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The Oldham and Rochdale Youth Identity Project

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## Vice Chancellor's Foreword

The University of Huddersfield has historic and strong ties with the areas of Oldham and Rochdale, as is well-illustrated by the continued development of the University Campus Oldham, and by the considerable number of students travelling from the Rochdale and Oldham areas to the main campus in Huddersfield.

This means that I am particularly pleased to mark the publication of this Final Report from the University's Youth Identity Project. This project has grown from a longstanding relationship between Youth and Community agencies in the Oldham and Rochdale areas and the University's School of Education and Professional Development, and has been supported by the Rochdale Pride Partnership Community Cohesion Group and by the University's own Research Committee.

These findings highlight important issues and ways forward for all those of us concerned with making further progress towards genuine cohesion, good relations and equality amongst all the communities of Oldham and Rochdale, and I encourage you to use these findings within your own work with young people and their communities.

**Professor B. Cryan**  
**Vice-Chancellor**



## Youth Identity Project: Executive Summary

The Youth Identity Project is the product of a partnership between the School of Education and Professional Development, University of Huddersfield and Youth Work agencies in the Oldham and Rochdale areas. This action research project has been funded by the University, and by the Rochdale Pride Partnership. It surveyed over 800 young people, aged 12-19 years old and of all ethnic backgrounds, across the areas during 2008, using a variety of research techniques to investigate young peoples' views on, and experiences of, cohesion, segregation and 'Identity'. The Project was designed as a pilot study which would explore positive ways forward for Youth policy-makers and practitioners in Oldham, Rochdale and further afield, as well as identifying issues that warrant further academic investigation.

### **Key Project Findings:**

- Young people in Oldham and Rochdale **do** have friends of a different ethnic background in school/college, suggesting grounds for optimism in relation to the future.
- However, they virtually never meet these diverse friends socially for a number of reasons, including experiences of housing segregation, lack of suitable and safe places to meet, and the fear that because of family and community attitudes, their friends may not be safe visiting 'their' area.
- This suggests a need for an enhanced focus on projects, places and spaces that can allow young people to meet safely. When young people have such opportunities to meet, such as through the excellent 'Fusion' residential experience which brings High School students from Oldham and Rochdale together, they are very positive about them.
- A significant number of young people of all backgrounds, especially young men, displayed overt prejudices and disrespectful language towards young people of a different ethnic background when asked to talk about them as a group. Such attitudes are the norm for some young people in many of Oldham and Rochdale's ethnically segregated neighbourhoods, reflecting the national problem of the lack

of cross-community contact and respect highlighted by the Community Cohesion reports.

- Virtually all the Asian young people surveyed saw their religion of Islam as the most important form of identity to them (in clear contrast to all other young people), but they do **not** see this as incompatible with being British – they describe themselves as ‘British Muslims’ or ‘Asian British’, and were happy to agree with the statement ‘I am proud to be British’.
- Muslim young people are much less sure about describing themselves as ‘English’, which they see as being about White people. In contrast, most White young people view themselves as ‘English’, rather than British. This suggests the need for a more positive and inclusive ‘Englishness’ to be discussed and celebrated.
- White young people are significantly less positive about Britain as a multicultural society containing different communities and backgrounds. Many of them were pessimistic and worried about race relations in the future (as were a significant number of Asian young people). This clearly highlights the need to step up positive cohesion work and educational activity that breaks down isolation and fears, which challenges myths and stereotypes, and which builds networks across different communities.

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Research Process</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Project Findings: Key Learning Themes</b>	<b>13</b>
<i>1. Cohesion and Segregation</i>	
<i>2. Young Peoples' understandings of 'Identity'</i>	
<i>3. Locality</i>	
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Further Contact</b>	<b>32</b>

### **The need for new knowledge around Cohesion and 'Identity'**

Young people's experiences of segregation, racial tension and British 'Identity' have been at the forefront of political debate and policy action over the past few years. Urban disturbances with racial overtones and a concern with the need to promote Community Cohesion have led commentators to suggest that many of our towns and cities across England are ethnically divided, with significant levels of racial tension that are often violently acted out by young people. The 7/7 bombings of July 2005 and subsequent terror plots has led to suggestions that a minority of young British Muslims are profoundly alienated from Britain and its stated values, whilst the significant growth in the far-right British National Party implies that some younger White people have negative feelings about Britain's multicultural society.

These national issues can be seen as being reflected locally in Oldham and Rochdale, and in other comparable towns in the North of England. Violent urban disturbances in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in the summer of 2001 led central government towards a profound re-think of race relations policies and to the new priority of Community Cohesion. Whilst Rochdale did not experience disturbances, the Commission for Racial Equality identified it as one of a number of other northern towns as being 'on the brink' during the same summer (*The Guardian*, 28<sup>th</sup> December, 2006). Both Oldham and Rochdale have significant ethnic segregation, according to the data provided by the Isolation Ratio, a measure of the degree to which BME and White communities are concentrated or separated in physical geographical terms, and which measures the likelihood of a close neighbour of a different ethnic background to one's own (Wood et al, 2006). The high level of ethnic spatial segregation in Pennine towns and cities has also been highlighted by Government (ODPM, 2006). Whilst there is positive evidence of this slowly breaking down in Oldham and Rochdale, such as through the 'Housing Market Renewal' initiative underway across the two areas (Phillips, Simpson and Ahmed, 2008; Finney and Simpson, 2009), the historical legacy of separate housing areas provides a challenge to overcome.

