

Look Who's Talking

Cultural Diversity,
Public Service Broadcasting
and the
National Conversation

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Summary

Public service broadcasting has a vital role to play in mediating the National Conversation and in helping the diverse communities of the UK to learn about each other. To do this effectively it must reach as much of the population as possible and be trusted to portray all groups accurately and fairly, particularly those who are currently marginalised in society.

However, there is a widespread recognition that broadcasters have been slow to make progress on what has become known as *cultural diversity*, reflecting the full variety of people and perspectives that make up Britain today. This report sets out to examine the reasons why.

Based on the views of over one hundred programme-makers across the broadcasting industry who have personal and professional experience of the barriers to achieving diversity on air, the report highlights the ineffectiveness of existing industry approaches. It examines in detail the many aspects of the programme-making process which can marginalise voices outside the mainstream of society, from commissioning and production to scheduling and promotion.

It demonstrates the value of a diverse programme-making workforce and explores why there are still so few people from minorities in senior creative or editorial roles. It reveals how people throughout the industry frequently feel powerless and frustrated because they cannot talk openly about the problems they face.

In its final sections, the report draws on the experience of programme-makers to identify practical ways forward. It proposes a new framework for making programmes that are inclusive and authentic in their representation of diverse voices, and makes recommendations for holding public service broadcasters to account in achieving this.

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Introduction

The mass media is constantly creating a narrative of the nation that none of us can see where it's going or see the shape of it. But what we are concerned to do is to sustain an effective dialogue. That seems to me the great challenge: how do we maintain a dialogue across the fragments that are now part of our nation?¹

It should be the arena of our shared public conversation on who we are and what kind of world we want to hand on to future generations...on this much depends, not least the future of Britain as a free and gracious society.²

The BBC makes programmes for the whole TV audience: it's a national conversation.³

The notion of a National Conversation has become popular in recent years as a way of envisaging how we "speak" to each other on issues of national concern and form an understanding of the other people in our society. An effective National Conversation is considered essential for a healthy democracy and public service broadcasters increasingly see themselves as playing a vital role in mediating that Conversation.

Channel 4 will contribute to the democratic debate as the place where interrogative and free spirited minds can both enrich and challenge the assumptions of modern Britain, and connect to its past and future.⁴

We also believe the BBC is an important builder of social capital, seeking to increase social cohesion and tolerance by enabling the UK's many communities to talk to themselves and each other about what they hold in common and how they differ.⁵

These descriptions of the role of public service broadcasting extend beyond the famous Reithian mission "to inform, educate and entertain". They lay claim to a higher civic purpose to promote a democratic and inclusive society.

But if the mission now is to build social capital and connect people to each other, important questions arise about the nature of the National Conversation that public service broadcasters are mediating through their programmes. Who is setting the agenda for this Conversation and how? What topics get discussed? Whose voices are heard and whose remain silent? Is there an onus on broadcasters to ensure everyone gets an equal chance to participate?

These questions have become more urgent in the light of growing concerns about citizenship, national identity and the segregation of communities along economic and ethnic lines. In an increasingly competitive marketplace, the future of public service broadcasting is also under scrutiny as the BBC approaches the renewal of its current charter and ITV considers its post-analogue future when it may no longer have to comply with its existing public service obligations. It therefore seems an appropriate time to take a more detailed look at how the actual practice of programme-making can fulfil the high-minded aspirations described by public service broadcasters above.

Background

I have been making public service television and radio programmes for nearly twenty-five years, first within the BBC and subsequently as an independent producer. Like most people who have had the privilege of working in this industry, I am a passionate advocate of public service broadcasting and proud of the place it has in the hearts and minds of people in Britain. However, I am acutely aware that there are many sections of UK society that it does not serve well.

I have often witnessed the barriers facing those who try to widen the range of stories and voices that get broadcast, particularly the voices of those who have less power and status in society such as people with disabilities, people from ethnic minorities, the old and the young, and those with lesser economic means. In the past my own response has been to see it as simply a matter of time before things would improve and to focus on doing my own work as well as possible to contribute to that improvement. But several incidents in recent years have made me question how much things *are* actually improving and I became concerned to understand the issues more deeply.

When I joined the BBC at the beginning of the 1980s, there was a great sense of change in the air. Sexism and racism were already being challenged in programmes and in the workforce. The arrival of Channel 4 in 1982 with its explicit remit to focus on under-represented voices helped to put diversity on the broadcasting agenda with a new political dynamism.

Real breakthroughs seemed to be happening everywhere. Lenny Henry established himself as a talented Black entertainer in his own show; *The Chinese Detective* featured David Yip in the lead role of a major drama series and turned him into a household name. Women were presenting news and current affairs reports, and starring in their own cop shows. The BBC Community Programmes Unit was bringing many ordinary voices to the fore in a direct and unselfconscious way. The first magazine programme for disabled people crept into the schedules. Many local radio stations launched their first programmes for Black and Asian listeners. On national television Meera Syal was doing pioneering work as an actress and writer which was to lead to her blossoming as a fully-fledged celebrity on *Goodness Gracious Me* in the mid-nineties along with co-star Sanjeev Bhaskar.

But, spin the clock forward and how much have we really advanced? Women have undoubtedly consolidated their position and risen through the ranks in great numbers. But look elsewhere and the picture is disappointing. Lenny Henry remains the only major Black entertainer on TV. Meera Syal and Sanjeev Bhaskar are still the only significant Asian celebrities. And there hasn't been another British Chinese lead actor in any drama since David Yip in 1981. There have been many false dawns. Pioneering initiatives such as programmes about disabled people made by disabled people and programmes about African-Caribbean people from the perspective of African-Caribbean people, all have come and gone without any lasting impact on mainstream programme output.

Although research suggests that the presence on screen of people from some ethnic minorities increased between 1993 and 2003, the increases were almost entirely due to their appearance in incidental roles.⁶ The total volume of (and spend on) television programmes defined as *multicultural* dropped substantially between 1998 and 2002 across all the terrestrial channels.⁷ The numbers of disabled people on television also fell during this period and remains extremely low.⁸ But most worrying is that, behind the scenes, the mix of senior people who shape the National Conversation has barely changed at all in twenty years.

It's not, apparently, for want of trying. Every year broadcasters announce new initiatives to promote what is currently known as *cultural diversity*, good intentions are voiced everywhere, occasional programmes seem to signify progress but turn out to only be a flash in the pan. People from all sorts of marginalised groups remain hungry for meaningful representations of themselves and their lives as part of the mainstream output on television and radio. The absence of so many voices and so many views means that the National Conversation remains skewed and stilted. Research indicates that trust in British broadcast news is lowest amongst people from ethnic minorities,⁹ particularly Muslims.¹⁰ Many people from such minorities are simply turning away from the public service broadcasters completely and seeking out other channels they can receive by satellite or internet. All these trends pose a serious threat to the public service broadcasters' stated ambition to mediate a national democratic debate.

In proposing my research I wondered whether there was a piece of the jigsaw that was missing. In the broadcasting industry the term *cultural diversity* seems to be interpreted almost exclusively as meaning more Black and Asian faces on air. The focus is almost entirely on *numbers* rather than programme *content*; it seems to be about appearance of change rather than actual change.

This is not to denigrate the general increase in the numbers of Asian and Black faces, particularly on news and drama programmes. The visibility of different people as role models is as important now as it was then. But after twenty-five years it's simply not enough.

It is, of course, easier to measure numbers of non-White actors in a drama than it is to measure the authenticity of the characters they are required to play. But this "colour by numbers" approach leaves deeper questions unanswered. Whose stories, whose perspectives are really being offered to audiences? Does it matter that some minority groups appear to be better represented than others? Can a more diverse-looking workforce lead to greater cultural diversity in the content of programmes? And how does all this contribute to an effective dialogue between the different groups that make up our society, to *knowing* each other?

My hunch, based on my own experiences, was that programme-makers from minority groups often think harder about these issues. Whether we like it or not, the personal often becomes the political. The experience of being from a minority, of growing up outside the mainstream, colours the way many of us feel about representations, not just of ourselves, but of many people that British society still treats as "other". We are often more closely connected to under-served communities and are constantly being challenged to examine and justify the output. We also witness close-up the way that broadcasting organisations encourage or impede progress: the practical reality of their policies and decision-making processes. Many of us want to be part of the solution, though my research suggests we rarely get that chance.

So it is to other programme-makers I wanted to turn and, in particular, to programme-makers who are from minority groups by virtue of ethnicity or disability, and others who have also shown a particular commitment to ensuring a diversity of such voices in their programmes. My hope was that by taking this "bottom-up" approach, some useful practical ideas might emerge to help clarify the muddle that currently surrounds cultural diversity in broadcasting, and to improve the quality and breadth of the National Conversation.

Method

Previous research has focused on surveying ethnic minority audiences,¹¹ monitoring portrayal of different minorities on screen,¹² and industry attitudes to multicultural broadcasting.¹³ There has also been some valuable work examining particular sectors of the industry such as independent production companies,¹⁴ and the experiences of a small number of ethnic minority producers.^{15 16} My hope was to widen the focus and develop a more detailed picture of the issues.

In selecting interviewees I looked for programme-makers who had a demonstrable track record in bringing culturally diverse programmes to air. These were programmes which showed a genuine ambition to engage mainstream mixed audiences with unheard voices or different perspectives that would widen participation in the National Conversation. I watched and listened to a great deal of prime-time television and speech radio and checked the weekly *Radio Times* as a means of identifying potential interviewees. I also used the formal and informal networks that I was already a part of as a producer. Some interviewees recommended others and I tried to follow these up wherever possible.

Over a period of eight months beginning in October 2004 I interviewed one hundred and two people. Most of my interviewees were producers and directors either in television or radio, working as staff in the BBC, as freelancers or with independents, across several different programme genres such as factual, comedy and drama. A small number were commissioning executives or heads of independent companies. I also interviewed people who had other creative or editorial input to programmes such as writers, actors and presenters. With just two exceptions, all my interviewees had been involved in at least one broadcast programme in the course of the previous twelve months.

My interviewees were all British, from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds and/or people who identified themselves as disabled (see Appendix for further details). Most of them were in the 25 – 55 age range. Just over half were women. Some of the interviewees identified themselves as gay when it was relevant. Many also talked of their class, education and specific regional backgrounds as an important aspect of their experience - at times more important than, for example, their ethnicity or disability.

In the course of the interviews I asked people about their own career pathways, their experiences of commissioning, production and programme scheduling and promotion and about particular projects they had worked on. I also sought their personal views on what cultural diversity in broadcasting meant and the success or otherwise of various industry initiatives to improve it. I did not follow a set questionnaire as each interviewee offered opportunities to understand different parts of the picture. I recognised that my own subjectivity played a part and frequently shared my own observations and experiences to test them against others'. The hope was to use my insider knowledge to ask more searching questions and make the links that a disinterested outsider might not.

As well as the above interviewees, I also spoke to a number of other people such as senior managers, publicists, diversity specialists and human resources personnel at the BBC and Channel 4 who provided an insight into how their organisations dealt with the issue of cultural diversity.

This report does not set out to paint a comprehensive picture of public service broadcasting but to give voice to the perspectives of a particular cross-section of people who work within it. The aim is to establish what they see as the barriers that currently exist to diverse voices joining the National Conversation and what could be done to overcome these.

In collating all the interview material I have tried to draw out common themes and particular insights which seemed to offer lessons worth sharing. I have given greatest weight to those people who are closest to the subject they are talking about. So, for example, on the subject of soaps it is the observations of writers, producers, actors and directors who have been directly involved in them.

The interviews often touched on painful experiences, stories of frustration and of feeling marginalised in the broadcasting arena. They also included many fascinating explorations of the creative process and what makes successful programmes. It has been a real pleasure to meet so many bright, talented people full of creative energy and passion for their work. I am very grateful to all those who took the time to take part and hope this report does justice to their contributions.

Note on terminology:

- **Public service broadcasting** There is no single definition but it is commonly understood to share the following attributes: universality (available to everyone and free at the point of delivery); range and quality that the commercial marketplace might not provide; impartiality and independence, particularly in news and current affairs; and an aspiration to reflect the nation to itself.
- **Cultural diversity** My own view is that cultural diversity is about more than ethnic diversity, and that both meanings of culture (i.e. a way of life *and* the creation and production of art and ideas) should come together when we talk about cultural diversity in the media. However, I am aware that the term is generally used in a more narrow sense and this ambiguity will be explored further in the report.
- **Descriptions of ethnicity** I am uncomfortable with using terms such as White, Black or Asian as they seem reductive and inadequate for describing people or their perspectives. However these terms are difficult to avoid in a report such as this one as they are so widely used in discussions about cultural diversity, albeit with different political and social meaning. I noticed that the term “Black and Asian” was frequently used as shorthand to indicate all people from visible ethnic minorities. When specific reference was made, for example, to African or Caribbean people I have used those terms instead. Wherever possible I have left people to self-identify. (See the appendix for the self-identifying terms that interviewees used.)

Why does cultural diversity in broadcasting matter?

Why cultural diversity matters to public service broadcasters

Section 264(4)(i) of the Communications Act (2003) requires that public service broadcasters “reflect the lives and concerns of different communities and cultural interests and traditions within the UK”. The broadcasting and communications regulator Ofcom has recently been conducting a review of public service broadcasting and has sought to define it more closely. It has identified one of the four purposes of public service broadcasting as being:

To support a tolerant and inclusive society, through programmes which reflect the lives of different people and communities within the UK, encourage a better understanding of different cultures and, on occasion, bring the nation together for shared experiences.¹⁷

Although all the terrestrial broadcasters have some public service obligations, it is the BBC and Channel 4 that were established fundamentally as national public service broadcasters. The Agreement accompanying the current BBC Charter (due to expire in 2006) refers to the need for programmes which reflect the lives and concerns of both local and national audiences. The Channel 4 licence is even more specific, requiring it to produce output that, as well as being innovative and distinctive, appeals to the tastes and interests of a culturally diverse society. Under its Charter or license, each broadcaster also has employment obligations:

To promote equality of opportunity between men and women; between persons of different racial groups and the equalisation of opportunities for disabled persons.

It is not my intention to make a detailed comparison between BBC and Channel 4 but it is worth noting that they have a very different profile in the minds of the programme-makers I interviewed. The BBC, funded by a universal licence fee, currently has approximately 27,000 staff and makes most of its programmes in-house for a wide range of television and radio channels. It was seen as paternalistic and conservative, in keeping with a recent report of public perceptions of the BBC:

When likened to an individual, the BBC was characterised in a consistent fashion: very definitely a man, probably aged in his 50s, wearing a suit, well-groomed and comfortably off... considered reserved, correct and polite, and, for detractors, rather stuffy, po-faced and perhaps a little inhibited.¹⁸

There is a general expectation from audiences¹⁹ and other broadcasters that the BBC (because of its sheer size, the variety and reach of its output and the nature of its funding) should be “setting the gold standard” for reflecting diversity in programmes and in employment.

Channel 4, a not-for-profit broadcaster funded mainly through the sale of advertising, has a small core staff and commissions most of its output from independent production companies. At present it only makes television, not radio, programmes. It has a brand image that is younger, more urban, cosmopolitan and inclusive, although interviewees were divided as to how much the Channel 4 output actually reflected this.

Why cultural diversity matters to programme-makers from minorities

My interviewees gave a more detailed and personal range of reasons why cultural diversity in broadcasting mattered to them:

▫ **Entitlement: everyone pays, everyone should feel represented**

Despite the different ways in which audiences pay for the BBC and the commercial networks there was a strong sense of entitlement to being represented on each.

We are citizens of this country, we deserve proper representation. That's not to say it has to be all positive, let's not deal with contentious issues, but, like White people, Asian people and Black people have complete backgrounds, complete characters, rounded personalities, a whole heap of stories to be told which are just like everybody else's stories - but they are coming from a slightly different place. And that is all I ever wanted was that people do their job. I don't think I am asking anybody to do anything that difficult or that is unreasonable or morally that they shouldn't be doing. - **TV producer**

We're part of the audience. We have the right to be represented truthfully, honestly, believably, respectfully. - **Writer**

▫ **Minorities are hungry for representations of themselves**

It is always a pleasure if the Asian viewers go, *oh my God, Asian faces on TV!* But why am I still saying that in 2005? I used to say that in the seventies. - **Writer**

Virtually everybody I spoke to who had grown up as part of an ethnic minority in Britain described the experience of their entire household rushing to the TV when they spotted someone like themselves on screen. It was such a momentous occasion even to see, for example, Asians playing silly roles on *Mind Your Language* or *It Ain't Half Hot, Mum*. It's not an experience that people who have grown up being part of the well-represented majority think about but it remains a powerful force in immigrant communities, old and new.

All my British Chinese friends all scrutinise the schedules for anything with a Chinese connection and the British Born Chinese website forums are abuzz when anything is on. I would like to see more about the Chinese who came here. I still don't fully understand the stories of the journeys my parents' generation undertook to come here. - **Former presenter**

▫ **Speaking to all the audience**

I think that currently, though the BBC is the public service broadcaster, it is essentially a minority service, especially radio drama. I think they make plays for people like themselves... they make plays for their friends and their families and they don't reflect British society as it really is, radio drama doesn't do that. I think that is what they need to do; otherwise people will just switch off altogether. - **Radio producer**

▫ **Knowing Me, Knowing You**

Television is a common unifying factor and it is probably the strongest medium for reflecting how we are living today. I think with that comes a responsibility in that we have to reflect accurately and deeply how we are living today. - **TV producer**

TV and radio provide a window on the worlds of different people, people that many in the audience may never get to know in their daily life, so diversity in output was seen to be key to bridging social divides. The divides mentioned by interviewees included those between able-bodied and disabled people, between the young and the old, between London and the regions, but most frequently between people from different ethnic and religious groups.

It is absolutely integral to the future health and safety of the country that the BBC increases its portrayal of diversity. We live such separate lives, I used to live in the East End of London and there are Bengali communities there who never mix at all with other communities, other cultures, and, likewise, the working-class White family there will have no contact whatsoever with some of the other minorities that are living in the area. Where are they going to meet each other? It is only through that inter-human contact that these myths and prejudices that we have about each other get eroded. - **Independent TV and radio producer**

It's a sin of omission rather than commission because they are allowing a pretty ugly vacuum to develop which is being filled by fears – people are fearful now. That has to be projected, filled somehow. We all seek mirrors, seek representations of ourselves. For me, it's the absences that have done more damage. Trying to get people to relate to me, *speaking to me*, not *at me*. Instead of the usual, *Oh, you speak good English, don't you?* They're not relating to you as a feeling human being with a capacity for a whole range of human emotions. - **Writer**.

When you're working for a public service institution part of what you are trying to do is to affect the population and its judgement of self. That's really, really important. That defines our future and whether people will be voting for BNP, how shows like *Coronation Street* and *Eastenders* handle issues of race. - **Drama producer**

Several people mentioned incidents such as the Oldham Riots as being the consequence of communities living separate lives and not knowing each other. The lack of meaningful cross-cultural exchange was a key finding of the Cattle Report ²⁰ that investigated the disturbances.

▫ **Children need diverse role models**

All the interviewees who were parents spontaneously raised this as being a prime motivation to wanting better representations on TV and radio.

