Equality Charter for Sport. Organisations should also provide race, culture and religious awareness training for their coaches, leaders and organisers to assist them when working with diverse communities.

Organisations should seek to ensure that people from ethnic minorities are proportionately represented in areas such as coaching, officiating, administration and decision-making. If not already completed, audits of staff and/or membership
should be undertaken to ensure this. In cases where ethnic communities are under-represented in these areas, organisations should develop recruitment or training programmes, seeking assistance in their development and funding from Sport England or Sporting Equals as necessary.

**Achieving equitable provision**

The previous section highlights many issues, together with the further information from key partners identified provides a clear way forward for organisations addressing inequity in sport.

**Addressing the needs of various communities**

It is essential that the various ethnic minority communities be considered individually, as each has different needs and experiences different barriers to participation; they are not a homogenous group. It is important that providers of sport collect information on their local communities and consider each community’s socio-economic, demographic and cultural profile when reviewing accessibility to sporting programmes and facilities. Consultation with established community groups, networks of sports clubs based in ethnic minority communities and support regional officers from Sport England and Sporting Equals is essential.

**Promotion and information**

Within every local area there are various communities, each containing smaller groups and communication networks. Gaining knowledge of these networks and using them to promote the value of sport will be essential to success. Low participation in sport within various communities should be addressed through promotion and positive images, and in working to ensure people from those communities feel confident and comfortable about participating.

**Changing attitudes and perceptions**

Addressing stereotypes, reducing what many communities perceive to be the barriers to participation and working with local clubs and organisations are fundamental actions in promoting sport amongst ethnic minority communities.

**Coaching and leadership**

There is a growing need to address the lack of coaches and leaders in sport from ethnic minority communities. Providers of sport at a local level must be proactive in addressing this concern, empowering local people and providing opportunities to progress to as leaders and coaches.
It is widely acknowledged that the increase in coaches and leaders from ethnic minority communities has a very positive impact upon the development of young people from those same communities. As a key aim of Sport England, Sporting Equals and SportsCoach UK are to continue to ensure that this positive impact upon the participation of young people is promoted. This is essential to success.

There is also a need to address the significant lack of management staff from ethnic minority communities in all areas of leisure, sport and recreation. The revised Sport England sports equity policy has identified the proactive steps that Sport England is to take in addressing this issue. Therefore, providers of sport and sporting organisations will need to consider the importance of addressing the current imbalance and initiate action for addressing these.