Alongside the phenomenon of spatial segregation, another national challenge with local ramifications has been the growth in violent extremism, firstly evidenced by the 7/7 bombings and subsequent court cases over recent years which have seen young Muslim

men from northern towns, including Rochdale, convicted of plotting terrorist acts (*The Guardian*, 19<sup>th</sup> December, 2008), and secondly by the warnings of Police Counter-Terror Units of a likely growth in far-right political violence in the coming period (*The Guardian*, 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2009), with existing evidence of some far-right activists in the north of England becoming involved in terror plots (*The Guardian*, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2007). The Government's 'Preventing Violent Extremism' agenda, set up in response to the events of 7/7, has focussed significant resources nationally on educational work with young people in reaction to these developments, with Rochdale's involvement in the programme leading directly to this research process.

These national political realities, and the governmental policy responses to them, make it vital that we know more about young people's experiences of cohesion and segregation, and their feelings about the Identities and lifestyles of themselves and 'others', yet the available research evidence is limited. Whilst there is a lively and growing focus on the myth and reality of physical/housing ethnic segregation (Finney and Simpson, 2009), there is much less empirical evidence concerning how young people nationally feel about ethnic segregation and 'cohesion'. Even more worryingly, given the concerns from some political and media quarters that significant sections of British youth are hostile to 'British' identity, there is very limited data on how young people see their identity and which forms of national, ethnic and local 'identities' are important to them.

The Youth Identity Research Project, reported here, focussed on the case study areas of Oldham and Rochdale, Greater Manchester, and has aimed to address these needs, and to generate findings that can guide both future policy development and resource allocation at local, regional and national levels, and the direction of future academic study. Given these twin aims, the research process, as described below, has had a clear 'action' element: we aimed to make a positive contribution by building capacity in the areas under study, rather than simply gathering data and moving on in a traditional academic way. This represents part of the University's deep and continued engagement with the Oldham/Rochdale areas, and with the educational and youth provision within them, as evidenced by the development of the University Campus Oldham.

### **Community Cohesion**

Whilst Community Cohesion remains a controversial policy approach, there is universal agreement that it is concerned with physical and cultural ethnic segregation and how to overcome it. Bringing people of different ethnic backgrounds together for 'meaningful

direct contact' is the policy concern of Community Cohesion, utilising youth activities, school twinning and shared projects to enable this contact. In-depth academic evidence from what Youth Work in Oldham is doing about Community Cohesion (Thomas, 2006; 2007) highlighted the real and positive impacts of such shared activity, and confirmed that this activity recognises and positively accepts 'difference', rather than trying to impose a 'sameness' on young people. This positive academic evidence about Community Cohesion youth activity in Oldham has had a national audience and impact. However, there is only very limited academic evidence nationally on young peoples' actual experiences of contact with young people of different ethnic backgrounds, or how they feel about this level and manner of contact. By investigating this issue, the Research Project hoped to generate new data that can help to guide Community Cohesion strategies locally and further afield.

### **'Preventing Violent Extremism'**

A key concern of the Community Cohesion policy agenda discussed above has been to emphasise the need for and promotion of 'shared values' that bind people of all ethnic and social backgrounds into a shared and positive understanding of Britishness. This aspiration has been significantly challenged by the 7/7 terrorist bombings, and subsequent plots and convictions highlighted above, and the media discussion of them that has focussed on claims of profound alienation from British identity. Intemperate media coverage has been fuelled by questionable political claims (Policy Exchange, 2007) of very significant Muslim alienation from 'Britishness', and considerable empathy with Islamist extremism. These security concerns have led the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to make funding available around the issue of 'Preventing Violent Extremism' (PVE) to Local Authorities and other bodies working with young people from April 2007, a policy priority that is still expanding and developing, and which has some potentially worrying facets (Thomas, 2009). This policy agenda, and media / political debate around it, is based on very limited empirical evidence about how young people of all backgrounds understand their 'Identity', and how this relates to national 'identity' for themselves and 'others'. For many Local Authorities and their communities, this PVE policy agenda has been problematic, particularly in its focus almost exclusively on Muslim communities (DCLG, 2008). The Rochdale Pride Partnership has been one of a limited number of Local Authority areas nationally to find a creative and holistic way forward on this issue, supporting initiatives, such as this action research process, which have focussed constructively on young people from **all** ethnic backgrounds through discussion

of issues of cohesion and identity that are important for all of us, and by building the confidence, skills and capacity of professionals working with young people around such issues.

### **The Youth Identity Research Project (YIRP)**

These concerns around the evidence base for the Community Cohesion and PVE national policy agendas led directly to this Youth Identity Research Project. This initially aimed to focus only on Oldham through funding from the University's own Research Committee. The aim here was to develop the School of Education and Professional Development's ongoing research around the meanings and impact of Community Cohesion, as well as further deepen the University's engagement with Oldham as a community. To develop the Research project, University staff worked in partnership with a number of Youth Work agencies in Oldham to plan and carry out research activity with young people of all ethnic and social backgrounds around these key issues, utilising the existing relationships between young people and their youth workers at the local community level.

After the initial planning stage, this Project was subsequently expanded to include Rochdale through financial support from the Rochdale Pride Partnership Community Cohesion sub-committee, utilising PVE funding. As discussed above, Rochdale Pride Partnership was concerned that any PVE-funded activity involved communities of **all** backgrounds in a holistic and constructive way, so ensuring that this new initiative was consistent with and supportive of, ongoing Community Cohesion work. This led to the 'Rochdale Youth Identity Project', devised and delivered through collaboration between SEPD, University of Huddersfield, Rochdale Youth Service and a number of other Community Organisation and Youth Work agencies within the Borough.