I have worked with Chinese kids, Vietnamese kids in Deptford, that's where we are based. They have no-one to look up to, nobody at all, no role model and so they are *Chinks* because that's all that they are to everybody else. There isn't anybody cool that they can say *I could be him*. - **Writer/Performer**

It's this sense of being able to place themselves in the island story of which they are a part, and to which they have contributed or their ancestors have contributed through me and their mother's ancestry. - **Director**

▫ **Creating a sense of belonging and citizenship**

Interviewees highlighted the role that broadcasting plays in the lives of many minorities who are socially isolated, in bridging their domestic and inner world with the wider world outside and making sense of their place within it. Several of my interviewees echoed the following sentiment:

Our validation in this society depends on how we are depicted in this powerful medium of television: how much space we get as well as the actual representation. This is vital to our sense of belonging and British-ness. So it's not simply about not wanting too much negative portrayal: it's not wanting to be treated as irrelevant.²¹ - **Drama producer**

▫ **Passion to contribute to national cultural life**

I have a passionate ambition to contribute to the cultural life of this country and I feel I have a lot to offer but no one seems interested. - **Broadcast assistant**

Many interviewees described this desire to contribute to the evolving cultural identity of Britain and felt that they should have the right to do so. Their comments resonate with contemporary ideas about social justice and cultural citizenship, that beyond the civil, political and social rights of citizens in a democracy there is a fourth right, to participate in shaping the nation's cultural life. Raymond Williams first linked the question of democracy and social justice to the cultural arena over forty years ago arguing for "the importance of society's communicative channels giving a voice to those excluded from the main centres of cultural and political power".²² But while his concerns were with class and the removal of elitism, today these issues need to be addressed from the perspective of a wider range of minority groups who have been treated as "other" by the mainstream of society. As Nick Stevenson stresses in his book *Cultural Citizenship*:

Questions of culture and respect remain connected through issues of interpretation. How we seek to understand the "other" will have a tremendous bearing on our ability to construct democratic conversations.²³

As the earlier comments of interviewees also indicated, public service broadcasting is one of the principal cultural arenas for understanding the "other"- which is why it is essential that it becomes genuinely more inclusive.

Why cultural diversity matters to middle England

It is a frequently heard argument that most of Britain is not as ethnically mixed as London and the West Midlands and therefore the concerns about cultural diversity that metropolitan broadcasting executives periodically voice are not ones shared by most of what is described as “middle England”. This is characterised as a monocultural entity tolerating ethnic minorities out of goodwill but lacking any interest in them. One BBC executive I spoke to, described the sort of viewer he had to worry about alienating while trying to respond to diversity targets.

There are people who complain to us about seeing too many black faces: *I don't know any Black people where I live so why should I want to see them on TV?*

I asked contributors and programme-makers from ethnic minorities to respond.

I don't think that's any argument at all because that's like saying *I am deliberately going to keep my culture anaemic and unsullied by other input ...that's awful, if there's no cross fertilisation going on! It's also quite dangerous in a society that is fracturing and fragmenting that you are allowing some pretty horrible stereotypes to fill the gaps. There are Chinese that are being beaten up and killed (like the case recently of a takeaway owner) and look at what's happening in Northern Ireland with racism. We have to reflect each other in society, we should be reflecting each other.* - **Performer**

Maybe you don't know anyone Black, but surely we should all be part of each others' consciousness? One day you might be interviewing someone for a job or meeting your daughter's boyfriend, and if your own social group is so narrow, how can you make a fair judgement of those people? Also, we live in a global village, the more you know about other people and how they live surely the better you are able to work together as fellow human beings? - **Radio producer**

Well, there *are* ethnic minorities in rural areas, but probably one of the reasons they don't see Black people in their village because there is that level of hostility and being made to feel an outsider. Geographical spread comes from confidence and the feeling that you will get a job, that you will make friends outside of cities. If it doesn't get reflected on screen, maybe that confidence isn't there. - **TV producer**

I don't believe middle England is all that conservative actually. People are generally more cosmopolitan today. They travel, they have family connections all over the world, they eat different foods, listen to different music. I think that picture of middle England is out of date and we should trust our audiences to respond to good programmes whoever they come from. - **Writer**

In concluding this section, it is worth recapping that there appears to be no disagreement between public service broadcasting organisations and the programme-makers I interviewed. Both seem to believe in the importance of ensuring cultural diversity in programmes. So why is it taking so long to happen?

Why has progress on diversity been so slow?

All my interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with the rate of progress on improving the diversity in programmes and in the workforce over the past twenty years. While it was acknowledged that the broadcasting industry mirrors the haphazard progress of equality and social inclusion in society at large, there was a belief that this should not be used as an excuse. It was felt that broadcasters should lead by example because of the particular power they have to shape public opinion, create role models and inform the way we think about each other. It was acknowledged that there have been programmes that succeeded in reflecting some of the diversity of UK life, but the frustration is that they remain the exception rather than the rule. There was also regret expressed that broadcasters had missed many opportunities to lay down better foundations in the pre-multichannel age when they could still command captive audiences.

So I asked my interviewees why they thought progress on diversity has been so haphazard.

It starts at the top...then stops

One of the recurring criticisms from all programme-makers was how the fine words of their organisation's top brass didn't translate into enough action on the ground. This was particularly true of the BBC, where staff painted a picture of waves of diversity initiatives washing over the masses who were just getting on with their day to day jobs regardless.

I see these articles in Ariel (staff newspaper) about diversity or yet another "vision thing" and I just turn the page. - **Producer**

Meetings happen, fine things are spoken, but action doesn't follow. - **Producer**

Diversity is seen as a bolt-on

For most of the past twenty years diversity has been seen as something that was done by a few people at the margins of the mainstream and this is still largely true today. In the past both the BBC and Channel 4 had their multicultural programme commissioners or units that were more or less successful in getting more diverse programmes and staff into the broadcasting arena. Now the responsibility has shifted to Diversity specialists but these are seen as people who are not necessarily equipped for the task.

The Diversity Unit is largely about training - don't forget it is also about gender, disability, sexuality, age - so they do some work in terms of awareness, they do a lot of work in monitoring: soft compliance, but again how much impact can they have when they don't control output and they don't control recruitment? - **BBC Senior manager**

All the programme-makers at the BBC I spoke to felt the Diversity Unit to be ineffective and "being seen to doing something" rather than having any power to change anything.

The Diversity Unit is seen as the police of the BBC and everyone hates them. - **Producer**

The fact of being located in Human Resources, rather than programme production, was seen as a major handicap with diversity specialists often lacking the necessary editorial experience to be able to influence programme-makers' behaviour (Channel 4 has tried to address this by appointing a cultural diversity manager who is part of the commissioning team.)

Individuals not infrastructure

Looking back, it seems that many of the successes of the past have often been due to the personal commitment of individuals rather than any infrastructural changes. The broadcasting organisations have not learned from their experience, so once those individuals left or changed roles there was no-one to keep up the momentum. Several examples were cited of "White knights" who took it upon themselves to give different voices an opportunity to be heard.

I don't know if I would have got in if I hadn't had a helping hand from that guy who told me to apply for the correspondent post and who ended up being my first boss. I doubt I would have got my first few jobs without him really; he had an eye on equal opportunities and what he wanted to happen. He was White but he understood and he was political enough to ring *The Weekly Journal* and *The Voice* saying *Have you got a good journalist?* But that was his own initiative, and he coached me in his own home before I applied for the correspondent's job about what to say on the application form. So there was a commitment from one individual but I didn't meet that sort of commitment often. - **TV producer**

No motivation for change from those in power

Examine yourselves *vis à vis* the mission statements and the principles by which you claim to exist, starting with this notion of inclusivity. Certainly a lot of people are scared if they allow integrated casting, quotas or diversity to get too far they'll lose their jobs. Some of them will have to. - **Director**

There was a view that those who have the power to change things are not people who are suffering any disadvantage under the present system, so do not feel any urgency to change it. If overall audience figures are doing well and programmes are winning awards, lack of cultural diversity in output is not seen as a pressing personal concern. There is no penalty, no consequence for failure to address the issue. Nobody loses their job or gets their salary docked for ignoring whole sections of the audience. Several people criticised the BBC Governors for not taking a more active role in holding BBC Management to account. There was also frequent mention of the lack of diversity at the senior level of every single public service broadcasting organisation in Britain. This was seen as a major part of the problem: issues of diversity were simply not on the *personal* radar of most people in power.

They're just talking to other people like themselves all the time. Diversity isn't part of their day to day normality so it's too easy to forget about it, however well-meaning they might be. - **Independent producer**

Colour by Numbers

My interviewees also identified the many problems which arose from the box-ticking approaches adopted by broadcasters. This “colour by numbers” focuses on improving the *visibility* of minorities in proportion to their national demographic share and leads to a number of unintended consequences that actually hinder progress.

▫ **Broadcasters are taken in by their own PR**

Promotional literature and internal communications (such as the BBC staff paper *Ariel*) were felt to be contrived to feature visibly diverse people and stories. Interviewees commented that it is easy to read these and think that, even though your own area doesn't seem any more diverse, other areas of the industry are doing a great job so you don't need to worry. The increase in Black and Asian faces in high profile programmes such as drama and news has created the false impression that there is more diversity than is actually the case. Many people described the way that annual reports and performance reviews also fudged the issue of diversity, giving a misleading picture of what was actually happening. (Several people also expressed surprise to see their names cited as examples of progress on diversity when they were being poorly treated and struggling to be heard.) Amongst my interviewees there was a widely held feeling that those who could monitor and challenge the rate of progress have failed to do so as a result of being taken in by the broadcasters' own PR.

When I started two and a half years ago, Channel 4 had a fantastic reputation as being the station which was very aware of what modern Britain looked like. But when we looked at the reality, we were trading very much on our reputation. The reality was: we weren't doing very well. - **Editorial Manager, Cultural Diversity Channel 4**

In 2004/05 the BBC went through a similar exercise, identifying two hundred diversity initiatives in the previous three years²⁴ but little culture change.

▫ **There is no pressure from audiences for change**

The mainstream audiences who are well-served by broadcasters see no reason to put pressure on broadcasters to change. Programmes which attract high audience figures such as news and drama now have more visible Black and Asian faces. This gives the impression of greater diversity to everyone except those who are painfully aware that their own representation is not getting any better.

Middle England should be worried that the only time they hear about Muslims is in the same sentence as the word *terrorist*. But middle England isn't campaigning for more Muslims on everyday programmes. It's left to us to bang on about it on our own. - **Documentary producer**

▫ **Published employment figures are unhelpful**

The Cultural Diversity Network, which was jointly founded by the major UK broadcasters in 2000 to tackle the problem of representation, uses employment figures to signal the progress they have made. However the employment figures that the broadcasting organisations cite do not give the information needed to track progress of diversity in the jobs that matter: the ones where the creative and editorial power lies.

For me it's not so much whether the workforce is diverse or not: we should be looking at the types of jobs minorities are in. If they are employed in Finance, IT, etc, they will not be able to play an active role in influencing programme making. - **Researcher**

The real thing is who are the people who are working on the programmes, who are the people who are getting the face to face contact with the commissioners, the controllers? At that level I don't think it has changed. - **BBC Senior manager**

So do broadcasters monitor the figures for production staff from minorities? They do. Will they reveal them? No. Why not? Because the picture they paint is not good.

When we started to monitor the number of Black people on production teams making programmes for us, it was shockingly low. It was 99% White. This was within the production companies that make programmes for us. - **Editorial Manager, Cultural Diversity, Channel 4**

Neither the BBC nor Channel 4 would share the actual figures. The lack of openness is a pity because proper information might help the industry take the issue more seriously. It would also show where there had been real progress. For example, the BBC has trumpeted the fact that it has reached its target of four per cent for senior managers from ethnic minorities but this amounts to just thirty five people, the majority of whom are not in production roles.

I wish they would break it down and say we have got three people who do this, and two people who do that and then you would know. They always have this big catchall figure, this four or five per cent and that could mean two people in key posts in Finance or Legal. But in Production what you need to do is look at Production. We would all love to know that, that would be heartening if the Production figure was true. - **Commissioning executive**

The numbers are so low in most areas that everyone who is from a minority tends to know any others who exist.

I was so shocked when I realised that there are no other Black comedy producers, which is disgusting, quite terrifying really, in Britain! - **Producer**

If you ask how many disabled, Black, Asian or Chinese drama or comedy producers are working in mainstream British broadcasting today, the answer could be measured on the fingers of one hand, or actually, forget that, just on one finger. - **Producer**

▫ **Colour on screen does not imply diversity behind**

I think what has happened in diversity is that we have probably concentrated too much on screen - so much so that news and children's television looks like, if I was an alien, I would think *F*** me: all the children in Britain are Black!* They all have Black presenters. But in terms of behind the camera I would say we have got a hell of a long way to go actually. - **Independent producer**

Few of the people I interviewed had noticed any significant increase in the diversity of the people on production teams with which they worked, except those who had the power to

improve it themselves and had done so. For example, none of the people involved in TV drama felt that there had been real progress.

No. On screen maybe they realise that they have to put a certain amount of black and brown faces but go back stage: script department, casting, lighting, make-up. No, where the power really resides there are very few Black people...very, very few. - **Director**

Radio drama is also described as having failed to change.

It is all White and it is all middle-class and mainly Oxbridge.
At the moment there isn't a single Black, Asian or Far Eastern producer working in the mainstream of the department. - **Drama producer**

Some people felt they had actually seen a decline in diversity in their own areas.

My big thing is to change the people that I see around me. I came back to this department after three years, it is less culturally diverse now, racially and culturally, than when I left. It has gone backwards. - **Documentary producer**

▫ **Monitoring can be manipulated**

There are currently no industry standards on monitoring either of employment figures or portrayal. While most broadcasting executives I spoke to felt their figures to be reliable and trustworthy, several senior managers and human resources staff described the "fiddling" of figures that goes on as managers are under pressure to deliver on diversity targets.

The pressure is absolutely focused on the staff figures but also about representation on air. But, how do you accurately measure? I can fiddle the figures any time I like about the representation on air and actually I'd defy anybody in the regions, and I suspect in Network if they are monitored ... We go through a monitored process maybe every couple of months. When the monitoring comes along everybody makes sure that you go out and cover more Asian stories or something on disability, of course.

Q. So you know it is coming?

Yes, absolutely. That is very interesting "you know it is coming" - you have just given me an idea there - but even if you don't know it is coming, if you are doing it yourself ... - **BBC Manager**

▫ **Box-ticking leads to ring-fencing of minorities**

They are full of lots of jargon about diversity and integrated casting but it only goes up to a level. If you look at the protagonists there's only one: one actor, one play, one series...always singular. - **Director**

Both in employment and portrayal the tick box mentality was blamed for getting in the way of increased natural diversity, led by the programme requirements.

You can't go too high in quantity within a programme or across seasons or genres; if they have done one or two they feel they have reached their quota, even though there aren't official quotas, it is subject to criteria like that that which stops it happening. - **Independent producer**

Actors, writers and directors from minorities also described this mentality as leading to a situation where they were hired for one episode of a series but no more. An example is the recent BBC2 comedy series *Extras* where two Black actors featured in one episode which focused on the lead characters tying themselves up in knots over race and another episode featured the only visibly disabled actor, again acting as a mirror for the lead character to reflect his stupidity about disabled people.

Neither was an active independently drawn character that moved beyond the label of race or disability that hung round their neck. Ironic, as the humour was pinned on the fact that the lead characters were so stupid they couldn't get beyond seeing the skin colour or the disability. So it is sending up the stereotype while at the same time reinforcing it. Is this post-modern? Or are we simply doomed to be stuck in this rut forever? - **Comedy writer**

This ring-fencing extends to all areas of broadcasting and frequently stops people from minorities being seen as anything other than the label that others have given them to tick the required box.

Another example of this is the way that Black and Asian presenters are currently used in local radio. There are forty local BBC radio stations around Britain, and, according to their websites, half of these have ethnic minority presenters who are used for the special programmes targeted at Black and Asian communities. (BBC Merseyside has a Chinese presenter and Three Counties Radio boasts an Irish presenter). With the exception of a few presenters in London and Manchester, it was rare to find any ethnic minority presenters in local radio who were being used for the mainstream output of their station.

▫ **Only demographically significant groups get any attention**

I feel the Chinese do not get a look in, they just don't get a look in, it is just Black and Asian. Now they sometimes say Black, Asian and Chinese but they don't mean it. - **Performer**

Black and Asian are seen as two large homogeneous groups, their aggregated numbers being each seen as demographically significant enough to need addressing in some way. This approach creates a hierarchy where smaller groups barely register on the radar of broadcasters.

As for Chinese, Greek and other smaller communities are not seen as being Radio 4 listeners so no effort is made to target them. - **Publicist**

▫ **Minorities seen as all the same, interchangeable**

If your monitoring is about numbers of ethnic minorities then it doesn't matter if they are, for example, all from one or two groups. There is no built-in reason to seek real diversity if you can achieve your targets with just one type of person.

Television infuriates me now. There's a real feeling they're playing a purely visual game: they have to have a representation of ethnicity and it doesn't matter what it is. *Eastenders* doesn't have an Asian family in it, for Christ's sake, the East End is full of Asian people. They've got a Black family, so they can tick that box. That's the biggest problem, not recognising that the ethnic community in this country now is diverse communities. African and

Caribbean are very different people, they have different histories, different interests. It's the same with the Chinese community, Bangladeshi community, or the Indian community. The problem is that until we get more of this on the air, both radio and television, we will only be doing it as a lip service, a token ...we won't care what colour the skin is as long as we've ticked the box because we're only doing it as a box-ticking exercise not because it's consistent with experience of people in this country. - **Editor**

This also leads to the sort of thinking exemplified by BBC Radio Gloucester where ethnic minorities were all "lumped together and expected to make do with a weekly programme aimed at all of them". *Face to Face* is currently split so the first hour is African-Caribbean in its music and interviews, then in the second hour the Black and Asian presenters come together to do news and events of possible interest to both, and the final hour is Asian with bhangra music and interviews. A similar example is the Radio Wales programme *Mixing It*,

... which aims to give ethnic minorities across Wales their own voice. It plays a selection of music that represents the ethnic make-up of Wales today.²⁵

That is *ethnic* as in non-White. Such programmes emphasise that in the minds of broadcasters the only thing that is important is that all these ethnic minorities are the same - in being different from whom they regard to be their mainstream audience.

What is the common denominator between someone with roots in the Middle East, Caribbean or Pakistan? How can you cater for all those on the basis of simply being a different colour? Would a broadcaster make a single programme catering for Russians, South Africans and Americans living in Britain because they were all White? - **Radio producer**

▫ **Minorities end up having to compete with each other**

I have got a very good example of this, there is a thing called the BBC Asian Network which is a 24-hour broadcast, seven days a week. Is there a single minute devoted on that output to what is happening to the majority of Asia? Asian in this country means Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Indian and Pakistani so what happens to the rest of us? We Chinese are not Asian because we are not part of that Network. - **Performer**

When there is only limited access to a resource, in this case access to a public voice, people become very resentful when one group seem to get a disproportionate share. Asian people once felt that African-Caribbean people were getting ahead (many still do), now African and Caribbean and Chinese people feel they are missing out to the Asians and disabled people feel they're not even on the starting block. (Even that's not a complete picture: Pakistanis feel they are missing out to Indians, South Indians are missing out to Punjabis.)

In employment, the quota mentality leads to some bizarre situations. One Black director described being disappointed when, having previously been allocated two episodes of a TV series, he was told he could only do one because the other was to be given to an Asian director instead "to fulfil the cultural diversity requirements". The two White directors who had four episodes each were not expected to give up any.

▫ **Monitoring focuses on visible minorities**

Most formal monitoring focuses on visible minorities. For example, Channel 4 which commissions its programmes from independent companies has introduced a contract clause requiring ten per cent of the programme cast to be from visible minorities, and all companies have to deliver their programmes with forms which give a breakdown of both the production team and contributors. It uses ethnic minority categories (*White, Asian, Black, Mixed race, Chinese, Other*) used by the Census and *disability* as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

So is it right that cultural diversity should be seen purely in terms of visible minorities? Are there other under-represented groups such as White working class that get missed through this approach, whose voices remain unheard? A cautionary reminder of why this is an important question is the way that Muslims were barely identified as an under-represented voice prior to 9/11, despite there being at least 1.5 million Muslim people in the UK.

