

Consultation Submission Form

The Commission on Integration and Cohesion would like to ask seven key questions to national bodies, local bodies and individuals about what practical measures we can take to improve cohesion and reduce tensions in local communities. You may wish to answer all the questions or just those you feel most relevant to you. We also welcome written submissions and examples of local good practice.

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Are your comments on the questions for national bodies, local bodies or individuals?	National bodies

The National Council on Archives (NCA) is delighted to have the opportunity to comment on cohesion and integration within the UK's communities today.

The National Council on Archives was established in 1988 to bring together the major bodies and organisations, including service providers, users, depositors and policy makers, across the UK concerned with archives and their use. It aims to develop consensus on matters of mutual concern and provide an authoritative common voice for the archival community.

The NCA would like to support the comments made by SEAPN: The Network, of which NCA is a member. In addition we would like to make the following comments:

Key Question 1 - What does 'cohesion' mean to you? What does 'integration' mean to you? What might a community which is both integrated and cohesive look like?

Neither 'cohesion' nor 'integration' mean 'homogeneity'. We believe that, in order to enable a cohesive and integrated community, certain factors have to be in place: the basic needs of all members are met, and also as many non-basic needs as possible without compromising the needs of others. A cohesive and integrated community will be one where tensions between members are minimised, and where tolerance of differences are encouraged and maximised. A cohesive society needs to be a fair and just society where, if two differing groups both have claims on a behaviour that contravenes the freedoms of the other, neither group is placed above the other.

With these prerequisites met, and complementary to them, an integrated and cohesive community is one where members of differing groups come together to enjoy their differences and celebrate them, in a spirit of equality. In order for this to happen, both individuals and the groups to which they belong must feel secure and valued by the rules governing their community. They must have a sense of place, worth and ownership.

A very powerful way of providing this sense of place and ownership is the valuing and validation of an individual's and a group's historical and contemporary record. Archives provide professional care, preservation and access to these records once they are no longer current. There are many examples of the power and impact of caring for one's documentary and oral heritage which I will highlight throughout this response. More examples can be found on the NCA's websites, www.ncaonline.org.uk, www.archiveawareness.com and www.communityarchives.org.uk.

Key Question 2 - What do you think are the main tensions between different groups in our communities? What factors do you think contribute to these and what are your thoughts about how to tackle them? What role can local leaders play in tackling them?

We believe that the main tensions between different groups in a community are caused by unfamiliarity, a sense of injustice, displacement or preference, incomprehension and misunderstanding, and fear. These reactions and emotions in turn may be caused by separation from another group, from historical precedent (e.g. the well-known attitude of the English to the French) learned from other members of one's own group, from a cycle of violence, or from a host of other causes, many of which set up vicious circles of behaviours and beliefs. The most effective means to tackle the tensions are to break these vicious circles. But these are also the most difficult, long-term solutions which require sustained, determined and consistent investment of time, patience, stability and, of course, money. Opportunities for members of different groups to live and work together sharing their cultures on an equal footing must be created; intolerance expressed in words or actions must be dealt with fairly, equally and quickly. Places where people who feel threatened may feel safe must be made available (e.g. women's shelters), and individuals and groups given the emotional and physical support they

need to change their attitudes, (e.g. through counselling or self-esteem or group capacity building). We suggest some tried and successful methods of providing this through archives below in Question 3.

Leaders can play a very important role: by ensuring sufficient funds are available to support these activities over a sufficient length of time to take effect, by acting in consistent ways that embody the principles outlined above, by showing sincere solidarity with their colleagues in positions of leadership in different groups, both in times of joy and harmony as well as in times of stress and crisis.

Key Question 3 - What things do you think help people from different backgrounds feel like they belong? Do you think there are particular values or 'ground rules' for shared life, which are or should be at the heart of society in the UK? What do you think they are?

The National Council on Archives area of expertise is in the archives domain. We are aware of other factors that help people from different factors feel like they belong, but we feel strongly that recorded heritage and documented memory of all groups are a resource dear to the heart of all groups, and should be valued equally. This means that all groups should be encouraged to preserve their original heritage themselves within a Community Archive (see www.communityarchives.org.uk) or by depositing their archives for preservation with a suitable place of deposit such as the local record office. It also means that all places of deposit should be encouraged to accept deposits from all groups and in all formats (e.g. some cultures have an oral history culture rather than a written history culture), and to build relations with groups to enable the building of trust which leads to deposit. In this arena, the Northamptonshire Black History Project has been the most outstanding success, but much more can be done. Such activities as these show that 'official history' values the experience (historical and contemporary) of different groups, and increases the groups sense of belonging.

As well as festivals highlighting individual groups' heritage, such as Black History Month, the NCA would encourage all archives and all groups to showcase and celebrate their heritage in a way that both entertains and educates members of other groups. British society has an enthusiasm for history and heritage, which has endured and is even growing, as seen with the success of such programmes as *Time Team* and *Who Do You Think You Are?* Groups who feel themselves outside of the Anglo-Saxon tradition can be made to appear much less threatening to 'middle England' by presenting their heritage to a larger audience, through this receptive route.

The NCA believes that respect for the individual is one of the values that should be at the heart of society in the UK. No one person conforms to any stereotype of their ethnicity, class, sexual group or creed. White family historians are sometimes surprised to find black ancestors; staunch Scots Protestants disconcerted to find English Catholic great-grandparents. The more we can see individuals as unique, and the more we know about our own personal and group heritage, the more difficult it becomes to hold bigoted beliefs about anyone.