### **The Geographical Focus: Oldham and Rochdale**

This report therefore highlights data and key learning from across the Rochdale and Oldham areas. **It is important to be clear here that the issues and problems under investigation are accepted by both government and academic commentators to be national ones, and this research focus, or the data produced, in no way suggests that problems of segregation and ethnic tension are worse in Oldham or Rochdale than elsewhere. In fact, the very fact of the engagement by key Youth Work agencies from Oldham and Rochdale emphasises the serious focus in both areas on building cohesion and dialogue, and the good practice already under way there.** Additionally,

through the long-standing partnership and research activity (for example, Thomas, 2006) outlined above, the University is well aware of the range of creative and determined youth activities underway in both areas with the intention of positively building cohesion. These include the ethnically-mixed staff teams within many Youth organisations, the nationally-recognised 'Fusion' initiative, the award-winning 'Peacemaker' agency, and on-going programmes of direct-contact work amongst young people of different ethnic backgrounds through schools and youth work. Instead, our intention has been to gather data that is helpful to local (and regional/national) policy-makers and practitioners and, in so doing, to contribute to increased skills and confidence of the practitioners involved in the research process.

At certain points, the report differentiates Oldham or Rochdale evidence; at others it amalgamates data into one overall analysis. Here, the key issues and findings have clearly been identified and evaluated by University Project staff, but all these issues and findings have been previously reported back to and discussed with participating youth workers as the project developed. The scale and the quality of research data available is a tribute to the energy and commitment of the youth workers, and agencies, involved. Clearly, the role of Youth Work agencies and youth workers as the vehicle for investigating these issues and collecting the data needs to be commented on. The participating youth workers and their agencies overwhelmingly gathered data from young people they already worked with and had positive relationships of trust with. We feel that this has enabled meaningful and important data to be gathered. Youth Work often, understandably, targets the most disadvantaged young people within society, so using Youth Work as the focus for the research has meant that a lot of data has been gathered from young people and communities who can be viewed as facing economic and social exclusion. This clearly impacts on the nature and balance of some of the data gathered.

Having said that, **the Project has involved approximately 800 young people from a variety of ethnic and geographical backgrounds across Oldham and Rochdale in the research activity.** These geographical locations have included the full range of locations in both the Oldham and Rochdale Local Authority areas, including urban, suburban and rural areas. Whilst both Oldham and Rochdale clearly face significant challenges around Community Cohesion, equality and inclusion as the data below indicates, the focus of this Research Project is that these are challenges for **all** Local authority areas nationally, as highlighted by governmental policy (DCLG, 2007b).

## The Research Process

The YIRP has emerged from well-established relationships between the School of Education and Professional Development (SEPD), University of Huddersfield and Youth and Community Work organisations in the Oldham and Rochdale areas. These relationships are built around the professional qualification training of Youth and Community Workers, with mutually-beneficial research activity emerging naturally from these positive relationships. Indeed, a significant number of the Youth Workers participating in this Research Project were current or former students at the University of Huddersfield. As well as producing the findings and recommendations detailed below, the Research Project was also intended to have an 'Action' element, in that the research process would lead to more skilled and confident youth workers and to greater collaboration around the key issues of Identity and Community Cohesion between different agencies working with young people. Research Project aims were to:

- Train and utilise Youth Workers to carry out research activity within their own youth centres/projects on issues of Identity and Cohesion
- Devise and use a number of different research approaches that allow young people of all abilities and backgrounds to offer their views and experiences
- Help young people become more confident and thoughtful in discussing Identity, of themselves and others, and Cohesion and segregation through taking part in this research process
- Strengthen relationships between different youth work agencies and help their staff become more confident and skilled in discussing issues of Cohesion and Identity.
- Identify clear recommendations for future work with young people in Oldham and Rochdale around issues of Identity and Cohesion.

The Youth Identity Research Project saw the existing relationships youth workers have with young people as a fundamental strength in the data collection process, and utilised this, believing that young people were more likely to feel confident and comfortable enough to offer their honest views (however prejudiced or challenging some of those are) with workers they already knew and trusted. As the aims above suggest, the process of

discussing these issues and hearing different points of view was seen as important, as well as what young people actually said. The Research Project consisted of the following processes:

- Training sessions enabling Youth Workers to explore their own views and experiences of Cohesion and Identity and to learn more about research approaches. This included evaluating and adapting research methods proposed by SEPD
- Research activity by Youth Workers, at times and through approaches that suited the reality of their agency and the young people they work with
- Action Learning Set meetings facilitated by SEPD staff to enable Youth Workers to discuss progress and share their experiences of research to date
- Evaluation with participating Youth Workers to identify key learning points
- Analysis and reporting of Research findings/data by SEPD

A number of different research methods and approaches were agreed during the above process in order to maximise the involvement of young people from a wide variety of backgrounds and abilities within the core 13-19 years age group. This variety of methods utilised also reflects the wide variety of youth work provision within the participating agencies, with this including statutory and voluntary sector youth clubs, targeted youth projects focussed on young people at risk on involvement in crime, youth participation and empowerment projects and youth worker-led sessions within schools. Some individual and group discussions were tape-recorded and transcribed, while others were noted on flipchart paper, with all materials analysed by University Project staff. Similarly, questionnaires and exercise sheets were analysed, using computer software programmes such as SPSS and NVivo. Research Project methods employed included:

- Individual interviews
- Group interviews/discussions
- Questionnaires
- Identity ranking sheets
- Word and sentence association exercises

More details of the methods and exercises employed can be obtained from University Project staff. In reporting the findings, we have used data from different exercises, not all

of which involved all the respondents: where this is the case, the number of respondents is provided alongside the percentage figures. We have excluded from the reporting process information that might allow specific respondents of localities to be identified, so that places may be represented by a letter or symbol.