It wasn't on the ethnicity agenda... Where are the boxes for Muslims? Do you mean, Indians, Asian, Africans, Brown people, Black people? No, I mean Islam. That's religion and it is boring, we are not doing it for the Jews or the Christians either so why should we do it for anyone else? There was a sense of religion is not really a big subject, religion doesn't play a big role in peoples lives. - Documentary Producer

▫ **Box-ticking takes no account of who is really under-represented now**

I have noticed that there are a lot of Asian females all over the place, generally pretty ones as well, I don't know if that means anything! Mainly, I would say, from the Midlands and the South of England. People have been so obsessed with ticking all sorts of boxes that I don't think they have actually realised what boxes they are ticking and whether or not that is actually truly reflective of society at large. I don't think you see many Pakistanis or Bengalis. I don't think you see many Asian men, particularly Muslim men, obviously Arabs, Chinese, Turks, Africans, they are not anywhere, they don't register in the industry.

In terms of the amounts of Asians that are in the industry right now, I say there are not many Northerners or from Scotland or places like that, not that many Muslim men. I think unfortunately we are helping people into the industry who don't actually need our help that much. - **Commissioning editor**

▫ **Box-ticking doesn't stop cloning**

If I hadn't been to Oxford, I wouldn't be here. The interesting thing about me is not my Asian-ness but my Oxbridge-ness and that unfortunately is often the case. There's a real sense of *Well, you're a darkie but you're one of us, aren't you? Middle-class, speak in a certain way, articulate, blah blah* and so, yes, I'm not scary because I provide them with a kind of mirror and a bonus to boot, I up their ethnic quotas. I'm being deliberately cynical but there is an element of that. And I think what's hard is when people come in who have a different background and have different ways of expressing ideas, but still have good ideas, it's much harder. - **Editor**

I always get slightly embarrassed about this because I am very mainstream, in that I am middle-class, Oxbridge educated, White girl essentially but I count as being diverse because I am also disabled and I do feel that I am cheating sometimes because you can employ me and be diverse but you are still getting all the non-threatening bits as well. - **Assistant producer**

▫ **Box-ticking becomes a cynical exercise and causes resentment**

The consequence is that what happens is that, in my opinion - I know for a fact, it is not an opinion - I was going to say the law is broken but I think that is getting a bit dangerous but, yes, I think appointments are made certainly in terms of ethnicity on the strength of the colour of somebody's skin. White people resent it. In the same way that men used to say, and I quote, this was from about fifteen years ago, *We need something in a skirt* and so we have moved on now to *We need a black face* and I know for a fact that a lot of senior managers were under very major pressure to get black faces on the television. - **BBC Manager**

The impact of this is not just resentment from "White people" but a huge burden on those appointed to prove that they are not just there because they are Black.

▫ **Diversity initiatives set people up to fail**

Several people described instances where over-eagerness to tick boxes had led to inexperienced people being appointed or promoted because they were from an ethnic minority or disabled and who then struggled in their jobs. This was seen as setting them up to fail.

There is a problem with a diversity industry that is seen to bring in people who are maybe not as good as everybody else on the grounds of skin colour because it creates not only bad feeling but it also creates a false impression that Black and Asian people are not as good as everybody else, it is only destructive. - **Producer**

It doesn't matter in the end how different the organisation looks visibly because it is not a truly diverse organisation and what happens, I think, as a consequence is that schemes are started, people who are not White, for example, and again for people with disabilities, get appointed to posts, and I know from personal experience they are not treated well. - **BBC Manager**

▫ **Box-ticking doesn't change the culture**

There is huge pressure but not to think that hard about it, a huge pressure to get the result and this is where there is a certain tension, ambivalence, in this whole thing because, if you want to measure your progress, you have targets. Well, I know they would say they are not targets, they are aspirations, but everybody knows they are targets. - **BBC Manager**

At the BBC there was a renewed momentum to achieve diversity targets after Director General Greg Dyke famously agreed in a BBC Scotland interview that the Corporation was "hideously White".²⁶

But targets are not a meaningful measure of what is actually happening or what needs to happen, a point made by the new Head of BBC Diversity:

The targets focused time and attention on the problem but targets haven't made it any easier for Black and Asian people to sell a programme idea. Targets haven't made commissioning editors less risk averse to giving, say, a multimillion pound project to a Black or Asian producer. And when we start to talk about disability, the cows go home!

▫ **Colour by numbers doesn't achieve cultural diversity**

The Communications Research Group which has been monitoring portrayal of minorities on terrestrial television channels since 1993 recently noted this discrepancy:

Relevance of ethnicity

A judgement was made about whether a participant's ethnicity played a part in their on-screen portrayal. In 2003, just over one quarter (27%) of cases involved portrayals where ethnicity was considered central (10% versus 8% in 2002) or relevant (17% versus 11% in 2002), leaving more than seven out of ten (73% versus 81% in 2002) judged as incidental. This supports the idea that in the majority of appearances by ethnic minority participants, there is evidence for colour-blind casting. By the same token, those with backgrounds in ethnic minority cultures were infrequently observed demonstrating this distinctive contribution.²⁷

It has also called for a more intelligent approach to monitoring:

One central concept emerging from a wide variety of audience research is a requirement that minority group portrayals should be authentic... A closer synergy between quantitative approaches and qualitative approaches is seriously overdue.²⁸

We currently have no indication of how broadcasters have improved the diversity of programme content. For example, they do not appear to monitor the number of hours of drama written by people of different ethnic minority backgrounds or documentaries on disability made from the perspective of disabled people. They do not monitor how the number of Black gun-crime stories compares with the portrayal of Black people as professionals or how many times Muslims have featured on programmes other than in the context of terrorism.

Cultural diversity - are we all talking about the same thing?

It is easy to understand why there has been such a focus on colour by numbers: it *seems* to provide a shared language to measure change. What is more challenging is the conversation about what cultural diversity actually means in broadcasting:

I know what it's supposed to mean: it's a softer term for saying Black and Asian but as is the nature of England, you never call a spade a spade so you say *cultural diversity*. Actually it's a meaningless term. All of culture anywhere in the world by definition is diverse. It has a five year lifespan and will be replaced by something else. Its premise is *difference* so they have to come up with a term about difference. At the moment usage of that term is a cloak to mask separateness, another experience, another art form, another audience, it's not part of the mainstream. - **Presenter**

I don't know. I have been through so many rounds of these terms ... from multiculturalism to cultural diversity. I haven't particularly changed in relation to these terms because I am doing it; it is the institutions that are changing their names and what they regard by it. I have always seen my life as multi, I have a "multi" life, I have a range of friends, I have a range of interests, I don't put one person's background above another person's background. For me diversity, cultural diversity, means an equal playing field of diverse people and interests. I have always been living that. - **TV Producer**

I take that to mean that it is not just Black and Asian. I take that to mean it's Chinese people, it's any minority culture, a visible minority culture that we ought to be recognising and tapping into ...and we rarely succeed in doing that for the main minority groups! - **Commissioning executive**

I am still trying to work it out, I don't know. I suppose it is better than multicultural - that sounded painful, like you needed to go to the doctor to get rid of it! Cultural diversity, it sounds like it should be more all embracing but I don't think it is, I think it is the way that *urban* has now become the new way of saying Black. Tragically I think that cultural diversity still means Black and it doesn't mean that we really are culturally diverse. - **TV Producer**

Virtually all my interviewees expressed similar views on how the term *cultural diversity* was interpreted by broadcasting organisations. Official statements and policy documents of broadcasters seem to offer a wider definition of diversity.

The BBC is committed to reflecting the diversity of the UK and to making its services accessible to all. This applies both to the output - TV, radio and online - and the workforce, aiming to be inclusive of those groups who are often under-represented - older people, women, disabled people, people from ethnic minorities, those of all faiths and social classes, lesbians and gay men.²⁹

However the discrepancy between statements and behaviour is widespread. For example, the Cultural Diversity Network was set up by the major broadcasters in 2000 with a great vision:

To change the face of television so that it truly resonates with the audience.³⁰

It laid out its plans for exchanging good practice, organising events and promoting culturally diverse programmes through its website. I have checked the website regularly over the past year and noted that it has been virtually inactive throughout that time. As of August 26th 2005 the website was still featuring programme highlights from August 2004, a list provided by BBC, Channel 4 and ITV which is revealing in what they appear to consider to be culturally diverse programming.

Of the ten projects listed, the first was a drama series about the 9/11 suicide bombers, another was a documentary series about the Anglo-US war on terror. There was a Channel 4 sequel to the *Torso in the Thames* programme about the suspected ritual killing of an African child. The digital channel BBC 4 was offering a variety of programmes to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Notting Hill Carnival, "a story of rows, violence and controversy". BBC Radio 4 offered playwright Kwame Kwei-Armah presenting a feature about "Black on Black" gun crime. BBC2's highlight was a documentary about the murder of a young aboriginal man in Australia. BBC Drama offered a cop show with a Black actor and ITV the first children's series with an Asian lead actor.

So, is this the broadcasters' actual vision of cultural diversity in Britain at the beginning of the 21st Century? Terrorism, violence, conflict, carnival ...and a little sugar pill for the children? It is not my intention to knock the Cultural Diversity Network, but if it is genuinely the intention of broadcasters to make their visions of cultural diversity a reality then we clearly need to develop a better shared understanding of what it means.

What's wrong with the programmes we have?

I asked programme-makers to describe what they saw as being wrong with the output at present and what they feel is missing from the National Conversation as a result.

We are always having to reinvent the wheel

As an industry, broadcasting is focused on the “new” and has little memory of achievements in the past. Even the current glut of TV nostalgia programmes ignores the chequered path of cultural diversity in broadcasting. Excellent programmes that appear to epitomise cultural diversity come and go without an understanding of why they worked and how to transfer that learning to other programme-makers. Many of my interviewees were deeply sceptical of what the broadcasters saw as progress: “We’ve been here before, they just don’t remember”. Several of my interviewees quoted examples of what they had thought were pioneering programmes from previous decades.

We had *Raspberry Ripple* with disabled characters, that was in 1988. Then there was *Skallagrigg* in 1994 - everybody got very excited about that. And then it takes another ten years before we get another drama with disabled people in it (*Every Time You Look at Me*). You can’t call that progress. - **Producer**

Black and Asian producers also recalled television and radio drama dating back to the 1970s, for example, the programmes from the BBC Drama unit in Birmingham such as *Empire Road* which were seen as providing more authentic representations than today. Long before BBC1’s recent successful adaptation of Meera Syal’s novel *Life isn’t all ha ha hee hee*, Radio 4 featured a series that revolved around the life of a group of middle-class Asian women friends.

Girlies was really groundbreaking. It was extraordinarily successful, a really good example of giving voice to the way that our community was evolving. It was about this interface of middle class and Asian-ness. I think people just accepted four Asian women who would argue about everyday stuff such as being in a mixed marriage while on the way to a party, that’s how it happens. It’s not a huge polemic, and we covered it all in *Girlies*. - **Writer**

The problem with the lack of industry memory is that broadcasters rarely consolidate, develop talent or move forward on their portrayal of minorities.

Programme-makers don’t imagine culturally diverse audiences

▫ **Making the connection**

When there is a human tragedy such as an earthquake somewhere else in the world, news programmes are increasingly acknowledging that there may be relatives of those affected, watching in the audience in Britain. It has now become almost standard practice to feature interviews with people from those British communities. (But it doesn’t always happen immediately, as the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami demonstrated. The initial news focus was almost entirely on the families of White tourists with no recognition of the thousands of people in the UK from the countries affected, worrying about loved ones.)

Other areas of programme-making rarely seem to acknowledge the diversity of the audience who might be watching or listening. One of the recurring themes in my interviews was that broadcasters fail to acknowledge the fact that Britain today is composed of many more people who have roots in other countries and who are sensitive to how those countries are portrayed.

Broadcasters need to wake up to the fact that Mark Tully or William Dalrymple's view of India or Bob Geldof's view of Africa are simply not sufficiently nuanced for many people in the audience today. We need a wider range of perspectives and narratives that acknowledge this reality. - **TV producer**

▫ **Stuck at explaining minorities to mainstream**

Audiences are always assumed to be homogeneous and White and able-bodied so even the few programmes which specifically feature people from minorities are often designed to explain them to this imagined mainstream audience. *The Great British Asian Invasion* was an entertaining example of this.

I was quite determined to make it an upbeat film and a kind of users' guide so that it was aimed at the White population, it wasn't aimed at Asians. There was very little in it that the Asian community wouldn't know, there wasn't a new story in there. It was for other viewers: *start here, you have seen them but you don't really know much about them and we will give you a little potted history and engage you.* - **Independent TV producer**

There is a reluctance to have disabled people dictating how stories about disabled people are told. *You've got to realise who these programmes are for...We're trying to get to a mainstream audience.* - **Producer**

You're forever trying to explain yourself as if you are an alien or some kind of threat so that you have to neuter it. - **Writer**

▫ **Look who's laughing**

The issue of the imagined audience came up several times in the context of comedy and the targets of a performer's jokes. Comedy producers tend to defend their shows saying anyone is a fair target, it's all about context. We have moved on from the days of Bernard Manning-type racist and sexist humour being considered acceptable but a lot of comedy now sends up the idea of political correctness, still making jokes about race or sexuality or disability but in a knowing *we can all take it now* way. Sometimes the justification is that the target is actually the person uttering the racist or homophobic lines. Other times it seems to be a matter of simply not challenging the material of anyone who is a powerful star, a valued audience-puller. No one I interviewed was in favour of censorship but there was a widespread feeling that race or disability-related humour was still often crude and unfunny as well as pointlessly hurtful. It was also thought to add fuel to the sort of playground and workplace barbs that many people from minorities still experience.

Such jokes were also seen as a way of keeping minorities at the margins while reinforcing the homogeneity of the core audience.

(Referring to a joke by Jonathan Ross on his BBC1 Friday night TV show about Chinese prostitutes being like Chinese takeaways) You're not saying that Chinese person is like me, you're saying it's me and my mates who are watching this. It's another way of defining self and other. That's what a lot of this is about. It makes us a lot more matey because we can define these people as still strange, still weird - they're alright to get our takeaways from on a Saturday night but they're not fully human, are they? - **Performer**

(Referring to a Catherine Tate Show sketch on BBC2) When I see cheap jokes made by straight people at the expense of gay people, I don't laugh. I imagine a young man who's yet to come out, sitting with his family at home, squirming with pain and embarrassment. That was me fifteen years ago and I know that's how it still is for a lot of people today. We're not all as at ease as maybe metropolitan media types are about being accepted and the impact that still has on families. - **Writer**

There was also a belief that shows like *The Kumars at No.42* were a sign that a minority had arrived: it was sufficiently at ease with where it was to be able to laugh not just at itself but poke fun at the foibles of the mainstream it was finally entering. It was therefore lamented that people from minorities remain peripheral to the comedy output on TV and radio.

Last night I watched ninety minutes of BBC2's comedy night: three programmes one after the other in which the only non-White faces were fleeting glimpses of non-speaking extras walking through a background shot. Imagine what it must feel like to play those parts; but imagine even more what message that sends out. - **Writer**

I think there is a lot to be proud of on Radio 4 but there are some areas of the output that are still predominantly, almost stuck in the 1950s as far as who peoples those slots, particularly the comedy output, it's still overwhelmingly White, middle-class males. - **Independent producer**

We're Bad News

Many interviewees commented on the way that minorities only entered the consciousness of the broadcasters and, hence the nation, at times of tragedy or conflict. Examples given were: the Chinese cockle-pickers, countless Black victims of violence, asylum seekers fighting deportation, disabled people in court cases to get the right to receive or deny medical care, the sacked Asian Gate Gourmet workers, and Africans generally. Their fleeting visibility alerted the nation to their existence under the heading "problem" but did little to help them be seen as equal participants in the National Conversation. The news was also seen as setting the agenda for other types of programmes such as documentaries and drama. The current coverage of Muslims was frequently cited as an example of this "reactive" approach to minorities.

Portrayal of minorities focuses excessively on their strangeness

All media are drawn to the unusual to grab their audiences but programmes or stories about minorities disproportionately focus on that aspect.

Channel 4 are just forgotten in terms of disability, they do the odd boy whose skin fell out of his nose or whatever and if that isn't a freak show showing I

don't know what is. And they don't do anything else, they haven't done any drama. Dwarves as dinner ladies in the third series of *Teachers* is not disability inclusion. - **Performer**

The preponderance of stories about bride burning and female circumcision, polygamy, and honour killings or stories of witchcraft and alleged ritual child abuse were cited as further examples of this focus on strangeness.

Minorities are reduced to a small number of familiar stories

We are more than the *issues* that the media shackle us with. We are not simply strangers who wear veils or have forced marriages or become terrorists. We are part of British society and we are as diverse a group of people as those born in the Catholic faith or any other group. Broadcasters should not reduce us by their own blinkered views. - **Writer**

Minorities seem to be reduced to shorthand all the time, don't they? Asians equals immigrants, culture-clash, Bollywood and curries. Black equals rappers, absent fathers and gun-toting yardies. Disabled equals objects of pity or *aren't they amazing?* Muslims equals terrorists and honour killings. Asylum seekers, Travellers – when do you ever see them except on the news? - **Producer**

There are individual programmes that have consciously avoided these stereotypes but across the industry as a whole this reductionist view still underpins portrayals of minorities, bringing all representations back to the same few narratives. So when the Radio 4 *Today* presenter interviewed Bonnie Greer about a new all-Black musical, she seemed surprised that it wasn't about crime and violence. "Black on Black" gun-crime has featured prominently on radio and television this year. With few other programmes featuring Black voices, it was felt to distort the picture that audiences receive.

It fits into this unspoken agenda that these are the broad areas of interest. There are a whole host of other subjects which never get a chance to be exposed. Given that such programmes are once in a blue moon, they take on the stature of being the definitive, authoritative programme on that community on that issue. - **Presenter**

Unbalanced representations reinforce damaging stereotypes

The limited ways in which minorities are depicted by broadcasters help maintain the stereotypes that can be so personally damaging to people from those minorities.

The problem is that this might be the one hour of output about disability that the BBC will have for the next six months and it's saying *boo hoo we are all really miserable* and because disabled people aren't integrated into the main body of the programmes and because you don't see those ordinary images then it just does affect how disabled people like me are seen. I go to the newsagent and buy a newspaper and people who don't know me from Adam, their perception of me is based on the programme and their perception will be wrong. - **Assistant producer**

Minorities are not seen in their variety

Many interviewees commented on the general tendency of programme-makers to paint with wide brush strokes that left the audience ignorant about the variety of people living in Britain today.

British Muslims aren't just Pakistanis, they come from at least thirty four countries all over Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe, but you wouldn't know that. - **Producer**

There is a strong and growing middle class amongst Black people who have had higher education, who are willing to engage with ideas and participate in discussions about the arts, about education, about public life ...but where are they in the media? - **Reporter**

Asian can mean Sri Lankan, it can mean Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani – and that covers a huge range of cultural and religious variety. What we get on the media is usually just Punjabi culture. - **Producer**

Others pointed out the cultural distinctions between people from the Caribbean and African countries such as Nigeria or Ghana not being reflected in output “aimed at Blacks”. Britain now has ethnic minority people of different generations whose connections with their roots may be more or less strong and their tastes and outlooks cannot be assumed to be homogeneous. Similarly, disability affects one in four of the population and covers a wide variety of life experience. Some disabled people identify very strongly with the political and cultural agenda of the Disability Movement but for others it is simply a personal matter. These sorts of nuances are simply not depicted in most of the output.

Mistaken identities

Many of my interviewees thought that broadcasters are too ready to adopt just one or two pundits who look like they represent some community without really understanding whether or not they do, and then use them to the exclusion of everyone else.