Of course, in order to enable such research and understanding about oneself, all areas and group in UK society has to protect and preserve these historical sources and continue to preserve contemporary sources for the future. This applies not just to those records created and kept in the UK but also all those for which the UK must take responsibility as they were created throughout the Empire.

We also believe passionately in the upholding of the democratic and evidential power of archives. In a modern society, where facts and truth can be manipulated more easily than ever before, through the media, the internet, and even through the massive loss of electronic documentation because local government especially but not exclusively is failing to preserve it, members of society can feel that they have no sure way of scrutinising their political and societal leaders. Yet, the documentation that is deposited in archives by law offers the most direct and honest method of understanding what people in positions of power have done and why. If this record is not cared for in the most professional manner, we have failed in our democratic duty to be transparent in our business and decision-making, which in turn may engender feelings of mistrust, suspicion, segregation and tension: the very feelings this Commission is attempting to reduce.

Key Question 4 - Why do you think people from different backgrounds may live parallel or separate lives? Is this negative or positive?

People from different backgrounds may live parallel or separate lives because they are not confident, as either individuals or as a group, in having contact with other groups. This may be an emotional reaction, e.g. because they fear other groups will not understand or respect their beliefs or customs (e.g. some older people being afraid of teenagers because they are perceived to be rude or unruly), or a reasoned choice e.g. because they disapprove of the beliefs or customs of the other groups (e.g. some Muslims disapprove of keeping dogs in the home). If individual people live apart because of the latter, that is their prerogative; they are still adhering to society's rules. They are not adding to the tensions, no matter what reaction this withdrawal may provoke in others. It may not be a positive factor in society, but it isn't necessarily negative.

If whole groups of people live apart, that is a more complicated situation. The effects of individuals within either group may be negatively affected. As long as each individual feels at liberty to make a choice, it would seem innocuous.

However, if individuals or groups live apart from people with a different background because of an emotional reaction, this is definitely negative. As a society we should look at the causes of the withdrawal and ask how the group feeling threatened can be reassured. This reassurance should be provided by all means possible, using the methods outlined in the answer to Question 3 and any others that work.

Key Question 5 - What role in contributing to community cohesion and integration do you see for organisations and institutions such as: local authorities, the police, the health service, schools, youth organisations, faith groups, inter faith and race equality bodies, housing associations, private sector bodies, voluntary organisations, theatres, art centres, sports associations, and the media?

Local authorities are responsible for local record offices and local cultural strategies. As such they should be utilising the cultural heritage, informational and evidential assets in their care to the best of their ability to build a shared valuing of all heritages and the shared community. Instead, many local authorities have been forced to cut the budgets of their archives, restricting the access the public has to their own public property and written heritage. In the Information Age, this is a disgrace. Local authorities would not countenance the use of up to 50% volunteer, amateur labour to assist in their finance departments, but this is common in their management of their information resources. In one region, it is estimated that it would take an archivist 299 years to make deposited but uncatalogued material available to the public (see *Logjam: an audit of uncatalogued collections in the North West*, by MLA North West).

The NCA would like to encourage all of the above mentioned groups and others to ensure that their documentary legacy is preserved and cared for, to help give their members the feeling of being part of something bigger than themselves, that will last beyond their involvement and possibly their lifetimes. This in turn makes their endeavours feel more permanent and their impact on their communities more secure, leading to a virtuous circle promoting more integration and cohesion within the community. The most tried and tested way to achieve this is to deposit their records, in whatever format, with their local record office, although some organisations would prefer to run their own archive and this should also be encouraged, with skills sharing from public archivists willing to assist.

Key Question 6 - What help do new people to a community need when they arrive? What help do existing residents need to cope with change in their community?

The NCA has no expertise to offer in relation to the first question, although, if possible, we would like to see people new to a community able to express their thoughts concerning their arrival in more public ways to help those already in the community understand their situations better. One way to do this is through the collection of reminiscence of other groups who have come to the community as well as those arriving more recently. An outstanding example of this is the 'Moving Here' project run by The National Archives.

We believe that among other, more practical, needs, existing residents need to know that they and their heritage are still valued. Archives can assist in this, by providing access to materials and professional assistance to local history societies, family historians and others. For example, the University of East London is starting a project to collect and celebrate the heritage of four large local businesses through the involvement of their former employees, many of whom still live in the area. East London is one of those areas going

through rapid demographic change, and this activity will provide a way of existing residents to express their pride in their area and community. It also provides those moving into the area with a sense of the type of community they are joining, and communicates that pride, giving integrate and cohesion between the groups a head start.

Key Question 7 - What do you see as effective ways to counteract people's negative perceptions of and attitudes to people from different backgrounds?

The NCA would like to see an emphasis on the sharing and celebration of community and group heritage. It is not only the content of such heritage that assists (for example, this year's Archive Awareness Campaign events, whose theme of *Freedom and Liberty* will celebrate a number of anniversaries significant to different groups for different reasons: Indian Independence and the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the British Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, and the founding of Jamestown in Virginia to name but three), but also the process of mounting exciting one off exhibitions and the sustained interest needed to tackle day-to-day document conservation. This common respect for each other's identity, expressed through the preservation of archival heritage is a very powerful tool to building understanding and harmony between different groups.