Key to acumens

AYP = Asian Young Person

WYP = White Young Person

M = Male

F = Female

### 1. Cohesion and Segregation

Young people who attend ethnically-mixed High Schools or Colleges **do** have friends of a different ethnic background, showing the positive progress stemming from the ongoing work described above, and providing significant grounds for optimism. However, these relationships only exist within the educational setting. The vast majority had no contact with each other outside of school, blaming the attitudes/prejudices of families and peers, fears about having to enter 'unsafe territory', and the lack of places, activities and spaces in Oldham or Rochdale that would enable young people to safely come together from a variety of ethnic and geographical backgrounds. These 'parallel lives' are leading to a significant number of young people from all ethnic backgrounds being ignorant about each other, and having highly negative, prejudiced views about 'other' communities and individuals. Clear majorities of young people from all backgrounds thought that ethnic segregation and tension are wrong and damaging, and that diversity is strength for Britain, but young people were worried and pessimistic about ethnic relations and Community Cohesion in the future.

#### Segregation

Young people's evidence supported the view of the Community Cohesion reports (Cantle, 2001; Ritchie, 2001) produced in the wake of the 2001 disturbances, that 'parallel lives' had become the norm for many young people in areas like Oldham and Rochdale:

*Oldham, you've got different communities in different areas. You're more comfortable in your area in Oldham (AYP, Oldham);*

*There's hardly any Asians around here and hardly any Asians are in our school. We've got like one Asian guy in our school. I don't have a problem with them, I mean I get on with them but you know, I just don't see them (WYP, Rochdale).*

*Because I just like stay in the streets of Oldham, I don't meet like other people, it's only like Asian people that I meet (AYP, Oldham)*

Segregation?: *That's a bad thing because then like they don't know how like English people can be and English people don't know how Asians can be. (AYP, Rochdale)*

The impact of this significant segregation is that some young people don't see the point of trying to enable contact across ethnic divides: *Because you don't have much things in common with them that's why* (AYP, Oldham) ; *if they spoke to me I would but I wouldn't go up to them and start talking to them* (WYP, Rochdale)

In contrast to such pessimistic views, many young people of all ethnic backgrounds reported having friends and positive acquaintances of a different ethnic background within school or college: *We mix all right in school but don't mix outside* (AYP, Rochdale). However, almost all young people had little or no contact with these friends of different backgrounds outside of school/college, meaning that the depth and quality of cross-ethnic friendships are very limited. For instance, in one White-background youth group in Rochdale, 100% of the young people had friends of a different background in school/college, but only 10% had any contact with those friends outside of school. There were a number of reasons for this experience being so common amongst those surveyed, one of them being the reality of physically ethnically-segregated housing areas: *They all live far away anyway, they don't live in the community that I'm from* (AYP, Oldham) ; *they live kind of faraway* (AYM, Rochdale)

Another, more depressing, reason, is that young people are already ruling out such possibilities, either on the grounds that 'differences' are so great, or because of (often fully justified) security fears: *they've never invited me and I've never thought of going myself* (AYP, Rochdale). Some of these reasons relate to fears about family, friends and local community would react to friends of a different background visiting them, as highlighted by a 13 year old White young man in Rochdale who explained why he never invited Asian friends to visit him: *My mates and stuff...(it would) Start fighting and got mates who don't like 'em*. Here, peer pressure and expectations of friends is playing a crucial role: *you talk to them* (White young people) *in lessons and if you see them in college hanging round you say hello. But I don't think they would like.... if they were with all of their mates you wouldn't approach them* (AYP, Rochdale)

Cultural differences and divides that have been emphasised and re-enforced by ethnic segregation are clearly part of the challenge here: ***"I'm uncomfortable (about going to their houses) cos they pray"*** (WYP, Rochdale); *the way they* (White people) *live is different to the way Asians live* (AYP, Rochdale); ***"I'm not allowed out of the house, so if I want to see friends, I have to see them in school"*** (AYW, Rochdale).

Even this limited impact of mixed schooling is beyond the experience of some young people: ***“My school, it’s always been like just Asian people so never like mixed in with White people”*** (AYP, Oldham).

Underpinning young peoples’ self-censorship over the possibilities of friends of a different background visiting them and their areas/families socially was a universal perception that ‘space’ in Oldham and Rochdale is racialised – that areas are ‘safe’ for one ethnic background, but not for another. Clearly this reflects the significant existing ethnic segregation within housing, and encompasses the wider reality of territory as an important factor in the lives of many young people.

### **Unsafe spaces and places**

It is clear nationally that young people of all ethnic backgrounds often feel that some areas or ‘territory are unsafe for them, with clear ‘mental maps’ of which areas and routes are safe and which ones are not (Kintrea et al,2008).This means that in areas of significant ethnic spatial segregation, the interplay between ‘territory’ and ‘race’ can be complex (Webster,1995), and that in areas of apparent racial tension, such as Oldham, territory-related youth violence can actually be more pronounced between areas of the same ethnic group than between areas of different ethnic backgrounds (Thomas, 2006): ***“I don’t feel safe in any of the areas really.”*** (WYP, Rochdale) The YIRP found that young people in Oldham and Rochdale were often very clear about which geographical areas they felt safe or unsafe in, with much of these perceptions focussed on their own ethnicity in relation to the dominant ethnicity of particular geographical/housing areas:

***“Especially S\*... I know it’s a White area and if I was seen there with a headscarf.”*** (AYW, Rochdale); ***“S\*... I got chased there.”*** (AYM, Rochdale)

This logic also works in mainly Asian areas, with local young people clear about why few White young people come into the area: ***“Because people around this area they threaten people that they come down our area, they jump ‘em .“*** (AYP, Rochdale). For some White young people from other parts of the Borough, the multi-racial nature of Oldham or Rochdale town centres was perceived to be a threat: ***“If I like went to hang around with my friends, like meet other people, I wouldn’t feel safe.”*** (WYP, Rochdale). An Asian youth group in Oldham discussed why they wouldn’t go to overwhelmingly White area of Y\*: *it’s just known as that kind of place where, it’s just a racist area, just like White people wouldn’t want to walk into X\* because of the X\* reputation, there’s a lot of racist Pakistanis there.* Clearly such characterisations of whole

areas as 'racist' or 'dodgy' are unfair stereotypes, but they do indicate that many young people have 'maps' in their heads of what areas are safe or unsafe, with the ethnic make-up of the area often being a crucial part of these judgements. The vast majority of young people surveyed in Oldham and Rochdale had such mental maps, and this clearly limits their ability and willingness to travel around their boroughs for education, employment or social reasons. As much of these beliefs were actually stereotypes based on little or no direct personal experience, there is clearly both a challenge and opportunity for enhanced community cohesion activity programmes here.