I think the fact is that this whole system does that to you, there is only room for one brown Muslim boy. - **Commentator**

Often they seem to choose someone because they *look* Asian or have a Muslim name, for example, even if that person's own sense is not of either of those being their major identity. It was felt that these are people who are attractive and articulate and acceptable to the mainstream precisely because they are not too different: “not scary”. When asked, those contributors say they do not pretend to represent anybody except themselves but are happy to exploit the career opportunities the broadcasters provide, hoping that their work will at least broaden the range of voices on air.

I don't know what other Muslims think of me – I don't really talk to other Muslims. I don't pretend to be an expert beyond my own experience. I don't feel exploited. I feel if I can tick more than one box, the cool, spiky, cultural commentator rather than just literate Muslim, it's okay. - **Presenter**

At local radio level I came across a couple of worrying examples of people parachuted into presenter roles on the station's Asian programme but who had no knowledge of the local

Asian communities they were supposed to be serving. There appeared to be no-one at the station who could make an informed judgement about the suitability of that person to be the voice of the community. But the Asian listeners could tell.

Lack of cultural authenticity

BBC diversity targets for casting ten per cent ethnic minority actors have led to a few high profile drama series (eg *Spooks*, *Hustle* and *55 Degrees North*) with Black male actors in major roles alongside White actors. Many other dramas have one Black or Asian-looking actor somewhere, usually in a minor part. As one actor said, you can sit on your sofa every night and play *Spot the Quota Filler*. Rarely are any of these parts written with any cultural specificity.

I have seen *Holby City* and it is like they think that they are being incredibly risqué and advanced and progressive by putting lots of Black actors in there but they are not. It is almost like they have landed from Mars, there is no back story to them and they don't really have any kind of cultural characterisation - they are not real. It is like great, wonderful, we have got Black actors in there but they are not real, there is nothing you can hold on to. It only takes another leap forward to actually give them some kind of reality: I am not saying that they should all not eat pork and not drink wine but it is, like, make them real for goodness sake! They have got to come from somewhere. - **Writer**

The Crouches just wasn't funny... this sounds so wanky and I don't mean it like this... but it just wasn't culturally specific, I can't think of a better way of saying it. I couldn't see the point of having a load of Black people on the television and not referring to them at all, I just didn't see the point. - **Producer**

The fact that they brought the Ferreiras into *Eastenders*, for example, they were supposed to be a Muslim family and then, right at the last minute, the exec producer got cold feet thinking *Oh God, Muslims that's asking for trouble*, so she changes them to Goans. I remember my mum watching it and going *well if they are all supposed to be Goans, how come they all look so Punjabi?* And I thought well yes, exactly. I don't watch it any more. I can't bear it; I think it is so false. - **Writer**

All About Me I would have re-titled it immediately *Not About Me* or *All Around Me*. You might as well have had a dog with his mouth sown up in that chair for all the attention anyone gave to him (the disabled character). Bottom line though, is that it is not a very good sitcom, it is not very funny and it is all just an effort. It groans with the pain of an exercise in PC, it doesn't enjoy any of the flamboyant, grotesque humour that disability can offer; it shies away from all of it. - **Actor**

Interviewees described the inability of commissioners, producers and script editors to move beyond their caricatures of minorities.

Because that is what they have seen already and usually it's the artefacts they are comfortable with. It isn't difficult introducing some diversity in characters in drama, but you mustn't go too far! - **Independent producer**

Actors described the difficulty of having to breathe life into two dimensional characters:

So, apart from the lack of variety and range and truth of the roles, when you do get a part you have to endow it, you have to do all this work to make it rounded, to make it whole, to make sense of it whereas the White actors can sail through, most of them doing their traditional bit. - **Actor**

Impermanence of Black and Asian characters in drama

All my Asian soap characters seem to die a death! - **Writer**

One of the recurring comments from the interviewees involved in drama was on the tendency for ethnic minority or disabled characters to be discarded too easily.

My heart sank in the last episode of *Spooks* when terrorists capture two of the lead characters: a Black man and a White woman, leaving the third lead character (the White woman's husband) having to choose between who gets shot first. You just knew it was the White woman who would come out alive and sure enough, a heroic speech and then the Black guy gets it. The White woman is rescued and goes off into the arms of her White partner. *Dr Who*, you knew from the start that Rose wasn't going to stay with her Black boyfriend and, sure enough, he is discarded by the end of the first episode. It happens all the time with Black characters, Asian characters, always the friends, always the sidekicks, ready to be dropped, ready to be killed off. - **Director**

The message was that people from minorities need to be in the fabric of broadcasting not just a temporary patch here and there. A good example that was cited by several interviewees was in the characters of Sunita and Dev in *Coronation Street* who have had strong storylines and strong relationships with other characters, whereas the Asian characters in soaps like *Eastenders* seem to be peripheral, all too ready to be dropped when the writers run out of storylines for them.

I'd say it's always wrong to demonstrate that Black and Asian characters have no permanency. One of the things that has always frustrated me about soaps in general is the way that Black and Asian characters can just up and go. They're rootless. This feeling that we can be sent back to where we came from is very deep, very real. My first experience of racism in this country was when I was walking down the street when I was sixteen and this guy stopped me and spat on me and told me to go back to "where I came from". And that's what we're doing all the time with soaps, sending these characters back.

I'm not saying you shouldn't get rid of characters but give them a reason to go, make it truthful. It always seems so... *oh well, we exhausted the race story, bit of equal opps we're doing, out with that lot...* Then we hear the hue and cry *Why aren't there any Black characters on x or y?* Then we suddenly bring a new lot in and when we get bored with that lot, because we haven't got stories for them, we chuck them out again. It's truly a dangerous thing to do in an environment like this. I do believe we have a huge responsibility in terms of broadcasting not just in the obvious messages we're putting out, it's the subliminal ones that worry me. - **Drama Producer**

My interviewees who were involved with soaps expressed frustration that all the actors in the Ferreira family in *Eastenders* had been dropped.

I think the problem with *Eastenders* is that it comes down to storylines. If the actor is not given the meat in their interactions, it's difficult to develop.

They're playing one dimensional.

Are you surprised the family has been axed?

Yes, I'm quite shocked... it's quite a political issue. Then to take them away and not address why they're not working is really incredible. - **Drama producer**

Casting colour-blind isn't enough

On television they produce images and they tell stories: I want those stories to be based on what I know of myself and my people and other people that I know, which I don't think is the case. I feel that people (from minorities) are very much treated as ciphers, as codes for something that other people are putting on them, they are not seen as real people, with their own stories, their own background, their own everything. - **TV producer**

While all the minority background actors I spoke to welcomed the general increase in work available as a result of greater colour-blind casting, most felt they were not reflecting anything richer of British life as a result because it wasn't there in the writing.

The keys are in good characters written as whole round human beings that are reflective of real life and properly cast. - **Actor**

Integrated casting on radio is now more widespread than it used to be but there are still producers who don't grasp the whole range of possibilities it offers.

They'll email me and say they want an Indian actress. I would ask *Is the play set in India? No, no it's set in London.* So I ask *Do you want an Asian actress who can do an Indian accent or a cockney accent? No, she was brought up here but she'll speak Indian because she lives with her family.* Ok, this is wide!

So there are people who will only cast Black and Asian actors in very race specific roles yet make sweeping generalisations about the characters. It should be the other way round, surely? Good actors can offer you a range of characters, but we need to know the specifics of what we are asking them to play. When it comes to casting European characters, Black and Asian actors are still being overlooked even though many Blacks and Asians now see themselves as Europeans. - **Producer**

Name-calling

My favourite is when they have a single non-White character and they've got an Asian girl called Charlotte – now what's that about? I know it's coming from a really good place but it's idiotic. And have you noticed all the Asian names on TV are Sunita, Nita, Reena, Nina? Maybe they think their public can't handle Shivani. - **Actor**

This may seem like a minor point but simply hearing names in all their diversity would help make more people feel more included in the National Conversation, get over the feeling of being treated as strange and “other”. Mispronunciation of names is simply unprofessional but making fun of foreign names which sound like something rude to an untrained English ear is an insidious form of racism. An example that was cited was of a radio documentary presenter who (in a serious documentary about the problems of bride-burning and the abortion of female foetuses in India) made a quip about the obstetrician (recorded delivering a baby) being called *Pushpa*.

One is not enough

In recent years there have been a small number of attempts to introduce, for example, all-Black drama or comedy but these have met with a very hostile response from African-Caribbean audiences. This has also shaken the broadcasters involved, and left them perhaps less willing to try again. But the outcry is often less to do with the merits of the particular show than the fact that it is the only drama or comedy to feature a large number of Black people on screen for several years.

Babyfather: there’s an example of a single train having to carry all this freight and expectation. It can’t really. - **Writer**

When there is only one play everybody puts all their hopes and expectations onto it, so it will always be pulled apart. You need a whole range, you need five or six Sikh plays, ten Black shows, and then you can probably talk about each of them in a proper sensible way, but, as it is, Black and Asian audiences have been so disappointed and so let down over the years that all kind of expectations and hopes and dreams all get fixated on one thing. - **Drama Producer**

You can’t see a programme like *The Crouches* in isolation to understand the reaction it got, and that was their biggest mistake, they thought they could. You really can’t be that irresponsible and you can’t then turn round and blame people for their reaction to it, you can’t do that. I think we need to see a variety of sitcoms. - **Producer**

This is as true of individual performers who carry the huge burden of representing large heterogeneous groups rather than just being able to develop their talents as individual writers and performers.

When they criticise I want to say: You go and have a go. I sometimes feel the whole weight is on my shoulders. I am not allowed to fail. - **Actor**.

Caution leads to blandness, poor research undermines credibility

The problem I have with a lot of representation of Black and Asian people on TV is I can’t think of any Black or Asian character that’s not bland - **Writer**

Interviewees who had been involved with *Eastenders*, described how several attempts were made to introduce a Sikh family and then a Muslim family onto the show. These were rejected in favour of a Christian Goan family as it was felt the writers could not cope with anyone too different. The *Ferreiras* thus arrived but with a perplexing mix of Hindu and Muslim names.

There is a lack of awareness, a cultural lack of awareness particularly in television I think with some very career driven people, focused people who are not necessarily au fait with the rest of the world...the whole production team who don't have much idea of the world. It was a surprise to most of them when told Asif was a Muslim name, and was probably a Punjabi Muslim with a Kashmiri family - all of which was information that you could ask somebody what this name would represent. - **Drama producer**

Homogenisation

Many people were concerned that, even when programmes featured diverse contributors or stories, they were all projected through the same homogenising lens, and so missed the full picture that those people and stories offered. This was considered particularly marked in the case of BBC prime-time output on television and national radio. Examples cited were the numerous documentary series featuring White middle-class men as presenters:

The commentary (BBC2's *Around the World in 80 Treasures*) was full of every cliché in the book: India was *chaotic, spiritual, exotic, sensual*. They filmed the same scenes that they always film when they go to India. He salivated at the breasts and lingams in temples. At one point he talked about international traders who brought *civilisation* to Cochin - what history books was he reading? It's lazy, it's ignorant, it perpetuates the same stereotypes, adds nothing to our knowledge of Indians, including those who live in Britain. - **Writer**

You get these big high profile documentary series every month and they're always presented by the same type of White middle-class, middle-aged man who brings the same view of the world. Michael Palin, Dan Cruickshank, Michael Wood, where are all the women? And on radio it's the same: it's always male news journalists who present the weighty series. Why does only their view count? - **Producer**

(I counted twenty presenter-led documentary series on prime-time BBC Television in the first eight months of 2005 and seventeen were presented by "White middle-class, middle-aged men". Channel 4 had far less presenter-led documentaries but did reflect a slightly greater diversity, thanks largely to a single Black presenter, Robert Beckford.)

This tendency to filter everything through the same type of lens was described by many of my interviewees. It's a characteristic of broadcasting that was noted by radio critic Anne Karpf more than twenty years ago and still seems to apply today:

Daytime Radio 4 has an extraordinary ability to absorb diverse experiences and information, masticate them and spit them out homogenised. It presents a familiar enduring world out there – dependable and, in spite of it all, reassuring. It is very professional, it passes the time enjoyably, but there is little of the roughness and sharp edges of real life. There is largely one voice, and it is a White (I only heard one Black person all day) middle-class voice, a late 30s to middle-aged voice. When will Radio 4 rupture its cosy cocoon?³¹

Targeted programmes

I do see there's a problem as long as you have *Desi DNA* and these other ethnic programmes. What do we do about these ghettos, do we just get rid of them all and say, no this is everyone's responsibility? Because as long as we have them there's always the excuse if we don't take an idea, it'll be done somewhere else. - **Producer**

So *Desi DNA* at 11.20 does a feature on artist Sacha Jaffrey, but why isn't he on *The Culture Show* earlier in the evening? It just marginalises the people on the show. - **Producer**

There was much discussion with my interviewees about the value or otherwise of targeted programmes. The trend in the past ten years has generally been away from having programmes on mainstream schedules aimed at minority groups. The official reason that was given for this change of tack was that it was better to put disabled people or Black people into the general mix of programmes so that they were not ghettoised. However, people who had worked on those programmes felt their programmes were axed because the channel controllers simply did not find them of interest and didn't want them because they couldn't deliver high audience figures.

While laudable in its aims, there is a general acceptance that mainstreaming hasn't yet been successful in ensuring that the issues and perspectives covered in those targeted programmes are actually included elsewhere.³² For example, when BBC Radio 4's *Does He Take Sugar?* was dropped in 1997, the promise was that the daily consumer programme *You and Yours* would have a disability producer who would ensure that disability received good coverage. But this has not delivered the sort of coverage that disabled people want.

You and Yours is only interested in consumer issues which excludes a lot of disability stories. Eighty percent of *You and Yours* is not about disability so if you are disabled you have to listen to five hours over a week in order to get the information relevant to you – that's just not practical. And because disability stories have to compete with non-disability stories, they may get dropped for sound editorial reasons but it means as a disabled person you are not getting the full range of material you need. So my view is that you do need a separate programme. - **Producer**

The need to have a "critical mass" of people whose sole concern was to find stories of specific relevance to a minority, but would reach a mainstream audience, was also identified as a benefit of targeted programmes, such as BBC2's *From The Edge* which ran for seven years.

You were able to see long-term stories developing; you kept in touch with the movers and shakers so you could see the significance of what was happening. I think we've lost that completely now. - **Assistant Producer**

Targeted programmes that survive such as *In Touch* on BBC Radio 4 and *See Hear!* on BBC2 also maintain a close ongoing relationship with their audiences and can be more responsive in ensuring their needs and interests are met. Producers who had worked on targeted programming questioned the reliability of audience research which said that people didn't want such programmes and preferred to be included in the mainstream. They felt it was not an *either, or* but *as well as*.

I absolutely agree that people want to see themselves in the mainstream but I also know as well that if you ask the right questions you still know that they want targeted programmes too. If they are asked: *Would you prefer to be in something like Black Britain or on Panorama?* They will go, *I would like to be on Panorama* but then if you say: *What other issues are you interested in?* They will say: *Well, I like Black cookery - why don't they do Black recipes on...? Why don't I see Black art anywhere, why don't I hear about Black history anywhere?* And what that is really saying is *I am not seeing those views reflected in mainstream programmes*, but that question isn't being asked in a very direct way. - **Former Black Britain Producer**

Do targeted radio programmes help facilitate the National Conversation?

When people from under-represented groups are allowed to shape their own agenda (or are facilitated to do so by producers and interviewers with insight and sensitivity) it was agreed that radio programmes are a fantastically powerful means to getting to know each other. But at present opportunities to hear under-represented British voices are usually outside of the routine programmes on national networks: in one-off features, phone-ins or a handful of dramas or readings where original voices bubble up and take you into their world. Those moments remain rare in the mainstream of radio. So what about targeted radio programmes made for particular minority audiences?

My interviewees were keen to distinguish between programmes which gave minorities the opportunity to reflect themselves to themselves and ones which gave them the opportunity to reflect themselves to the wider society. There was agreement that the former could not take the place of the latter in the National Conversation.

▫ **Targeted radio networks**

Launched nationally in 2003, the digital channels Asian Network and 1Xtra are now often cited by the BBC as progress in the arena of cultural diversity. I asked programme-makers from the minorities they were designed to serve whether they agreed.

No, because at the end of the day one is a talk current affairs sort of thing and the other one is a street music station. My Mum doesn't listen to street music, my Mum is a sixty year old Black woman who wants to watch a variety of programming and wants to definitely see her views and her cultural reference points in some of that programming - not all of it but some of it. So I don't agree with that at all. - **Commissioning executive**

1Xtra is a great success, I listen to it a lot. It's got vitality, experimentation, relaxation around its subjects. But it shouldn't be used as an excuse to not get those subjects and voices into the main channels. - **Producer**

According to the BBC, the Asian Network

...aims to be the main broadcast forum for debating the issues preoccupying British Asian communities.³³

Many of my interviewees (British Asian and others) expressed profound misgivings about ghettoising certain communities in this way: “leaving them to just talk to each other”. Others felt it was acceptable to have these networks as part of “a mixed economy” if they were subjected to the same creative or editorial standards as the rest of the BBC.

It’s there; there is a value to it as an intermediate platform. My biggest criticism of it is, it’s rubbish, it’s patronising. It has been criticised for this ³⁴ and there will be changes now. I think it is not even tapping into the debates, the kind of talent that is out there, the skills base it could be developing. It could generate an enormous following but people don’t listen to it because it doesn’t talk about what concerns them. They get more on *Question Time* than they can get on the *Asian Network*. - **Producer**

Others recognised that both 1Xtra and Asian Network could act as a conduit for stories and talent to the rest of broadcasting but this was something that had to be actively fostered.

▫ **Local radio**

Half of all BBC radio stations have some sort of programme specifically targeting ethnic minorities in their local area. Few of these are presented by trained journalists, and the quality of debate and discussion is very variable. A more detailed study of the role of ethnic minority presenters in local radio is needed but interviewing some of those involved suggested that, compared with their non-ethnic minority peers, there are a number of areas for concern.

- They are usually peripheral to the mainstream output and this often appears to be reflected in their pay.
- Their programmes often do not appear to be subjected to the same editorial rigour as the rest of the station’s output
- The programmes are creatively unambitious.
- They often lack basic broadcast skills such as interviewing technique.
- They often do not come from the local area so do not always seem to understand the audience they are serving.
- Few appear to have opportunities to develop and move into other areas of broadcasting.

Several people commented that the basis on which such presenters are hired and the types of programmes they present both perpetuate an outdated *samosas and steelbands* view of multiculturalism which does not encourage participation in the wider National Conversation.

So What's Missing?

I asked my interviewees to describe what they thought was missing from the mainstream of broadcasting and so the National Conversation. Their replies focused on the variety of **people** and **perspectives** they thought were missing and types of **programme** that were missing.