Some of these fears relate to public spaces, including parts of the town centres of Oldham and Rochdale, with some White young people from other towns in the Boroughs understanding the more multi-racial main towns as 'Asian', as discussed above. For instance, a number of White young people expressed fears about Rochdale Bus Station and other parts of the Town Centre, particularly if they lived in the other (mainly monocultural) towns or villages of the Borough.

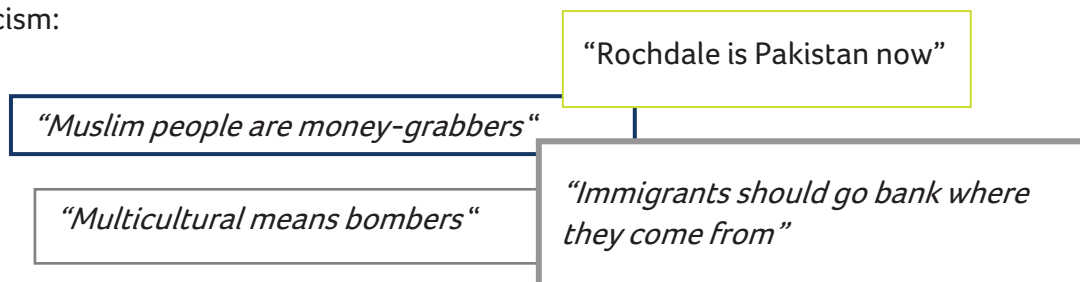
Such fears held by young people are sometimes fully justified, being based on real experiences of racially-motivated attacks or threats, as was graphically illustrated by a mainly Asian youth participation group in Oldham who recounted being racially attacked in a mainly White area whilst returning home from a very positive youth event. The young people acknowledged that this provoked feelings of anger in them and their friends, and that it made them wary about 'unsafe' areas. Here, there are clearly cycles of incidents and responses, based on 'territory' as well as ethnicity/race, that re-enforce fears and perceptions of areas, and it highlights the need for work that bridges territory divides of all types amongst young people in Oldham and Rochdale, and helps break down the myths and fears held about areas that have never actually been directly experienced.

### **Prejudice and dislike**

A direct result of this ethnic segregation and 'parallel lives', and the difficulty of overcoming this outside of school/college even for the young people who want to, is significant levels of ignorance and exaggeration about 'other' communities, and about the ethnic make-up of the Boroughs in which they live, as shown by a 15 year old White young woman in Rochdale when asked to guess the ethnic minority population of Rochdale:  
*About 75%.*

For a significant number of young people from all ethnic backgrounds, the lack of contact and resulting ignorance could tip over into prejudices and stereotypes, some of them overtly hostile and racist in tone. Here, it has to be acknowledged that young people are sometimes reflecting prejudices and stereotypes held by wider sections of their communities, including by their own family members, but young people can also generate such racism themselves through their own experiences and the way they make ‘sense’ of them within their peer networks (Back, 1996). Both White and Asian respondents expressed crude stereotypes and insults about each other, suggesting the lack of friendships across ethnic divides made it easy to hold to such stereotypes.

The prejudices and views expressed by some White young people supported the notion of a ‘sense of unfairness’ amongst White working class young people who feel that other ethnic groups have been prioritised and favoured by policy makers, views often reflecting their own economic and social exclusion from a society of deepening inequality: *I don’t like any of them because... “I don’t mind them being Asian if they didn’t look down on us and take over I wouldn’t be bothered but everywhere you go you get looked down on by them, and it’s your country, it’s our country” (WYP, Rochdale) “They (Asians) get everything they want” (WYP, Rochdale)* Such views also reflected opinions and prejudices found in some sections of the popular media, or amongst racist campaigning organisations, with a significant minority of young White men tipping into overt, crude racism:



**(White Youth Group, Rochdale)**

The extreme negativity and prejudices towards White people from some Asian young people was often expressed in judgemental moral or religious terms, suggesting that the religious identity seen by all Muslim young people was being used by a minority to judge and label others in highly disrespectful ways, with terms such as ‘drunkenness’ and ‘godless’ being utilised, as this excerpt from the exercise completed by one youth group in Rochdale shows:

### ***White people: Shameless, not believing in God, no respect for other people***

Such prejudices were particularly exposed by the 'Word Association/Sentence Completion' exercises, with responses suggesting that racist language and stereotypes are part of 'everyday' life for some young people of all ethnic backgrounds. Here, the evidence would support the view of the Community Cohesion reports (Cantle, 2001; Ritchie, 2001) that within largely segregated communities who have at best superficial links with individuals of a different background, overt prejudices and negative language can become part of the open and 'taken for granted' way of acting and thinking. Meaningful direct contact with other communities through Community Cohesion programmes is the only way to overcome this and enable people to re-think their assumptions, language and behaviour without them feeling that they are being 'policed' and judged.