▫ **People and perspectives missing**

I think generally in the big subject areas: history, science, arts, natural history, I think there are people missing and there are points of view missing and there are contributors missing and there is an attitude missing, completely. It's as if that piece of the jigsaw was never there. The question is how do you get programme-makers, independent producers and people who are coming up with ideas to recognise and reflect a diverse view on all those areas? They are very White in all those areas - **Commissioning executive**

The absence of British Chinese people on television, why is that, why don't we see Chinese people on our television screens, why is there no Chinese character in *Eastenders*, the East End was the home of one of the most important Chinese communities, so where are they? Do we not exist? The Chinese excel in a number of areas, it's just that people don't know, so in the field of research of science and technology in academic fields, there are many, many Chinese professors which we just don't know about. There are heads of NHS Trusts that are Chinese that we don't know about. And again, it's about portrayal, representation. Chinese are there, but we don't know that they're there because they're not seen in the media. - **Writer**

Disabled people, they are just not there so that part of life isn't being reflected, that whole area of life experience isn't being reflected, or if it is being reflected it is being reflected in inappropriate semi-voyeuristic ways. - **Former editor**

It is not just disability, it is not just race, the big hidden problem in this country are older people because once you're over the age of sixty there are no programmes directly aimed at older people, very, very few. They are terribly under-represented and where they are represented they are always represented in patronising ways. - **Broadcast journalist**

Representations of Black, Asian, Far Eastern are missing but I think that society is also changing with refugees and asylum seekers. I think White working-class people aren't represented enough either and I think that disability isn't really looked at properly. I think we don't really do anything for people with learning disabilities, for example, neither does anybody else. - **Drama producer**

▫ **Programmes missing**

Good plays, good writing in general, more historical drama. It's finding a way in which the past can speak to the present because, to me, that is the basis of the struggle we have here - and by "we" I mean "we ex-colonial people". The whole debate about us is around the notion of immigration and integration. It's absurd: we've been here since Roman times in various kinds of numbers. We don't forget about Windrush or about Idi Amin and the expulsions of Asians but if we only see it in these terms we will always be seen as newcomers or interlopers when in fact we have helped to establish this country in very fundamental ways. - **Writer**

I think we need to see a variety of sitcoms. Mixed, not all Black, all Asian or all White. - **Comedy producer**

The thing that I also feel is that when we do the big kind of costume dramas or the classic works, based on classic works, there is never a Black presence there. - **Commissioning Executive**

What I always find really fascinating that you will watch Sunday night BBC and ITV you wouldn't know that we are living in a multicultural society or that there are any Black or Asian people in this country, I would love to see much more urban stories which reflect the real world that we live in rather than these sort of country practices and these costume dramas. - **Writer**

Programmes which give a different way of looking at the rest of the world, particularly the developing world. I'm sick of seeing the same type of ignorant White middle-class man going round saying, *golly!* - **Producer**

As a White middle-class woman, I would like more opportunities to see other communities being reflected through ordinary people and in their ordinary moments, not just when something extraordinary happens to the community. - **Publicist**

I'd like to see more mixing of people - this country's got so much of that going on but you'd never know. And more stuff from the inside out, that didn't treat people like objects - **Director**

It's not just odd programmes here and there. I'd just like to see the cultural diversity of this country, all the different flavours and textures of people's lives, really infuse everything that we do. - **Producer**

The problems with the current output can be summarised as: lack of meaningful and accurate representations of people from minorities in most areas of programming, too great a reliance on too few voices, and the inability of broadcasters to address a diverse audience. What is missing from the output, and hence the National Conversation, is a whole range of voices and perspectives that reflect modern Britain.

What's stopping more cultural diversity on the airwaves?

There was widespread agreement amongst programme-makers (remember these are the people who are developing and pitching ideas) that the main bar to diversity in output lay in the **commissioning** of ideas. Another major barrier lay in the **casting** of programmes: the choice and availability of diverse presenters, contributors or actors and the lack of diversity in **production teams**. Producers also highlighted programme **scheduling** and **publicity** as areas of concern.

Commissioning

Producers identified a number of problems with the sort of people who are currently commissioning output across national mainstream television and radio networks and with the commissioning process.

▫ Difference between Channel 4 and BBC

BBC and Channel 4 have a very different profile in the minds of independent programme-makers, with Channel 4 being perceived to be less rigid, hierarchical and "institutional". This was seen to be a product of its smaller size as well as its brief to be distinctive and innovative.

We are working with Channel 4 on a number of things at the moment and compared with the BBC, it is chalk and cheese. You look at the embrace and welcome and *encouragement for causing trouble* as they call it at Channel 4, they want you to go out there and stir up a hornet's nest. At the BBC, it is like *we have one bee in the room, how many more do you bloody want!* It's really couldn't be more approaching from opposite ends of the spectrum. - **Independent producer**

However, Channel 4 was not seen as necessarily being better at embracing diversity and committing resources to make culturally diverse programmes.

Don't assume Channel 4, because it is trendy and a bit more fashionable, that somehow all those people are with it, they are not, otherwise their output would be even more diverse actually than it is. - **Independent producer**

Channel 4 wants to make a noise, be prepared to offend, and people are encouraged to take risks. BBC treads more cautiously. It's a more conservative organisation: by its nature it's not an organisation of risk-takers (they wouldn't be there if they were!) But the bottom line is that the BBC does offer a place where there are the resources and willingness to make something more intelligent than Channel 4 might have done. - **Director**

▫ **Commissioning power is in the hands of too few people**

Across different areas of television and radio, programme-makers felt that the number of people they could take their ideas to was very limited.

It is weird because we only have three people who commission radio drama and they are all quite similar, they are all of a similar sort of age and cultural background and work background and they are the ones who decide on everything that goes out, three people. - **Radio producer**

Independent producers also identified the lack of diversity in the output of ITV and Five, and the withdrawal of ITV from its traditional regional bases, as being a barrier to a greater market for programmes which come from different perspectives.

▫ **Commissioning is subjective**

This is an industry which, unlike other industries, we don't produce something objective that you can say that this rivet is better than that rivet, this car is better than that car, we don't do that. We work on subjective lines about subjective things. Who is to say that that idea is a better idea than that idea, it is a subjective thing. It is an exercise in discrimination and in taste and it is something that is very difficult to hold somebody accountable for. At the moment the people who exercise that discrimination, that taste, that selection, that editorialisation are from a particular narrow cross section of British society, one which does not represent that society as a whole. - **Producer**

▫ **Commissioners' narrow outlook is a bar to diversity**

At the moment you have a mono-cultural view of the world going on. It is a White, middle-class, middle England, mostly male, but not exclusively so, view of the world that is deciding what programmes are getting made. That is not to say that the working class cannot get on, but it is these people's takes on the working class that get on. It is not to say that Black or Asian programmes can't get made, but it is these people's takes on Black and Asian-ness. - **Producer**

▫ **Commissioners don't understand ideas coming from different places**

As soon as you start coming with ideas which are culturally specific you can see from the reaction a lack of interest, a lack of comprehension, all very nice but haven't got a clue what to do with it. You know that you are kind of pushing against a wall as opposed to having a door which is very receptive to ideas. So in a sense have to leave your ethnicity behind. The system likes you to just become a clone. - **Producer**

We had this programme idea that everyone supported but there was no-one who could exec. I think because it was basically a cultural programme and they didn't know the culture. We were pitching a programme about disability culture and no-one understood that. I think there are people who *are* willing to understand it and I have met a lot of those but just when we needed one there wasn't an exec who did that. - **Assistant producer**

Only what they have experienced counts! They're playing God – they're creating our culture in their own image and they're not allowing us to break through. Only where they say it's okay. - **Writer**

▫ **The good, the bad, the don't-knows**

If I am pitching to people who are from an ethnic background they will get it. There are a number of White commissioning editors who I think want to understand it and their hearts are in the right places but probably don't have the kind of right experience to really make a great judgement on it but, on the other hand, commission it because they know they have got to do it, so they are okay, that group is fine. But there is a whole bunch of people for whom it is not on their radar at all, not because they are racist, but it is not part of their experience. They are the people who have a mobile phone that doesn't have an Asian or Black name on it, so I think they are problematic; there is no point in pitching to those people.

There is also another bunch of people who I think are positively obstructive and I think they are people who just haven't come to terms with modern Britain and we still have those people. I don't know what to call them because I think racist sounds really strong, just prejudiced, people who actually don't like the way the whole diversity thing has made them re-evaluate what they do and feel uncomfortable about it and some of them are in quite serious positions of power really. - **Independent producer**

I think if a decision maker is White without much contact in their social circles with Black or Asian people they are relying on certain generalisations in their mind about what is happening in society and what trends they want to pick up, and some of that might be well spotted, they are reading the newspapers etc, and some of it might be relying actually on quite old stereotypes. - **Writer**

▫ **Only get stories which are about extremes or are safe, lose the variety in between**

It's a really difficult line between celebration and tension. You do find that quite a lot of the stuff that is commissioned is edgier stuff and I know this argument riles people in ethnic communities in this country: why are we constantly making programmes which somehow are about arranged marriages, honour killings all these things that are negative about the community? But equally I don't just want it to be happy clappy. - **Radio producer**

You have two agendas that you are having to meet: you're just the same or you're very peculiar. And that's true of your offers; you can offer an all-Black Shakespeare set on a housing estate, or you can offer a youth gang culture type story. You can't offer say, a break-up of a marriage where the world you've set this marriage is Leicester or Notting Hill (I can't imagine an all-White Notting Hill, somehow other people can). The slow, thorough exploration of self, of inner, of whatever makes drama, we avoid when it comes to Black and Asian people. We're looking for some extreme. It's amazing to me that all Black and Asian drama has to sit on that extreme whereas White drama is about self and about contradictions of self. - **Drama producer**

BBC commissioning at the moment, apart from one person, is entirely White and what I think happens as a consequence of that is that, if your idea is totally counter intuitive - all Muslims are slags, say - sure we need to look at that because it is so provocative, whether it is founded in anything or has any truth in it, it is bound to be looked at. Or you can do the very safe, let's look at Islamophobia, or let's mark Ramadan, that's bound to get looked at because it's a no-brainer that you have to cover those bases. But the stuff in the middle: homophobia in the Black community or whatever, has been very hard to get on, partly because I think the people you pitch to (and the pitch is a piece of paper by and large so you are pitching fairly blind) doesn't necessarily fall at the desks of the people who understand the nuance that you are trying to get across. – **Former C4 commissioning editor**

▫ **Commissioners can't imagine the universal appeal of ideas from diverse perspectives**

I don't *not* pitch stuff because it comes from a diverse perspective but I'm absolutely clear that there is an agreed reality of which minorities can speak universally and which can't. I think that it is absolute nonsense, it is to do with the story that you are telling, whether you are in a factual or fictional format, whether drama or documentary, whatever the format, if the story reaches the level of universal truth, it doesn't matter if it is a story about marine plankton or Home Counties Tory lady - either have the potential, any community has the potential to draw on universal levels of truth, but that isn't seen as fact from most commissioning editors. - **Independent producer**

This isn't simply an issue about ethnic minorities or disabled people; it applies to a whole host of stories coming from regional perspectives too:

They don't want to know about Scottish stories usually. We have to sell our Scottish stories to BBC Scotland, you try to sell them to the national network and, goodness me, then there is convincing to be done: *It is about Scotland; what has that got to do with the UK, what's that got to do with England?!* - **Independent producer**

▫ **Commissioners will only take what they already know**

It's almost impossible to get them interested in ethnic minority presenters. If it's someone they already know, someone who writes a newspaper column then, they might go with it. Otherwise they put up hurdles that they just don't with White presenters. It's a case of *They can't be good because we haven't heard of them.* - **Radio producer**

Producers also described the danger that they just ended up offering ideas that they knew commissioners felt comfortable with - instead of offering the variety of stories they believe should be told.

I feel the only way to sell Black and Asian things at the moment is to say, look how much I can compare it to x and y and how much it's like the West. That's the commissioning process itself, people haven't time to think so you try and do it so they don't have to think. You have to say it's like this or like that. It's written in the style of *Bridget Jones*, something that they already know...and that is the most exhausting thing.

I'm not sure whether I'm creating programmes and ideas and being really creative or just getting very good at judging what they'll take. - **Radio drama producer**

I was kind of guided to which ideas would probably win a commission more than others so my play did fit a stereotype. I suppose it was the case of what the commissioners' tastes would be. Both of the ideas that I put in had ethnic characters and roles in them so it wasn't: don't do an Asian or a White, it wasn't anything like that, it was more about the subject matter. In a way I think it was picked because it was a bit more familiar to Radio 4. - **Writer**

Other producers noticed commissioners' preference for stories about the Empire. The impact of these is to simply keep reinforcing the same narratives about White British people's relationship with others as being over there, not over here.

For some reason, I think it is okay if they come from somewhere else. I still think they kind of find the *over there* slightly more exotic and safer because it is not so close to home. - **Producer**

▫ **Cultural apartheid in treatment of ideas and talent from minorities**

One of the most despairing things for me since the eighties is that we have entered a period of cultural apartheid. Our work would be classified in an ethnic, culturally diverse slot *first* and *then* its artistic merit or demerit would be considered. The first response is that something is of a minority interest, in other words you think politically, sociologically... all sorts of other ways other than the art itself, is it good? - **Director**

There is still too much of that compartmentalisation whereas I actually live in a world where people meet lots of different people all the time. I haven't got a slot mentality when I look around me, but the slot mentality is there on television. In the commissioner's minds they are different sorts of people, they need different sorts of slots, different sort of treatment. - **Producer**

The producer of the pioneering BBC comedy *Goodness Gracious Me* felt it was also subjected to this sort of apartheid, despite its award-winning success on radio:

For the TV pilot, the money they wanted to give us was laughable and it was questioned whether we could do it for that money, we didn't have any choice. The controller of BBC2 at the time, his attitude seemed to be: make this, provided you can make it for no money, and I will stick it out after *Newsnight* because it is going to be a minority thing, one of the ethnic shows that we have to do to tick the boxes. But they had low expectations.

There was also a perception that projects led by writers and producers who were White were more likely to get the go-ahead than similar projects offered by people from ethnic minorities.

Yasmin (Channel 4 drama) was written by someone who wrote *The Full Monty* and it gets produced and you wonder how many Asian people came up with the idea and it never saw the light of day? To an extent you say to yourself: that's the reality of commercial life... but the interesting question is, if it had

been written by an Asian, how would it have been first perceived? What connections would producers have made? I can almost guarantee the connections they would have made are *it's ethnic, it's political*, all those sort of things. But when Simon Bufoy writes it the connection they make: *well, good drama, art*. Why aren't we ascribed the ability to make art? - **Director**

The whole feel that I get from the industry (about scripts from disabled people) is a charitable one, not *Is it good drama? Is it something worth making? Is this going to be ground breaking, or funny?* All of the normal questions. It is just before you even get to that, there is whole set of - you can only call it brick walls, barriers: *I don't know who is interested; will the audience want to watch this?* This is before they have even opened the envelope so it is very difficult. And I just thought this world that I am sitting in, the odds are so stacked against disabled people... they don't even think about talent and all the rest of it. - **Director**

At the end of the day, it's quite a simple project: it's about equity, equity of access, just being seen as the same. But what the structures do is that the person who is looking at the show, their immediate instinct is not about the work first, the first instinct: *Is this going to be dodgy? Is it going to be a problem? Is it only going to appeal to a particular sector?* Which is quite different to a response to a non-ethnic piece of work. That's the era that we're in. Post Sept 11th I can't imagine this going down. I think it will increase. - **Presenter**

▫ **One is not enough**

They say they don't want to go ahead with my project because there is this other Black project that's going ahead. So you're allowed one only. - **Writer**

Minority writers and producers are used to hearing this as a reason for their project being sidelined. There is also a widespread sense that commissioners are only willing to recognise one or two people from minorities as having any talent and will ignore the rest. In the eighties it was Lenny Henry appearing in comedy and drama as the only Black entertainer the BBC could apparently trust. Now it's Meera Syal and Sanjeev Bhaskar who are currently carrying the flame for all things Asian: writing, acting, starring. As the executive producer of *Life isn't all ha ha hee hee* described Meera: "She is the Queen of Asians". But while everyone I spoke to recognised her talent and the sheer hard work she has put into developing her own projects, there was a concern that a variety of other talent was being ignored.

You would think there was nobody else but Sanjeev and Meera in this world doing anything and, although they are very good, it is just worrying even our own people start to just see the whole world through two artists' eyes, it is not right. - **Writer**

▫ **The Fear Factor**

My personal view is that they just don't get it. It's a bit scary for them. - **Writer**

Many writers and producers described the apparent fear that stops commissioners taking a punt on something outside of their own experience: fear of worthiness, fear of getting it wrong.

I think also amongst the sort of White mainstream of broadcasting, the *hideously white* BBC, all that, the effect of the PC movement in the eighties and nineties is that they are now so afraid of doing the wrong thing that they don't do anything, their approach is *Let's not even go there because it is a minefield.* -

Independent producer

▫ **Commissioners play safe**

I think also partly for many people what their main organising principles for making decisions is, is furthering themselves and if it is anything contentious or out of the mainstream that is far more of a risk to take, far rather do something that you know will get showered in praise from the Home Counties, particularly for channels like Radio 4. - **Independent producer**

▫ **Track record is not respected**

Several people cited this as a reason why there are not many older people in programme-making and why talented people from minorities don't seem to be able to get work on to the airwaves.

What is flawed you don't get treated as the sum of your experience, you always get treated as new, untried, untested. - **Writer**

▫ **No consensus around what makes a successful programme**

What is the definition of a good programme? Good audience figures, press coverage, audience response, the views of other programme-makers? At the moment broadcasters are not very good at making explicit the criteria by which they judge a programme to be a success, so decisions, for example, on whether to re-commission a series can seem very subjective and often seem biased against programmes using minority talent and ideas.

They don't really remember what you've done – you're having these short editorial meetings and you see them looking at you sceptically, like, *go on impress me* and you think, but just look at the work we've done, the reviews and everything. - **Independent TV and radio producer**

A rather poignant adjunct to this is that many interviewees felt that commissioners didn't always recognise the value of programmes they *have* commissioned which have brought in new voices or new perspectives in a rich and engaging way.

▫ **Drama commissioning processes are obscure and time consuming**

I spoke to several drama writers from ethnic minorities who have had work commissioned but never “green lit” for television. Sometimes this has involved work spanning over several years, lots of positive feedback but the project never gets made and they never really find out the reason.

As a writer, you have no power, control. There are so many different reasons it might not happen, apart from race and ethnicity. Personnel change so quickly, you develop an idea with someone and they go. We have a vertical system in this country. You go up a bit, and a bit more and at any point you can fall down. So you develop an idea and you just try and keep going until it becomes something. - **Writer**

▫ **Difficult to challenge commissioning editors’ decisions**

In-house producers at the BBC described feeling quite a long way from the decision makers, working through intermediaries and having to rely on a piece of paper to do their pitching. But independent producers also felt at a disadvantage:

You can’t really argue with the commissioning editors. If it hasn’t said to them in the first time you pitched them, if that hasn’t spoken to them there and then, you just know it isn’t going to be commissioned. At least if you are in the department you have more slots that are dedicated to that department and they are more likely to be able to take a chance on it. Also you can work on them over time, you can try and build an alliance with the other producers in the department and wear them down. You can’t do that as an independent. - **Independent TV and radio producer**

▫ **Commissioners work with who they know**

Several independent producers believed commissioners at the BBC and Channel 4 had an “inner circle” of companies they liked to do business with and this made it difficult to get their ideas heard equally. This is something that has been noted in previous research with ethnic minority-led independent production companies.³⁵ The fashion for senior BBC executives to leave the Corporation to work with independent production companies was also seen as simply reinforcing the existing powerbases, giving an already privileged group an advantage over independent producers who could not boast the same range of insider knowledge and contacts.

▫ **Missed opportunities**

Several people voiced their concern that a failure to engage with ideas that came from diverse perspectives represented a missed creative opportunity.

We are in a creative industry and we live and die by our ideas and if we don’t have fresh perspectives and fresh ideas and fresh ways of looking at things then we’ll be condemned to seeing re-hashes of the same old thing over and over. Which we are seeing at the moment. - **Producer**

Casting

Another major area of concern was to do casting: the people who appear on TV and radio programmes. They may be presenters, experts, game-show contestants, participants in lifestyle programmes and documentaries, actors in comedy and drama. In any given day of viewing or listening we might encounter hundreds of such people, allowing them a space in our heads, each reshaping our view of the world in a small way. Casting of programmes thus provides a major opportunity to bring different voices and experiences into the National Conversation.

The selection of contributors is a vital part of the construction of a programme. They may be found through research or through advertising, but the goal is to find people who are articulate and engaging, people that will resonate with the audiences who see or hear them. So why are there not more diverse contributions to the National Conversation?