A significant portion of young people did **not** support such views, and others were clearly 'struggling' with feelings of ambivalence over multiculturalism: ***"some Asian people don't like white people and just look down on them but some white people don't like Asians and look down on them so that's probably why"*** (WYP, Rochdale). This was particularly true of a significant number of White young people, as explored in the following section, so suggesting that enhanced Community Cohesion activity is needed to encourage greater tolerance and respect.

### **Feelings about Diversity and Multiculturalism**

Young people were asked for their views regarding diversity in society, and whether they regarded this as a positive development. Attitudes to a range of factors associated with living in a multi-cultural town were explored using a 3-point attitude scale. While a large number of respondents indicated they were 'not sure' about many of the statements (often a large proportion), there were still notable differences between the groups self-identifying as Muslim and those who did not. 60% of the group self-identifying as 'Muslim' agreed that *'Britain is a stronger country because of difference'* as opposed to 23% of the rest of the sample. In response to the converse statement that *'Britain is stronger if groups live separately'*, only 16% of the Muslim population definitely agreed and 71% definitely disagreed, as opposed to 36% of the non-Muslim remainder definitely agreeing and 30% definitely disagreeing. Separate items examined the samples'

responses to the towns they lived in and whether they believed people from different backgrounds got on well in the town. The responses are given below.

**Table One: Responses to the statement ‘\* (Name of local town) is a good place to live’**

Respondent Group	Definitely Agree (%)	Definitely Disagree (%)
Muslim	35	15
Non-Muslim	26	25

**Table Two: Responses to the statement ‘Different sorts of people get on well in \* (Name of local town)**

Respondent Group	Definitely Agree (%)	Definitely Disagree (%)
Muslim	25	20
Non-Muslim	14	40

### **Pessimism about the future**

Despite some of the positive evidence discussed above, the significant ethnic segregation, the fears about/realities of racially segregated ‘territory’ and the frustrations over the lack of opportunity to meet young people of a different ethnic background discussed earlier in the section mean that many young people in Oldham and Rochdale are currently pessimistic about the possibilities of ethnic relation improving and racial tensions reducing in the future.

*“The future will be worse, war in Iraq is getting worse, and BNP is slowly getting into power.” (AYP, Rochdale)*

*“People don’t want to mix with different people.”  
(WYP, Rochdale)*

*“Racism will increase.”  
(AYP, Rochdale)*

**Q** *Why do you think young people from different backgrounds don't mix?*

**A** *Don't know, it's never happened has it.* (WYP, Rochdale)

Clearly, the challenge here is for Community Cohesion policies to further develop tangible programmes of activity that young people can see and experience, supported by community and locality commitments to, and support for, cohesion and equality initiatives.

### **Ways Forward**

Young people who had experienced ethnic mixing and diversity were positive about it:

*“Once we started college it was completely different because we got to know so many different people from different races and stuff, so you actually get on with them then.”* (AYP, Oldham).

The majority of young people clearly want the opportunities to meet across divides and to be challenged to work at overcoming fears: *“You shouldn't just give them a lecture because they just sit there and think, you know, 'shut up', instead you should stick 'em together and make 'em work together* (AYP, Oldham); *If they get youth clubs where you can put them together and then get them to be all right with each other“* (WYP, Rochdale).

*“I'd love to have Indian friends, white, black friends and mixed race friends.”*  
(AYP, Oldham)

*“I'd be worried about racism...but it would be really interesting and you'd learn lots of new stuff“* (AYP, Rochdale)

This builds on positive local survey evidence showing more positive attitudes to ethnic mixing amongst younger people of all ethnic backgrounds (Oldham MBC, 2006; Phillips, Simpson and Ahmed, 2008). Young people were clear about the need for activities and opportunities to engage young people and to facilitate them coming together: *“There's nothing to do for young people, there's nowhere for them to go so to keep themselves occupied they turn into gangs, groups of people, commit crimes and then they start a turf war over that... You kick off because there's nothing else to do...Nothing”*

(WYP, Rochdale)

*“The way it’s going now... communities are not getting together, things are not being done... there should be mixing and talking about religions and why they believe in things.”* (AYP, Rochdale)

*“If they start putting people together at a young age I think it will help them to develop.”* (AYP, Oldham)

For such contact between young people of different ethnic groups to work, certain principles need to be followed, as identified by the evidence from ‘contact theory’ (Hewstone et al, 2007) work to break down long-standing fears and prejudices between communities. These include ensuring that no participants feel that their backgrounds or cultures are being threatened or attacked, that contact is over time to allow genuine dialogue and understandings to develop, and that it is done in groups to avoid the danger of ‘he is ok, but the rest of them...’. Developing cohesion work in groups also helps people to avoid feeling isolated and exposed, as a mainly Asian youth participation group from Rochdale reflected on the only White member involved in the session: *Sometimes if you’re the minority in a group you feel.... I don’t know if this is how he feels, but sometimes he puts it across that he feels insecure around us because he’s the minority isn’t he?*

There was also positive support for the efforts already under way to create small-scale, ethnically-mixed housing areas through the Housing Market Renewal initiative in Oldham and Rochdale, supporting positive previous evidence from research amongst young adults (Phillips, Simpson and Ahmed, 2008), as shown when young people were asked where they would like to live in the future: *Build new houses and let people know that houses are being made and mixed environment... Whites and Asians* (AYP, Rochdale).

## **2. Young Peoples’ understandings of ‘Identity’**

Clear differences emerged in the type of identity seen as important by young people. Virtually all of the Pakistani/ Bangladeshi-origin young people involved in the research saw their Muslim religion as the form of identity most important to them but, for the large majority of them, this Islamic identity is **not** incompatible with British national identity – the overwhelming majority of young Muslims were happy to identify themselves as ‘British Muslim’ or ‘British Asian’. The fact that a smaller number (although still a clear

majority) of Asian young people were prepared to say that they are ‘Proud to be British’ might be related to their concern with, and criticisms of, domestic racism and British foreign policy positions. The emphasis of Asian young people on ‘British’ rather than ‘English’ national identity was in clear contrast to the views of White young people, who clearly favoured ‘English’ identity.