▫ **Public life is not diverse**

Much of television and radio output depends on contributors drawn from public life such as politics, academe, publishing, journalism and the arts - but most of these do not reflect the diversity of British society either. The expert contributions in programmes are therefore drawing on a narrow range of people.

I think where Radio 3 and 4 do much better now is to use the few well-known writers and artists from minorities in their arts and discussion programmes, but they still could do a lot more to go out and look for rising stars in other areas. – **Radio producer**

▫ **Few celebrities from minorities who are suitable or willing**

Many programmes today rely on “celebrities” so there is another chicken and egg situation. If you have a series like BBC2’s *Grumpy Old Women* and want to include a Black British female celebrity amongst the talking heads, what do you do?

Don’t forget that the pool of people that you can ask is small, then the chances are that some won’t want to do it. If they are willing to be interviewed, will they be funny enough? Will their personality shine? Will they fit into the mix? Finding White contributors is easy, there are hundreds to choose from – you can throw people away and bring people in. There are Black contributors that you really do want to include and a lot of the time they will say no, they don’t want to do it and then you are stuffed. - **Commissioning executive**

▫ **Appearance or a different accent can rule people out**

Judgments about attractiveness and suitability of contributors’ accents are made all the time (though rarely made explicit). People from ethnic minorities and disabled people are often not selected because they do not conform to what is considered appealing to audiences. Several drama interviewees described the way that casting directors met their ethnic minority quotas but seemed to favour the least “ethnic-looking” actors. This reinforced comments made by other interviewees elsewhere on the choice of commentators who appeared least different, least “scary”.

▫ **Diverse contributors rule themselves out**

To agree to take part in a broadcast requires a certain level of confidence that many people from minorities may lack. They may also be wary of how they will be used and not wish to risk being party to the sort of stereotypical portrayals they are familiar with as viewers and listeners. Lack of diverse role models means that many also just don't imagine they are the sort of material producers want so they don't come forward when opportunities arise.

There was a programme where we encouraged people to write in and tell their stories. Someone had and there was this thing on the website saying *Would you be prepared to tell your story?* He had actually said *I am disabled so I probably wouldn't be appropriate...* And he hadn't left his phone number and I wanted to tell him *No, honestly*. He had told a quite interesting story, one that we would have ordinarily have followed up with a phone call. It really made me think. - **Assistant producer**

▫ **Programme-makers stick to who they know**

What we see happening is that the same type of people are heard repeatedly, the same perspectives are reinforced again and again, and the range of people who become household names...it's not a meritocracy, it's the same pool all the time. And then they just keep moving the same people around, up this golden spiral staircase of celebrity. To those who have, more shall be given. - **Writer**

It was perceived to be a general problem that producers tend to draw on the same pool of experts and presenters as each other, using people who have been validated by other programme-makers, rather than going out and looking for new voices.

In factual programmes producers are now aware of the need to find diverse contributors but they don't always meet it because of the pressures of broadcasting. If you have four hours to set up an item and find a contributor, it's very tempting just to use the person you've used before, a safe pair of hands. It's the easiest thing to do. - **Radio producer**

I think some producers feel that they are doing enough. They are not stupid people, they went to the best universities in the world, they are very literate, very liberal, very intelligent people, so they do understand that there is an issue here but at the same time they feel over-worked, they feel under a lot of pressure so they tend to just fall back on what they know which is their own culture. They like to work with the people they have always worked with and the sounds that they have always used, the voices, themes, depth of exploration, they always go for the comfort zone. - **Drama producer**

Other producers thought it was wrong for the BBC to use their only well-known disabled journalist to cover the Paralympics on television

I think it was a terrible move because I think that what you are doing again is ghettoising people ... Peter's got many, many facets and he is a genius even taking away from the fact that he is visually impaired, his ability as a broadcaster is right up there in the top two or three percent of anybody I have ever heard.

He is very, very good and the basis of his ability is the fact that he is a bloody good journalist. Now to be scrabbling around and say, *Who can we find who will fit this bill?* was a terrible move. - **Broadcast journalist**

Radio was highlighted as being the medium which provides the most opportunity to bring in diverse voices, with thousands of hours of speech annually on Radio 4 alone. Despite a few ad hoc features which often produce rich and unexpected encounters, the mainstream of its output was felt to remain very monocultural. As an illustration of this it was pointed out that, of the ninety-one regular presenters listed on its website, only one is from an ethnic minority.

▫ **Commissioning editors have to push producers for diversity of contributors**

In factual entertainment shows and formatted shows, I think it has improved, you do see some contributors in those shows. You still have to keep on top of people: you look across the range of things you have got and look at the tapes you get in. Who is in them, what they are like, age range, from what part of the country are we getting them, how many Black and Asian contributors are you seeing? You are absolutely looking for that stuff and you have to pull people up and say, *Come on ...* You will get apathy and you will get the stock response *well, we have tried and we couldn't find anyone*. Sometimes there is no way of saying you didn't try hard enough or did you check that person or this person out? - **Commissioning executive**

Over the years there have been various attempts to set up "diversity databases" of potential contributors drawn from minority groups and several currently exist for ethnic minority and disabled people. However few of the producers I spoke to had ever used them. One person who had been responsible for setting up a diversity base for a particular production area recognised they had problems:

You have to keep them up to date. If you're a busy producer and you've tried to use it once or twice and it didn't deliver, then you don't try again. - **Producer**

▫ **Attempting diversity at the casting stage is too late**

In drama, as in comedy or factual programmes, it was stressed that if you want diversity you need to think about the stories you are commissioning, not leave it to the casting stage:

I have got casting directors with a clip board - this is absolutely true - quoting to me that we should fulfil an eight percent quota and we only have two. I said this story is completely bizarre if you force that character to be non-White, it is bizarre. The token casting of a Black actor or Asian actor to fulfil quota is absurd to me. I am saying as far as drama is concerned, you should dig deeper when you are writing and when you are commissioning. - **Director**

▫ **We're British too**

Drama is drama... If you're doing a play about Britain, why shouldn't someone with a Guyanese accent be in it? Just as we would expect characters with an Irish or Scottish accent to appear. When I am in America I naturally assume people are Americans unless they tell me otherwise, skin colour or accent aren't the defining thing - **Radio producer**

At an event organised by the Cultural Diversity Network in December 2004, a British Chinese actor asked a panel of television drama commissioning editors why there had been no British Chinese actors since David Yip that could be role models for the younger generation. The response was "Yes, China is a very important emerging economy and we should be looking at that." There didn't seem to be any recognition of the need for drama which included the *British Chinese*, over here.

Every ethnic minority actor I interviewed also had their stock of auditioning tales where they were required to put on accents or behave in what the directors thought was a more "ethnic" manner even when the character was British. This was felt to be reinforcing outdated stereotypes.

I went to an audition for small part as waiter in a well-known drama series: it was a scene where one of the main actors proposes in a restaurant (written as a curry house) and the waiter looks on indifferently. I ran through the lines and was asked to do it again, *with an accent this time*. So I did it again in full Scouse. There was a look of complete horror on their faces! They said *No, a Chinese accent!* and I pointed out the script said it was in a curry house. *No, we can change that to a Chinese*. I put on my worst Chinese accent I was so fed up – that's all I ever get asked to do! - **Actor**

A British Asian actress described being asked by directors "Can you do that thing with your head?" And in a hospital drama she had to utter the immortal lines "Oh darling, I'll never be able to roll chapattis again!"

Production Teams

Producers identified the lack of diversity of experience and outlook in programme production teams as one of the main barriers to cultural diversity on the airwaves and I shall be examining this in more detail in the next two chapters. But it is worth noting here that interviewees varied widely in their opinion of how programme production teams dealt with issues of diversity. While it was agreed that there were "enlightened" individuals everywhere, there was a sense that few production teams had managed to incorporate an understanding of diversity into their general working ethos; many were still stuck at the "colour by numbers" approach described earlier.

A lot of television people do not live in the real world just because of the hours and the closed nature of filming so I think there is a lack of understanding and a sort of feeling that they have got to do it to be PC as opposed to a gut feeling. It is not to say there aren't some very good people and very well meaning people. I think most people are not bastards, there is a well meaning-ness but a failure to understand. - **Producer**

Scheduling

Programme-makers were particularly sensitive to decisions which marginalise minority voices further through scheduling. The "efnik graveyard" slots late at night were cited as examples of this. Programmes that are moved around the schedules, appearing at different times each week or disappearing in the middle of a run, also contribute to a sense of their stories not being valued by the broadcasters.

Black and Asian people are part of British society, a significant part of British society, and our stories are just as valid as anybody else's and should be on screen at the same times and in the same ways. In reality, the people that commission and the people who schedule do not think these stories are just as important.

In your own mind if you ghettoise Asian programming as being ethnic programming for an ethnic audience, then it's case of, we don't have to worry about it, let them put ethnic people in charge of it, we will put it on at 11.20 at night and no-one is going to see it but, if they want to see it that badly, let them watch it then. - **Producer**

Good scheduling decisions are essential if the programme is to have the best chance of reaching its target audience. This was recognised as being vital to the BBC2 disability magazine programme *From the Edge* which was broadcast through the nineties.

There was a time when we were absolutely bang in the heart of the schedule and that was a conscious decision made by Michael Jackson on BBC2 who said *From The Edge* had been going out fortnightly so people never knew when it was on anyway. Michael Jackson took *From The Edge* from the early afternoon, (which we always said the only people who are going to watch it are those in day centres) and moved it to 7.30. Now, fair enough, we were up against either *Eastenders* or football depending on the night but people chose to come to it and the audience certainly increased as a result of that. - **Former DPU editor**

It was thought that the responsibility of schedulers was to imagine the target audiences for such programmes and treat them with respect. This was considered to be particularly important for programmes which offer opportunities for families to share viewing experiences together. The revamped second series of *The Crouches* was clearly aimed at a family audience but was broadcast at 10.30pm. *My Life as a Child* (BBC2 9.50pm), an intelligent insight into family life from a child's perspective, was also put out at a time when young children wouldn't be expected to be in the audience. This made the series seem more voyeuristic – as if the children's views were simply there for adult entertainment.

Interviewees also commented on the tendency to have "seasons" and lump the entire year's disability or ethnic-specific output in one night or one week. Examples cited included a weekend of BBC programmes about British Pakistanis, *Pakistani, Actually* and a BBC disability season *What's Your Problem?*

I think that I got slightly hot under the collar about the disability week that they had on BBC2. I just think again that that is ghettoising things and this idea of a "showcase" for disabled people just isn't the way. - **News producer**

Broadcasters say that putting the material under a single banner and promoting it as a special event gives it a higher profile but many of the programme-makers felt it was a ghettoising impulse that should be resisted.

▫ **Who can be on prime time?**

Several interviewees felt that broadcasters are worried about alienating mainstream audiences if they show programmes that feature people from ethnic minorities in prime time. Senior figures at the BBC and Channel 4 acknowledged that the decisions are determined by

the taste of channel controllers and schedulers and *their* perception of what will draw big audiences in prime-time slots but denied that they were wary of having Black faces in prime-time programmes.

No, I think what you have to distinguish between is: is it commercial suicide to have a Black presenter or is it commercial suicide to have a multicultural programme? *Jamie's Kitchen* yesterday pulled in five and a quarter million viewers. Now, that is money that helps pay for less populist programmes.

There is no getting away from that. If you say, alright, instead of *Jamie's Kitchen* we will put out *Narinder's Kitchen* and it only gets watched by one million then, why are you going to do that if you are a commercial broadcaster? No, you put *Narinder's Kitchen* out at a time when it hasn't got to bring in as many viewers because Channel 4 is a commercial broadcaster. It has to survive on advertising; there is no handout, no licence fee. If you want to see it survive on advertising and you don't think that they are going to make all their money from populist programmes then we will be making programmes for a quarter of the budget because that is what the market will pay.

Now the BBC on the other hand, which we pay a licence fee to, quite frankly should never be making *White man's Kitchen* and should always be making *Narinder's Kitchen* and putting it out at prime-time. - **Commissioning editor**

So the decision seems to be whether the programme itself can be expected to appeal to a large audience. At the BBC, *Holby City* and previous series of *Spooks* were quoted as examples which demonstrated that they trusted viewers not to turn over if they see a non-white face on their TV screens. But, as we have seen, my interviewees felt that neither represented authentic cultural diversity. The BBC1 series *Life isn't all ha ha hee hee* was thought to be a better example and one which worked at many different levels.

One of the most satisfying things about *Life* was the way it sat convincingly both creatively and audience-wise in prime time on a mainstream channel. - **Executive Producer**

The series was essentially an entertaining popular drama that happened to be located in the world of three British Asian women and was directed in a heightened Bollywood style that is increasingly familiar to many non-Asians in Britain. But beneath the gloss it managed to weave in many different culturally specific themes and images which were striking, not least because they remain so rare on British television. As one interviewee said "when was the last time you saw two Asians kissing on prime-time television?"

Publicity

There is a widely held perception that one of the reasons we do not have more mainstream stars from ethnic minorities is that the press won't give them the column inches.

They are racist. They like to put us on the cover only if we have done something to do with sex. We've struggled really hard to get front covers. We got one cover and my opposite number said *Why did we only get one, the pictures were so lovely*. I said *It's because you're with a Paki... People won't buy it because it's got Black people on the front cover*. - **Actor**

Producers of programmes that have demonstrated the universal appeal that broadcasters seek are bemused by the lack of publicity their programmes are given.

Of course, whenever they did a presentation about the values of the BBC we were top of the list we were, *Goodness Gracious Me*, they would all trumpet us to the heavens, but when it came to actually putting money behind publicity, they weren't that interested. They did trail it, the first series, and it did well, but it was a real uphill struggle to get them to push it and I could never work it out. For example, I was keen that for series three we should be on the cover of Radio Times. This show which had won loads of awards, it was ground breaking but the publicity people said *We would never dream of asking for the cover*. And we spoke to the Radio Times and said *Would you put us on?* They said no. The bottom line is that they won't put brown faces on the covers of magazines because they don't sell, that is my personal theory. - **Producer**

Who makes it to the cover of Radio Times is a topic that several of my interviewees raised, so I was interested to read the following interview in *The Guardian* newspaper quoting the editor of the *Radio Times*, Gill Hudson:

What's great is there's still an understanding that if you haven't made the front cover of the Radio Times, you haven't quite arrived. I get petitions to get on the cover. You don't hold onto that currency unless people believe what you do is good.³⁶

In the past year there has not been a single non-White person who was deemed sufficiently "good" to warrant a *Radio Times* cover on their own. *The Guardian* interviewer probed Ms Hudson on her decision making process:

So how do you get an RT cover? Try getting to know Hudson's family. "One thing I often do when choosing covers is to stand back and say *Does my brother know who that is? Will my mother care?*"³⁷

Stars are made by this sort of decision. It is not simply a matter of people having sufficient talent; it's the value the broadcasting organisation attaches to them by promoting them. It was pointed out that Michael Palin was on two Radio Times covers in the past year for his travelogue *Himalaya* and for a single documentary about a little-known Danish artist. But Meera Syal, who attracted big audiences with a major BBC1 drama series *Life isn't all ha ha hee hee*, the comedy series *The Kumars at No.42* which transferred to BBC1 this year, and also the BBC2 drama *The secretary who stole a million* has not earned a single place on a Radio Times cover this year.

The whole process of programme-making from commissioning and production to scheduling and publicity is based on numerous judgements about which people and stories merit a place on the national stage. At present these subjective decisions are made by a largely homogenous group of gatekeepers who do not reflect the diversity of modern Britain and rarely seem to move beyond what appeals to their own personal tastes.

Does it make any difference *who* makes the programmes?

Is the ambition to achieve a diverse workforce driven simply by the need to meet equal opportunities obligations or by the belief that it will enrich the output, bringing different perspectives, different agendas, and different voices into the National Conversation? Does it really matter who makes programmes?

Value judgements are implicit

There was a consensus amongst my interviewees that personal experience and knowledge play a big part in how we make programmes but that our value judgements are rarely made explicit.

It's the way you put stories together, it is the tone, and you betray yourself in the way you tell stories. Even news is not an objective thing, it's a subjective thing. It's all subjective. What goes in on any given day, how the story is treated, and the context that's given to a story. My big bugbear is the way Africa is treated: I think just in the terms of journalism, it's treated unprofessionally. They ignore stories. The whole picture of Africa and the way Africa is developing is being missed. They use different criteria: showing pictures of naked children and mothers suckling their children – they would never show European women in Kosovo, never show that. We don't question what we see and they don't question what they show. - **News producer**

Does it take one to know one?

Should only Asian producers make programmes about Asians, or disabled producers programmes about disabled people? This is a prickly topic. There is a natural resistance to the very idea that we could draw boundaries around our imaginations and abilities to understand something unfamiliar to us. Programme-makers pride themselves on being able to parachute into a strange situation and construct their programme within a limited time frame, gathering the necessary expertise as they go. To suggest that they couldn't do so because a programme is about Black people or disabled people, is anathema to many.

My view is that it should be about how good you are and I don't really think that the ethnicity of the individual necessarily determines the quality of the programme you make...If you know about the subject or you get to know about the subject or you have a brain that is curious, and curiosity seems to be the most important quality that you need in this game. None of those things are to do with your ethnicity, so I am really quite nervous about that. -

Producer

▫ **Can anyone create authentic characters of a culture different from their own?**

It is generally agreed that there are not enough writers from minorities involved in comedy and drama, but is research and imagination enough to give any writer the possibility of creating authentic characters that are culturally different from themselves?

You don't ever want to get to the position where you think that you can't do anything unless it is written by somebody of that race or class or creed, because I think that is wrong. Just that they really know and understand or research what it is that they are doing, that's all, and that, no matter where you want to take it, the foundation is based in some truth. - **Producer**

It's about the tone and the choices you make. It's where you're coming from and where your heart beats. You can do the research but you then have to let go of objectification, then it will become something. I think you can foster that, you can develop those skills. It's also about writers developing themselves and finding out about themselves. - **Writer**

It is difficult, I think it depends on their background. I think there are some White people that could write authentic Black characters, for example. But there are some people that I suspect will never have sat down and had a meal with someone of a different race or colour, they have never been in their home or, in fact, they have never had somebody different in their home. If you have never had that experience then, forgive me, but what the hell do you know? - **Producer**

Do people from minorities bring anything different to a programme?

Some of my interviewees had not considered this question before and started to look back at their work to identify whether they could ascribe a creative or editorial decision to their cultural background or knowledge. Others were very clear of their distinctive ability to look with a "different lens" at stories and situations. They felt they brought a different sensibility, made different connections and reached the parts where other programme-makers couldn't. Most came up with examples of where they had brought something distinctive to a production because of their particular cultural knowledge and experience.

▫ **Drawing on different sources of knowledge, experience and motivation**

Several interviewees described the richness and variety of their own life experiences that they brought into their work which was different from that of their peers.

Drama director Alrick Riley described how his film making career started in the London streets where he was brought up, but also how he drew on the influences of a wide variety of directors from Martin Scorsese to Euzhan Palcy, whose films *Black Shack Alley* and *To Sleep with Anger* gave him a powerful alternative role model. At film school he felt being Black gave him an advantage because he could tell stories that no-one else was telling, in a way that no-one else was telling them.

Being black, some people will see as a disadvantage, but I see as an advantage. So, I am at Film School and I am looking at all the good films that everyone else is making and I am sure as hell not making anything like that! When you are in an institution, you can lose touch. You kind of get into a way of film-making that is actually very similar to your contemporaries at Film School so everyone starts to make similar-ish type of films. I was bringing a wider perspective.

Pam Fraser-Solomon, an award-winning radio and TV drama producer, is also aware of the value of her Guyanese heritage and experience of growing up in London as a Black woman.