### The importance of ‘Muslim’ Identity

Islam/faith was seen as the most important form of identity for **all** Asian young people taking part (consistent with other research nationally, and in strong contrast to all other ethnic/faith backgrounds). This clearly gave a lot of Muslim young people a strong and positive sense of identity:

<p><i>Pakistani Muslim</i>  <b><i>“I’m a very strong believer in all religious rules”</i></b>          (AYP, Rochdale)</p>	<p><i>British Muslim</i>  <b><i>“I’m very religious”</i></b>          (AYP, Rochdale).</p>
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Respondents were asked to rank eight possible labels that for the sources of their identity: British, English, their local town, their ethnicity, their status as a Northerner, their religion, their local area within the town, or their status as a European. One of the clearest distinctions between the different identified ethnic groups was the significance of religion as a source of identity. Self-ascribed ethnic categories were grouped together to facilitate meaningful comparison, and responses ranking identity factors 1 or 2 were also aggregated to allow for those with a shared religious/national identity to emerge. The findings are given below in Table 3.

**Table Three: Significance of religious and national identity for different groups**

<b>Self-ascribed ethnicity</b>	<b>Rank Religion 1 or 2 (%)</b>	<b>Rank English 1 or 2 (%)</b>	<b>Rank British 1 or 2 (%)</b>
White British, English, White, White English, White Christian, British (N=57)	7	75	56
Asian Pakistani, British Muslim, Pakistani Kashmiri, Pakistani, British Asian, Bangladeshi/Bengali, British Bengali, British Asian (N=54)	93	3	20
Black African, Black British, Mixed Race, Other (N=16)	44	56	44

This finding represents a qualification to the positive responses given to the finding that the Muslim sample were proud to be British, in that it is clear that for this group, unlike their counterparts, religious identity trumps national identity.

However, this also gave a minority of young Muslims a basis to negatively judge the morals and lifestyles of non-Muslims and British policy, as highlighted in the earlier section on 'Prejudice and Dislike'. A strong 'Muslim' sense of Identity meant that the perceived position of Muslims nationally and internationally and emotive political issues, such as the Iraq and Afghanistan military involvements played a significant role in the way Asian young people viewed 'British' and 'English' identity, as well as the way they understood themselves. This suggests that more overt work and discussions with older Muslim young people about their identity and its links to political issues like 7/7 and the Iraq war could be positive as those issues are already at the front of young people's minds. Nationally, most educational work within the PVE/Prevent agenda has avoided such overt engagement with such contentious topics (Thomas, 2009), what DCLG Minister Hazel Blears characterised in December 2008 as the 'sharp end' of the PVE agenda. This evidence suggests that some Muslim young people want and need to engage in Citizenship/Political education-based dialogue around these issues, as they are already discussing them. It also suggests that inter-faith work of the type already developing in Oldham and Rochdale amongst young people may be a positive vehicle for Cohesion. Such political events had also coloured the views and attitudes of a considerable number of White young people, as discussed below, suggesting that more overt discussions with them would also be helpful.

### **'Britishness' and Englishness**

For the majority of Muslim young people, this primary faith-based identity **was** compatible with being 'British' (contrary to alarmist suggestions of anti-Britishness amongst Muslim young people: Policy Exchange, 2007): *British: Me* (AYP: Rochdale). 63% of those self-identifying as 'Muslim' definitely agreed with the statement 'I am proud to say that I am British' (less than the 80% of the 'non-Muslim' group), and only 10% definitely disagreed, indicating that misgivings about foreign policy frequently expressed in the group discussions did **not** have an alienating effect on the majority of Muslim young people:

*"British means living with different people."*

*"British means loving your country."*

*"British means you can be multi-cultured yet keep your identity."*

*“British means being loyal to England and not being a terrorist and blowing it up.”*

**(Asian Young People, Rochdale)**

For Asian young people Britishness is more positive than Englishness: *I suppose because British is more inclusive, that’s how people can relate to that more than just the St George flag* (AYP, Rochdale). This could be a function of Britishness being associated with ideas about inclusive citizenship, as expressed in this word association

***British means you live in Britain, abiding laws, treating each other respectfully, a citizen of Britain, having rights in Britain***

By contrast, Englishness appeared to be more associated with socio-cultural traits: the last respondent identified English people as: *sometimes racist, to blame for the war on Iraq, good at football, good cricketers, to blame for street crime*, and in the following example, ‘Englishness’ is seen more negatively, as it is viewed as being about ‘being White’.

*“English people are White people.”*

*“English people are the opposite of us.”*

**(Asian Young People, Rochdale)**

This is clearly problematic, as most White young people see ‘English’ as a more important identity than ‘British’, as is indicated in Table 3 above. This focus on ‘Englishness’ amongst White young people may well reflect the challenges to past notions of ‘Britishness’ posed by devolution, European Integration and inward migration.

### **Impact of Foreign Affairs**

The British involvement in western military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and domestic media and political discussion of them, has had a clear impact on how some White young people view Muslim communities, and on how some Asian young people view national identity:

*“British means attacking other countries.”*

*“Muslim people are targeted, victimised.”*

*“English people are to blame for the war in Iraq.”*

The impact of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiments amongst some sections of British politics and the media has clearly impacted on some Muslim young people, with a number of very thoughtful, or even plaintive, comments:

*“Muslim people are misled by extremists as well as world leaders.”*

*“Muslim people are not terrorists.”*

**(Asian young people, Rochdale)**

For some White young people, these foreign events, and coverage of them, has provided an opportunity to project prejudices and fears in particular directions; the word association with Muslim produced responses which identified religious markers (*headscarves, beards, funny clothes, Q’ran*), disapproval of religious observance (*too strong in their faith*), and references to terrorism and the language of redtop newspapers (*bombs, ragheads*). These were in addition to more timeworn references to cultural traits and the size of the population. The strength and regularity of such prejudiced comments from some White young people highlights the need for enhanced cohesion and anti-prejudice educational work.