People like me with experiences that can inform characterisation and storytelling, subtly changing the emphasis, can lead drama away from comfort zones. This doesn't make me better than others, but it makes my contribution equally valid. I see the world through the eyes of a Black woman, so in that sense all my intuition eventually leads back to that fact.

Having access to a different language is something that can also have creative and editorial value as director Patrick Lau recalls from his days at Granada.

I remember I could go into the Chinese district, when they sent me to a news item in the restaurant district. I could walk straight to that old lady and put her at ease in my own language of Cantonese to tell us her story.

Coronation Street actor Shobna Gulati described how she was able to bring authenticity to her role as Sunita in many ways that are not in the script, for example, slipping in and out of Gujarati.

I know a lot of girls like Sunita so I draw on that experience. We're in and out of the language. I do it spontaneously in the line run and they either like it or hate it. Usually it's fine.

Documentary makers from ethnic minorities described the different lens with which they see the world.

As outsiders within the society I think we look at that society a little bit differently to the people who were born and grew up in it and don't know any different. I am conscious that actually some of the things in my upbringing and the way that I look at the world, which I can virtually 100% guarantee that I have in common with you, I can virtually guarantee I haven't got in common with White English people in my office, because their culture is different, their cultural approach to family, their cultural approach to food, their cultural approach to consumption, whatever it is, there are these differences.

So I think I bring that part of me into it. That is not to say that a White person cannot bring exactly the same thing, it just is that in my experience, the people that make television, they are middle-class White people and they see things a little bit differently to, say, working-class White people and they certainly see things differently to the majority of ethnic minority people that I know. - **TV producer**

Obviously on race and stuff like that I might have a deeper knowledge and a more inside track on the way a certain community thinks and works, and Black and Asian contributors might be more comfortable with me if I am the first point of contact. Over and above that, I think I probably have a more social pair of eyes than a White middle-class guy. I try and put as little distance as possible between me and the contributor.

I try not to come in from an outsider's position. In one film I made on a council estate I basically walked into that household everyday through the backdoor and put the kettle on and sat around for hours with that family, just making

them feel comfortable around me. It actually involved being with them, spending time in their lives. I think that was probably my main skill as a filmmaker: the trust and making people feel comfortable enough to be open.

Q. How do you link that to your own background?

I would probably link it with the fact that is what I have had to do as a migrant. I have had to try to fit in to the society by working out what commonalities I have got with people, by being quite tenacious, of having to connect with something in any sort of environment. All those skills about looking for a place in society has indirectly got involved with my work as well.

- **Director**

A number of other people described this sense of having lower fences around themselves, creating a different chemistry with their contributors.

▫ **Fishing in different reservoirs for ideas**

Mohit Bakaya, Editor of the BBC Radio 3 arts and ideas programme *Night Waves* described the mix of talent he has on his team, each bringing something different to the programme.

I'm thinking of one person who, although she's very knowledgeable about the arts, very clever, knows her politics and her ideas, I also know that when she's reaching for ideas she has this extra reservoir of places where she'll go. She'll immediately come up with... say, Urdu poetry or theatre. So she's got that as well as – it's not *instead of* but *as well as*. I think they are a pretty amazing bunch actually, but they're all *as well as* people not *instead of*.

He says for himself he does not feel particularly integrated with the Indian community but his Indian background does give him a wider perspective at times:

I know it's important and I'm much more open to that. So if we're doing a discussion like we're doing tomorrow, doing a discussion about anger, I'm much more likely to say let's look at anger and how Buddhism speaks about anger, let's look at Hinduism and anger. It's just part of my sensibility to think about those things whereas someone else might not.

Colin Prescod, former Editor of the BBC African Caribbean Programmes unit, described how the Black production team was able to explore the question of "What does the Black African Diaspora do when it's given the right to make programmes?"

It's about different perspectives on race, class and situation in the globe. We were looking in different places for the cutting edge stuff so we knew before anyone else that John Singleton's film *Boys in the Hood* was coming because it was connected to the whole hip-hop surge which was just beginning then (early 1990s). And we knew it was opening up a whole new area. That's what happens when you're grounded in a different reality.

▫ **Looking in different places for talent**

Producer of *Goodness Gracious Me*, Anil Gupta, describes going to a *Secret Asians* comedy gig featuring Sanjeev Bhaskar and instantly relating to it, both culturally and professionally.

There was clearly this voice that was different and there was this sort of cathartic feeling in the audience of people laughing saying he is doing stuff about what we know, that nobody ever does stuff about and I thought he is great.

He is in no doubt that being half-Indian led him to both seek out that talent and to recognise its appeal when he saw it.

▫ **Asking different questions**

Pat Younge, former Editor of *Black Britain*, is amongst many of my interviewees who think the profile of the Stephen Lawrence murder was raised by Black journalists who asked different questions and kept it on the public agenda.

If you look at *Why Stephen?* the film for which we won the RTS award, the Stephen Lawrence case had been the subject of four or five documentaries, drama documentaries and we came along with a different take. Why did this one case - not the first Black kid to be stabbed - why did this one case take on all the dynamics that it did? And what was interesting, when you unpicked it, was Stephen had two parents, not one parent, he wanted to be an architect, his parents went to Church, so it was a blameless family, the sort of Black family that all White people would love to have living next to them, an aspirational, lower-middle-class family. We took a stand and looked at it through a different question.

▫ **Imagining different audiences**

This is one of the most valuable things that my interviewees described: being able to imagine someone like yourself or your family sitting at home watching or listening and really understanding how a programme will play to them.

I have always been keen to say I am not just making programmes for middle-class people who live in London, in whatever I have done. And, having worked in local radio in the North East where the listening community was very much of my background, I have always been very aware that programmes have to reverberate for them, have to matter to them as well, and so I try to make that sense of culture and transcend the kind of class barrier. - **Former producer**

Programme-makers who have grown up in a different cultural setting, often develop a “stereovision” enabling them to imagine *both* a specific audience *and* a mainstream audience. So producer Anil Gupta’s background was key to the success of *Goodness Gracious Me*:

I was conscious that I wanted to make a show that was watched by as many people as possible, I didn’t want to make a show that was exclusive so the material had to be accessible. That was one of the sort of defining mantras: you can’t write something that nobody will be able to get unless they are specifically from the Asian community.

I just used myself, I thought well I am going to do what I think is funny and I am half Indian so I am not completely steeped in Indian culture, I am as English as I am Indian, or more English than I am Indian, in fact.

▫ **Creating different role models**

Seeing people in broadcasting jobs who don't fit the norm is a subtle but important way of inspiring others who might otherwise never consider entering the industry or believe they can participate in a programme.

People don't believe who you are and when they do they just go *Oh right, it is unusual, you are the first*. I get that from Black and White people. It is great and people see that it makes a big difference - to be more visible is helpful. After the Baftas my name went round a lot and people were very impressed and it was all very good and nice, but I think that one of the barriers is that people don't see Black directors up there like they see Black musicians, Black singers and even Black actors up there. - **Director**

I was working with a contributor and speaking to him on the phone and said we would like to come and film you tomorrow and, towards the end of the conversation, he said *By the way I should probably tell you that I am partially sighted, does that matter?* It was quite entertaining because he didn't know that I was disabled and I went *Well, I have cerebral palsy does that matter?* He just opened the door and laughed at me and I laughed at him! - **Assistant Producer**

As a counterpoint to this notion of raising people's expectations of who could do responsible jobs in the media, a journalist who has a visible disability described how some people's low expectations of her were sometimes quite useful.

It is funny, I often think about this, that a part of the reason I am good at what I do is because people tell me stuff and sometimes it is possibly when it is against their better judgement to tell me. I think their guard is down quite a lot with me because basically they are under-estimating me which, in life, I find very annoying and I campaign against and I wish never happened but actually, given the nature of what I do, it is often best to let it happen.

▫ **Seeking more diversity in contributors**

I think it does make a difference having a Black person on the production team. I went to see a production company who were making a series about dinner parties and social manners and, when challenged over the fact that they only had one ethnic minority person across a whole series of six programmes, one person in the room said quite clearly to me *I don't think Black people have dinner parties*. I found that completely shocking. But what it said to me was this person doesn't have Black friends and doesn't understand about the Black community in this country. Not everyone lives on a housing estate and has a mother who is a crack whore and she's got five kids by five different men. That's a tiny part of marginalised Britain, it's not the Black community.

So it does make a huge difference if you have a Black person on the production team: because they know themselves, they know who they are, they know other people among their friends and their family who reflect their cultural values and they bring that to the production team in a way that someone who is White but has some Black friends can't, because it's just not what they know best. - **Editorial Manager, Cultural Diversity Channel 4**

▫ **A commitment to seek out unheard voices**

I am an immigrant still, my dad has only been in the country for a few years and I have a very naïve belief that you have to give disenfranchised people, a voice. - **Commissioning editor**

If you say to non-disabled programme-makers *Why do you have so few disabled people in your shows?* They say they would really like to have more *but they are just problems, aren't they?* A disabled person doesn't start from having this person on my programme who is going to be immensely difficult, they start from the point of view of having this disabled person on my show is an important thing to do because it helps us to more accurately reflect society, or that it is not a big deal because we have all overcome our own access requirements and we know we can do it for other people. Non-disabled people won't, they will think about the problems involved with doing it and won't get on with doing it. - **Former editor**

My antenna is always there. I wouldn't choose a disabled person to take part in a discussion just because they are disabled. If there was someone out there who was disabled who knew what they were talking about and could actively engage with the question at hand in a lively and interesting way, then I would obviously bat for them as much as I could. It is a way of attempting to infuse the way that the BBC goes about things with a certain openness to say, well, there are people out there who are pretty good at talking about this and don't just ghettoise disabled people in talking about disability. - **News producer**

Drama producer Pam Fraser-Solomon instinctively works in a similarly integrationist way on her radio productions.

Whatever I'm doing, classical or contemporary, I always try to integrate the cast. It's instinctive. I also try and bring in people new to the medium. It is the way I work, it's my priority. A Black girl can play an Asian character. An Asian girl *can* play the daughter of a Russian refugee and on and on. I just keep playing with sound.

▫ **A motivation to tell untold histories**

Many of my interviewees gave examples of programmes they had made which featured the stories of the lives and achievements of people from minorities that have hitherto gone unrecognised. They gave examples of how having disabled or ethnic minority programme-makers in charge brought out a richer, deeper narrative, eliciting themes that someone without a personal connection might not even consider.

I rarely get the opportunity to produce programmes covering Black history. There appears to be a powerful resistance about making programmes that tell us about Black people's role in creating the world we now live in. On the rare

occasions that I get the chance, I try to get to the heart of the trailblazer. I don't see Black historical figures as astonishing; I'm just interested in why these pioneers are invisible. I pride myself in getting my facts right, every time.

It is very easy to stop the research at the point of the "miracle" that a Black person did x or y and make up the rest. Black history is all around us and it is compelling. We just have to look for it, and then be trusted to use our experience and talent to make absorbing programmes.

Such stories are vital because they contribute to creating a shared cultural identity and play a valuable role in extending the reference points in our National Conversation.

▫ **A willingness to tackle difficult stories**

People make assumptions about what is racist and what isn't. They're so scared of getting it wrong that they don't want to touch it. We were offered a package about alleged witchcraft amongst the British African community and they didn't want to run it, whereas I could see it was a good piece of journalism and should go out. People think if you are talking about Black people it's a race story, that's the filter. It wasn't, it was about child abuse. There's a fear of tackling issues. - **News producer**

▫ **Building bridges with diverse communities**

Judgements about the authority of contributors or the validity or importance of stories and perspectives can sometimes be hard for programme-makers who don't have insider knowledge of the different cultural groups they are reporting or portraying. Several producers saw their role as bringing that expertise, for example, to unlocking the stories that Muslims also want aired but are afraid of non-Muslims getting wrong.

And I thought I can try to change this. All my life I have played that role of the middle person, the mediator, the bridge between these two different communities so I began to see there was a place there for me. - **Producer**

▫ **Building bridges for other programme-makers**

Programme-makers with insider knowledge of a culture can help to inform other programme-makers.

I think there is a level on which disability culture can be quite hermetic and difficult to navigate. I have spoken to people who say they feel like it can be quite unapproachable and that is not necessarily very healthy. Or people who have said that they know that other disabled people get upset if non-disabled people make films so they are just not going to do it - and that is not good either. So if there are friendly disabled people in an organisation who are willing to talk about what is involved and offer advice then that is really helpful. - **Assistant Producer**

Does a diverse workforce inevitably lead to more diverse output?

So, having seen that people from different backgrounds can often make a distinctive contribution, does it follow that simply having more people from minorities in the workforce will improve the diversity of the output? It seems there are many reasons why this is not the case.

▫ **Need some level of politicisation**

Physical appearance does not necessarily signify political awareness or even deep knowledge of, or interest in, a different cultural group.

There was another girl who had an Asian background but just knew nothing, openly admitted it, wasn't interested, hadn't even been to India, very anglicized, her parents were anglicized, she was a Parsi actually so it just wasn't an issue for her, which was fine and that was it. - **Producer**

Younger people coming up may be British Chinese but not necessarily politicised or thinking about representation. Of course, people should be able to make the films they want to make but the danger is that representation won't happen. - **Director**

Several people explained that it was only by being part of a bigger "critical mass" of people from their cultural group, that they gained the expertise and political awareness they needed. For example, being part of the BBC Disability Programmes Unit:

There is a tendency for non-disabled people to assume if you are disabled you are an expert in all types of disability. I know about spinal injury but I'd never claim to be an expert on visual impairment or hearing impairments. So it was useful to have the DPU experience because it gave me a wider range of contacts and understanding. - **Radio producer**

▫ **Let me be seen as a professional**

I just want to be allowed to do good work that speaks for itself. - **Producer**

People from minorities, like anyone else, simply want to get on and develop their professional skills rather than draw attention to an aspect of their personal identity which may or may not be relevant.

Actually it is very nice to be employed as a writer, and not to feel pressurised to have to invent a whole Asian storyline for them and so, in fact, what has happened in my writing career in telly is that nobody has ever, ever asked me to write anything that is Asian. - **Writer**

▫ **Fear of being typecast**

People from minorities do not want to get typecast in the programmes they make or stories they are expected to tell. Actor and writer Lennie James recently spoke in public on this:

Black writers keep getting asked to write about Black issues, those issues get used up! Need to develop the writer... I want my writing to be everything and

nothing about race. I shouldn't only be brought in through the door to write, say, a Black family but for my own ambitions and skills.³⁸

▫ **The burden of representing a community**

People from minorities may be reluctant to get caught between trying to please the broadcaster *and* representing a diverse community that is hungry for media representation. Several programme-makers who have tried to do this described having their fingers burned.

I basically wanted the Chinese community to back me and what got it hairy was that I got death threats from people claiming to be Triads which, in retrospect now, as the police said *Triads aren't known for leaving voicemails!* I thought, well that is true, but at the time when it is in the news and there are hate mails on the internet and you are getting voicemails saying they are going to kill you, you take it seriously. - **Writer**

▫ **Don't want to alienate your colleagues**

Many people described the desire to fit in with colleagues and not draw attention to any difference.

Sometimes just doing what you are doing upsets people because it brings out their own insecurities; it touches something in them that they feel they should be doing. - **Producer**

▫ **It is hard being the lone voice**

The morning news conference when there's, say, ten of us pitching ideas, I'm the only minority in the room. It takes a lot of courage to be the one who tries to challenge the status quo. I do it but it's hard because people think you're trying to show them up or that you've got your own agenda. - **News producer**

No, I don't speak out because I think there lies the road to madness! I think if you try and be this lone voice in TV soaps banging away and going *make them more real or put in some proper storylines!* you end up being seen as a trouble maker. - **Writer**

▫ **Ridiculed for promoting different voices**

I was producing a series where each week a celebrity would choose their favourite written work and there were various people in the series including Derek Jarman. He was the guest and every piece of written work that he chose for his programme was written by a gay author and this was derided within the department by the two straight women who were editor and chief producer in the department: *how preposterous, how ridiculous* that he should choose that.

I said to them: *Would you have said that if it had been Maeve Binchy and she had said I am determined to choose every piece of work by a woman writer? You would have lauded that, why is it preposterous that he has chosen work by gay writers? That is who he identifies with, that is who speaks to him.* It was seen as a nonsensical criterion on which to choose your featured pieces. - **Radio producer**

▫ **Risk being labelled as unprofessional**

People who reveal a personal cultural knowledge and use it to challenge stereotypes are in danger of being labelled as lacking objectivity. This was something that came up with numerous interviewees who had long and successful track records as programme-makers but found themselves ostracised when they tried to do stories about a minority community.

I went to Diversity and she told me well there is a big question mark about your objectivity which, as a journalist, is considered quite bad. She practically suggested that I leave the BBC for a while. I thought that was very rich coming from someone whose job it was to recruit talent, ethnic talent. And I also felt disappointed that after so many years of training me now you are saying *Go away*. - **Documentary producer**

Yes, I have had a few of those discussions where they have challenged my impartiality but I sort of felt that they were being led into territory that they didn't know, therefore they were scared to let me go down there, they didn't know whether they could trust me to do it. I think it is people trying to second guess what someone higher up might think, it is not even what they think. - **Independent radio producer**

They just thought I was going to turn this into a soapbox or whatever whereas I explained that I am a professional producer and I will ensure a balance. - **Radio producer**

▫ **You need power**

I don't have the influence or the power. I have the ideas. Today I have a stack of ideas; all I have been doing all week is trying to sell them. - **Documentary producer**

To get any idea made requires all sorts of skills in packaging and pitching but you also need to have the clout to persuade other people to take your idea forward. Often this means identifying who is willing and able to do so. Several people from minorities who were brimming with ideas described the difficulty of finding a BBC producer or an independent company to champion their idea with commissioners. Even people within the BBC find it difficult to get their ideas heard by the people who have the power to commission.

Unfortunately that is the way it works. You don't go and see the controller of the channel. Basically the researcher or whoever should be coming to somebody who has the ability to sell it. Unfortunately we don't have enough people with a diverse background, I don't just mean race here, I mean class as well, as I think that has a huge impact. I don't think you have enough diverse people to be able to do that and that is a bigger problem that will take time. - **Commissioning editor**

A tip for other producers was to establish a successful track record doing programmes that were not "minority" as a way of first gaining the respect of the controller or commissioner.

I think the way to get accepted on being able to get multicultural programmes commissioned is if you have done other stuff as well so when you do suggest that, you have the track record of being a film-maker and then they think, *well he must be okay*. - **Commissioning editor**

A more worrying example of the lack of power was given by several interviewees who described instances of people from minorities being put on a project to give it credibility, but where they did not have editorial power to influence the way the programme was shaped.

Having initially rejected all disabled candidates for the production which was about disability, this producer had been made to realise that it would be politically unacceptable not to have any disabled people on her team, so she appointed a researcher. I think this is often what happens: the most lowly role goes to a disabled person so they can say *we had a disabled person* but they are not too powerful to dictate anything. - **Producer**

▫ **Working practices can militate against diversity**

Ethnic minority drama writers have described how difficult it is to bring any cultural knowledge into the scripts for soaps.

Every single story beat was prescribed by the producers, by the storyline people, so even when they said *Can you do something here where you show Phil looking worried or something?* You put something in and they say *No, we have decided we want to take that out, we are going to do Grant looking worried*, so you put that in and they go *No, we have changed our mind and we decided we are not going to have Phil or Grant in this episode at all.*

It is like you are constantly jumping through hoops and everyone is so paranoid about losing their job that they just do whatever, so by the end of it you think, hold on, where am I in this script? And quite often the script editors are rewriting your lines, you watch it on the telly and you think *God! I never wrote that, where has that scene come from?* So it is very much you have to be able to stand back and not see it as your own. It is a soap, that is how it works, it is a long running series which has to make sense. They have got so many different writers with so many different styles and everyone has to log into the *Eastenders* style. - **Writer**

Television drama directors also described being hired too late in a project to be able to influence the casting or the script so, even when they spotted problems with portrayal, they were powerless to do much about them.