### **3. Locality**

Some negative opinions were expressed by young people of all ethnic backgrounds about their local areas and what they have to offer to young people. Clear and recurring concerns were dirtiness and litter, the limited Further and Higher Educational opportunities, and the prevalence of drug dealing and use. Young people also felt that there were very few places for them to use or go to in the town centre, although this data had been largely gathered through their involvement in youth work activities and facilities. Whilst negative, these concerns do offer opportunities for initiatives that could involve young people of all backgrounds, so moving the focus away from differences and ethnic divides. This negativity was balanced by a considerable level of positive comments about the genuine sense of community and friendliness within, and young peoples’ attachment to, local areas.

#### **Concerns about local problems**

Clearly, the disturbances of 2001 attracted negative media coverage towards Oldham, and there was evidence that young people had internalised this negativity: *“I’m going to Uni next year and if we were to see someone at Uni and speak to them and if they asked you where you’re from, I wouldn’t really want to say Oldham because they’d get that impression straight away like drug user, fighter, causing trouble and just like stereotypical, like the word that goes round about Oldham that it’s just really rough.”* ( AYP, Oldham)

Another issue identified by young people of all ethnic backgrounds was the ubiquity of drug dealing and use: *“The way it is like at the moment it’s getting full of druggies, young children are like getting into drugs and stuff and it’s not a place that you want to be.”* (AYP, Oldham).

*“Young people in Rochdale these days all turn to ...drugs to pass time”*

(WYP, Rochdale). Whilst negative in tone, the fact that these concerns were shared by young people of all ethnic backgrounds provides the possibility of unifying, cross-ethnic youth campaigns and activity aimed at these issues.

### **Lack of Spaces and Places**

Some concerns focussed on the lack of facilities or spaces for young people to meet in Oldham or Rochdale town centres: *“Rochdale is not doing anything for youth.”*

(AYP, Rochdale)

*“The shops are all right but the town centre, when we go there we just get kicked off for nothing.”* (AYP, Rochdale)

*“ The worst thing is that kids don’t have anything to do on a Friday night so all we can do is go out and get drunk on the streets.”* (WYP, Rochdale).

This echoed previous research findings (Thomas, 2006), suggesting that the lack of youth-friendly facilities in Oldham town centre that enabled young people of different ethnic backgrounds to safely share space together was a serious block to progress on cohesion. Some young people also identified access to further and higher education as an issue: *Bad about Rochdale?: “Education, there isn’t enough colleges.”* (AYP, Rochdale)

When young people were able to safely share spaces, such as at youth work events and projects, and at the towns' Further and Higher Education Colleges, young people were positive about the experience, as shown by evidence above. Again, this provides a potentially positive platform for the future youth and education strategies.

## Recommendations

Whilst these recommendations are made by the Research Project staff from the University of Huddersfield, we are confident that they reflect both the evidence presented in this report and the dialogue with Youth workers during the research process:

- Rochdale and Oldham would be aided by enhanced Community Cohesion programmes aimed at young people outside of school settings. The progress on direct contact work locally of recent years, such as through the 'fusion' initiative, should be utilised by local Community Cohesion Strategies to significantly increase Cohesion activity involving young people, helping them to develop contact and positive relationships across ethnic, religious and geographical lines. National research evidence (Thomas, 2007; Hewstone et al, 2007) suggests that this needs to be done in a sustained way over time, be properly resourced and planned, and that it should be focussed on positive shared interests, identities and experiences, rather than difference.
- Part of the remit of such Cohesion activity aimed at young people should be to overcome fears of 'unsafe' territory by facilitating positive experiences of different areas and their communities, so 'myth-busting' about 'no go areas' for young people, whether in relation to ethnic, or simply geographical, background.
- There is also a need for places, spaces and events that make Oldham and Rochdale town centres attractive and safe places for young people from all parts of the area to want to come to, that create a positive and shared youth 'vibe'.
- An enhanced focus on strengthening local, over-arching 'Oldham' or 'Rochdale' identities through programmes of shared activities, and high-profile youth events that focus on shared interests, experiences and needs as young people. One

possible type of vehicle for this could be youth campaigns and activity to make the local area a better place – anti-litter, environmental clean-up, or anti-drugs activities, so addressing issues that young people of **all** ethnic backgrounds have clearly identified during this research process.

- The need for more ‘up front’ work with some older young people that allows them to explore contentious issues, feelings and prejudices in a safe and supported environment. For some Muslim-origin young people that should allow them to debate and discuss Muslim identity and Britishness, and current issues that impact on feelings about that. Whilst ‘risky’ in some eyes, and inevitably leading to discussion of controversial political issues the dangers of not doing such work is that alienation and extremist views can grow underground unseen. Enhanced inter-faith activities could be one profitable way forward here. Similar attempts to engage with the extreme racist prejudices and alienation of some White young people should also be considered.
- More training and support is needed for those who work with young people to run alongside enhanced Cohesion activities that aim to overcome prejudices and fears of ‘unsafe territory’. Such training should be action-orientated and focussed on the sharing of good practice in a very practical way – building practitioner skills and confidence through practical programmes of activities, as this action research Project has attempted to do. Similarly, action-oriented training should focus on those engaging with older young people around contentious issues
- There is a need for more academic research nationally around how young people see and understand their national identity, and how this relates to their ethnic/faith background.

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