News journalists described how the style in which morning conferences were conducted could militate against different voices speaking out.

There's a dynamic of itself in those morning meetings: aggressive editors demanding *So what's going to be the lead?* If someone comes up with an idea, no-one else contradicts it because they are intimidated. Other editors just come in and tell you what's on the running order. No discussion. So there's a whole lot of reasons why you wouldn't want to rock the boat too often. - **News producer**

▫ **Cultural knowledge is not valued**

When I wrote for *All About Me* I was constantly coming up with ideas and storyline suggestions to do with this whole marriage between a White man and Asian woman and what I found shocking is that whilst the production company and the script editors were very, very supportive and very interested in that world, the BBC execs who then came in would sabotage it. They would say: *we are not interested in this character, we don't care what he thinks about his parents, we just want to know about Jasper Carrott and his neighbours*. His silly racist neighbours! I think a lot of really good scripts get messed up by executives coming in and not really knowing what they are doing. - **Writer**

Diversity should not be the responsibility of minority programme-makers alone

There is clearly a value in having a diverse workforce but it was stressed that people from minorities should not be seen as the only people responsible for bringing new voices and new perspectives into the National Conversation. All programme-makers should be encouraged to acquiring some cultural knowledge of the different groups that make up our society so they are equipped to bring this into their programmes.

The BBC needs more Black and Asian producers but you can't absolve everybody else, you can't absolve White producers for not catering to a whole audience or not exploring the issues. - **Producer**

Why is there not more diversity in the people making programmes?

If I go to any development meeting, any brainstorming session in the BBC and look around, there's a good chance I will be the only Black person in the room. You go to any editorial board meetings and it's the same. - **Head of BBC Diversity**

It is estimated that over two thirds of original television and network radio output is made in London, one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world where 38% of the general workforce is from an ethnic minority,³⁹ yet the people who make programmes still don't reflect that reality at all. Outside of London the diversity of the broadcasting workforce is even poorer. I asked my interviewees why it has been such a struggle to get a more diverse mix of people into programme-making, particularly into senior creative and editorial roles.

Getting In

▫ Need to be au fait with British culture

To take part in the National Conversation through broadcasting you need to understand its prevailing cultural references in order to be allowed to participate at all.

Television is probably one of the most culturally determined institutions to work in. You really do have to understand the culture of the nation, you can't be a foreigner and work in television, you need to know the British people. If you have just come off a boat from Algeria you are not going to really know that are you? - **Independent producer**

It's not just foreigners; it's also difficult for people from different class and cultural backgrounds who may have different knowledge and social values:

I was made to feel really stupid for not knowing who Elgar was.... I could have told them the name of every single Top Ten band since 1970 but I didn't know the classical stuff, what the director wanted for his film. - **Researcher**

I think anyone from an orthodox religious background would feel very out of place. I know I've always felt a bit buttoned up: the way people swear and talk about sex and whatnot, it makes me feel quite uncomfortable. That's why I think I ended up doing children's programmes. - **Assistant producer**

There was a strong smoking and drinking culture which was not what I'm used to. You were also expected to be loud and extrovert and confident with selling ideas which I didn't feel I could be. The culture of the place was extrovert, loud; I guess people can argue that's the way media is – you needed a certain degree of arrogance to get on. Just wasn't me. - **Former researcher**

▫ **Lack of role models**

A few people mentioned the reluctance of some ethnic minority communities to encourage their children to enter broadcasting as it was seen to lack job security or a clear career path; but they also linked this to the lack of successful role models.

Sometimes I go to talk to young people in schools or colleges or drama clubs and it is such a different world out there, the media world has absolutely zero, no contact with it on any sort of real practical level at all. It is very hard, it feels like a barrier that you almost build for yourself so you don't actually get started because it is just so far away. I would like young people to have an attitude to film and television that they have to music. - **Director**

We still haven't understood what it will take to encourage more Black and Asian people to apply to radio, particularly non-news radio. It's not seen as a destination for Black and Asian people. It's a straightforward question: in television they see George Alagiah and Krishnan Guru Murthy or any of these people and think *ah, someone's made it there, I could do that, there's a role for me there*. On radio they don't hear themselves very often, so they don't think of it as a place where they can end up. - **Editor**

I think really that there is something about the BBC which only invites or encourages a certain type of person to have (a) any interest in joining it or (b) and, perhaps most importantly, any belief that they *could* join it. I think it is not too strong to say that they would not see it as their place to think about working for the BBC. - **Former producer**

Hopefully the example *Goodness Gracious Me* is there now, I think that is what wasn't there before. If you were Asian in Britain you didn't think *I will go into TV comedy*, the brown people who were in TV comedy historically weren't exactly the sort of role models that second and third generation British Asians were going to aspire to be doing, so hopefully for people within the Asian community we have provided some kind of sense that you can do this if you want to. - **Producer**

▫ **"The talent is simply not there"**

Working in broadcasting is competitive, a lot of people would like to work in the industry and can't get jobs - are there simply not enough talented people from minorities to be able to compete effectively?

Rubbish. For a start, don't believe that every White person in this building is massively talented, they are not but they get more leeway because they exist within a social system and a society where they get more of a break. - **Producer**

Several people said the industry didn't do enough to get out and look for talent or develop the talent that was already under its nose. Evidence of untapped talent that was also cited included the independent film scene where the work of Black, Chinese and disabled film-makers is regularly showcased. Others suggested that the perception that there was a lack of talent amongst minority communities was out of date and needed to be revised.

▫ **Entry routes to broadcasting jobs are not clear**

So you decide you want to work in the industry, how do you get in?

First you need to work out what you want to do and then you have to work out how the people in those jobs now got there. You then realise that there's actually very few direct routes to any job. You have to know the system, you have to be hungry, and you have to be incredibly lucky. - **Producer**

Those that do apply, we put ridiculous barriers in front of them in terms of what we expect their experience to have been. They face this chicken and egg thing: they've got to get in to get the experience but we don't take a risk. We have these very arcane boards, which is very intimidating if you haven't been to Oxbridge and are used to that kind of interviewing. It can be very rigid at times and doesn't allow us to get people in, who, frankly, sometimes may not be quite right yet but have the potential. - **Editor**

It is also a well-recognised but untackled problem that the most frequent entry route is to work as an unpaid or lowly paid "runner" for a year or more with a production company. This is only likely to be possible for people who have the support of wealthy parents. A lot of the old entry routes, which may have enabled diverse people to come into the industry, no longer exist.

The kinds of backgrounds from which people came used to be much wider and the age difference was greater too. For example I started at twenty nine, well, that is almost unheard of now. Invariably now people start straight out of post-grad journalism courses. - **BBC Local Radio manager**

▫ **Little opportunity to bring in new people**

Several people identified the problem posed by low staff turnover in many areas of the BBC, something which has been accentuated by the current round of job cuts and is likely to continue in the foreseeable future.

There's been a definite restriction in external recruitment. We now circulate the people we have. So if you have a largely White workforce, you're just going to be moving them round. We're just reshuffling the BBC pack. That's a key issue. - **Editor**

▫ **Jobs not advertised**

One of the problems clearly is that very few jobs are actually advertised in this industry and it is a word of mouth industry. And therefore unless you are part of that circle you are never going to get selected really and the same system operates in the independent sector. If you take most average companies only about ten percent of their workforce is actually on fixed long-term contracts, practically everyone else is on short term contracts so how do you recruit those people? Those jobs are not going to be in *The Guardian* or in the back of *Broadcast*, they are done through word of mouth recruitment, and the trouble with that is that if you ask most White people to get out their mobile phones and flick through them, the thing that they will discover is that actually all their friends on their mobiles and their acquaintances and their contacts are all White so you have got this structural bias.

Why is there not more diversity in the people making programmes?

I think that is what Macpherson⁴⁰ meant by institutional racism, you have structural problems in the industry which means that certain people find it hard to break through. - **Independent producer**

This informal approach to recruitment was noted by many people as a major barrier to diversity. One person who had worked in Human Resources for several major BBC production departments described the inconsistency in their approaches. While some departments had genuinely attempted to introduce modern recruitment and assessment methods she felt others behaved as if they were a law unto themselves:

It was a shocking eye-opener to see this large BBC department's working practices: there was very little transparency in the way it recruited. A lot of people were taken on because they were friends or had previously worked with someone rather than through advertised jobs. The whole dinner party circuit as a way of getting jobs and influence was rife and this discriminated against White working class as much as those who were from minorities. - **Human Resources manager**

▫ **Disabled people are not on a level playing field when looking for work**

I think it is much harder to start and I don't know how you would start in an indie (independent production company), entry level jobs not knowing what your access needs were. - **Assistant producer**

Disabled people who need equipment or access workers to enable them to carry out their roles have an additional hurdle to overcome. The Access to Work scheme run by the Department for Work and Pensions provides for equipment and/ or personal assistants to those it deems eligible. Disabled interviewees highlighted a number of difficulties with the scheme. The onus is on the employee to apply each time they start a new job and to prove their need. In a business where short term contracts are the norm (particularly for junior roles) this makes life very difficult for disabled people.

For each disabled person their access needs will be different and it may take some time to work those out in actually doing the job. Once an application has been made for Access to Work support it may take time to approve the funding and the actual money may not come through for several months. This can make it difficult to approach a potential employer, particularly a small independent company for whom the delay in payments could cause serious cash flow problems.

I knew that when I went to the indies I would have to apply for it again and when you are in a situation in face to face interviews or trying to pitch, it doesn't look good. I am of a school that thinks you really have to talk about access needs at the beginning, and if that means that they are going to be prejudiced and not give you the job then actually, I would rather know that at interview rather than half way through production.

Also because it does impact on how I work, I would pitch it to them that the result would be the same, but I sometimes work with an access worker - and answer any questions they have about that. But they are relying on you to explain it and what they want you to say is *oh, it is no problem*. It needs to be easy for them. - **Assistant producer**

The BBC has an Access Unit to support disabled programme-makers but the same time-consuming discussions have to take place about their access needs for every new job and the cost to the department in which they will be working. While the Unit will provide emergency cover for sickness and holidays, those needing personal assistants are expected to recruit their own and be responsible for doing the administration such as setting terms and conditions, managing their payroll, tax and national insurance. This is all in addition to simply doing their own jobs.

▫ **Special entry schemes don't always work**

There is often an assumption that if you get more people from minorities into the industry, then they can be left to sink or swim on their own merits. Unfortunately this leads to many people sinking without trace. One of my interviewees was thrilled to win a place on the BBC Talent Scheme and felt it was "a real chance to have a stab at a traditionally ignored profession in my culture". She went on the BBC induction course which ended with a rousing "Welcome to the BBC" which she said made her feel she would die for the BBC! But once she started her placement it seemed they didn't really know what to do with her.

I was introduced as having won a competition which sounded like I'd entered a caption competition!! It was clear from day one that there had been little planning with the placement. No clear direction, teams I joined throughout the placement had no idea about me starting; there were very poor communications and it was all very disheartening. - **BBC Talent scheme winner**

She feels that the whole exercise was largely to make the BBC look good – a box could be ticked but that it hadn't really been thought through. She left the BBC and the broadcasting industry at the end of the scheme. A disabled producer felt this cynicism also pervaded a lot of the schemes targeting disabled people.

They just want to be able to say we have disabled people in the BBC. Result is some useless people come in, people who have demonstrated no talent, who are wrong for the media and can't hack it. Once they're in, they are scared of getting rid of them so some survive for years. This prejudices producers against disabled staff and contaminates the rest of the organisation's views of disabled people. - **Producer**

What often happens is that we invest a lot of money in those kinds of schemes but there isn't a job at the end so as far as all the host departments are concerned, great, we have a free body, the money is coming from somewhere else, fantastic, but if there is no job at the end of it, what is the point? - **BBC Manager**

Many of my interviewees were very ambivalent about any sort of "positive action" initiatives because they were seen to create prejudices.

The problem is that you get that automatic assumption that you're not really up to the grade so it can be a handicap for the person on the scheme. I never applied for them and it took me years to get in to the BBC but for many years whenever I met someone from another department, the first thing people would say to me was *Are you a trainee?* Now that's shorthand for: *Have you come in on one of these schemes? You're not really worth it. You've just come in because you got in through the back door.* - **News producer**

Why is there not more diversity in the people making programmes?

Getting Stuck

There were many problems cited, many of which apply to the industry generally.

▫ Career development is hampered by confusing career ladders

Now I feel as if I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place. I'm experienced as a producer and film-maker, quite proficient in using a camera and that's the way broadcasting has gone but I don't seem to get the work perhaps because I haven't done the researcher, assistant producer route. - **Director**

Several people in the BBC also described becoming stuck within a programme genre and finding it difficult to move between different areas of the BBC.

I think it is a problem of television anyway but you get quite pigeon-holed as to the type of television you make quite early on in your career. When I was in current affairs it was really difficult to get out of current affairs and into documentaries. When I was in popular documentary, it was impossible to get the kind of quality vehicle doc that wasn't a docu-soap, so sometimes your first breaks end up being possibly your last choice in what you develop as a career. - **Documentary producer**

▫ People get stuck on the training slopes

Several directors I spoke to described the problem of getting the right sort of experience to showcase their talent. There have long been programmes such as *The Bill* which are seen as training grounds for new TV drama directors; currently it's also the BBC daytime show *Doctors*. But having *Doctors* on your CV won't get you the opportunities to direct full-length dramas.

People kept saying *we like your work but we're looking for something a bit more authored*, and you hear this again and again and again. If I'm directing a television medical drama *Holby City* or *Doctors*, there's no room to be an auteur. - **Director**

I feel stuck really. I would like to be doing film, independent film or interesting single dramas or two-parters or things like that where my voice matters and is listened to and trusted. To feel that my creative abilities are what somebody wants, I think that would be fantastic. - **Director**

▫ Lack of honesty in performance management

It is another recognised but un-tackled problem that the management of people in the broadcasting industry is very poor so people who get stuck don't always know why.

People don't give authentic feedback because we're in a really polite environment where you never know who you are going to work with one day, and they're scared of criticising poor performance for fear of being hauled up before a tribunal, so they just work around the issue. There are useless people who survive for years because no-one has been prepared to confront the problems. - **BBC Senior manager**

Why is there not more diversity in the people making programmes?

Getting Out

Despite all the schemes and initiatives to bring more ethnic minority and disabled people into the industry over the past twenty-five years, there are few who have stayed and risen through the ranks.

There have been a lot of people who've come into the media, had a bad experience and gone out again; which is why I laugh when people talk about trying to find the next generation because there are people my age and older who have been in, and would now be senior management, but who have completely left the industry in disgust at the way they have been treated. - **TV producer**

As an industry, it was felt that broadcasting is very profligate with its talent, taking little interest in mentoring or staff development. Several of my interviewees described leaving the BBC because they didn't feel valued.

I was quite successful for my background. Why did I leave? Maybe you leave because actually you have to fly the nest sometimes, and maybe the industry environment means that you have to leave sometimes as well because you are not happy in what you have been asked to do or you feel that you have been passed over, there are all sorts of reasons. - **Independent TV producer**

Nobody asked me, I walked out the door and I didn't get a pat on the back, I didn't get anything, I got a cheque and I quietly left the building and that was it. I just thought well this place doesn't appreciate me that much. I had become quite disenchanted by them in terms of how I had six years of experience, I had worked myself from researcher to director to producer in that time, I had had hundreds spent on my training and was probably one of the only Asian women directors in the department. - **TV producer**

Since leaving the BBC I just wouldn't go back as a full time member of staff. The reason I left was the censorship and the playing safe and I was denied many opportunities because of being gay. - **Independent TV and radio producer**

I do have anecdotal evidence that a lot of disabled people leave the BBC. I know five who have left in the last six months because they weren't getting good opportunities. Now, it may be that there were genuine reasons why, say, they weren't up to the job but it does seem more than a coincidence. - **Radio producer**

I was also struck by how many of my interviewees from minorities who worked in the BBC were considering leaving. Sometimes it was to pursue other career opportunities but many said that the fact they didn't fit or feel valued had played a part in their decision. A Human Resources manager confirmed that there was a recognised problem retaining people from minorities.

Amongst applicants there was a very diverse mix but amongst those who got in, very few became senior – either they left of their own volition or didn't get the senior jobs when they applied. I'm aware that minorities don't like working for the BBC and when they leave don't tend to come back; it's not seen as a place where they fit.

▫ **Ethical dilemmas**

A lot of programme-makers will face ethically-challenging decisions in the course of their careers, but I wondered whether people who have had a religious upbringing might be more uncomfortable in some of the situations that programme-making throws up. This was an issue that arose with several of my Asian interviewees.

I had a lot of ethical dilemmas. I am quite good with people, with contributors, and I can get people to open up and that's me as a human being connecting with them and I realised in the commercial sector that actually as a film-maker you are probably more manipulative than you are in the BBC. You manipulate your agenda for the film all the time but actually to have an institution like Channel 4 or somebody going: *You have to sex this up a bit*, it sits very uncomfortably with me when I am actually going to the contributors: *Trust me, let's talk openly*. I have had quite a moral upbringing, my whole kind of way of living, of getting through life is staying on the side of being a good person, it is a bit of a slippery slope if you don't toe that line, and I found myself going too near that line, saying that I haven't told this contributor that his girlfriend is having an affair and I am filming his girlfriend having an affair and he doesn't know and it is going to go out on national television. It was just too much. I just felt *yuck*. I got the film made and it was a good film but I had a really horrible time making it. - **TV producer**

This documentary maker left the industry feeling such programmes were not worth the moral compromises required.

▫ **Track record not valued**

I won two C.R.E. (Commission for Racial Equality) awards. I had a wealth of cultural contacts. Lots of other drama producers rang me for advice. I felt very valued: people were confident in me. Then the commissioning system changed and I stopped getting work.

Even given my reputation and track record I would have to explain my ideas and would be lucky to get anything. - **Radio drama producer**

▫ **Minorities may prefer the indie world**

You don't feel comfortable inside an organisation like the BBC. It is overwhelmingly heterosexual and White. - **Independent producer**

Several former BBC people described the liberation of joining the independent sector.

I fitted better. There were more Asian and Black faces in the companies that I visited, maybe not a lot more. It was liberating and it was just a little bit more real world, it was less cocooned, less institutionalised, it was a bit more funky, it felt edgier I suppose. - **Former TV producer**

The independent sector has an even poorer track record in workforce diversity than the BBC or Channel 4 but, where production companies are led by people from ethnic minorities, there is often a greater mix of people in the workforce.

There is a greater chance if you walked into this building of meeting diverse people, and, by the way, I don't just mean racially diverse, I would say we probably have the highest concentration of gay people for any company. We have got somebody who is on a Channel 4 disabled scheme who is coming here; we have got somebody on the diversity scheme from Channel 4's trainee researcher scheme. I try and make a big effort because I am now at a point where I actually can: I am the Director of the company and I have got power to influence who we hire. - **Independent producer**

Getting On

The number of people from minorities in senior management and in senior creative and editorial roles remains tiny. This is a problem that the broadcasters acknowledge they have been slow to tackle.

A greater concern is that the "significant number of diverse people" who are employed at the BBC are not reaching positions where they can influence decisions. "We've been doing diversity here for 20 years and we should have more to show in terms of senior managers".⁴¹ - **Head of BBC Diversity**

Several people described hitting the bottom rungs of the management ladder as the point at which they decided to leave.

It was the first time in my life actually where I confronted this whole issue that in order to get on in broadcasting it required much more than talent, that if I made brilliant shows, they would get noticed. It took me so far, after that I think it is about playing a political game. I was suddenly being invited to lots of corporate organisational meetings and I didn't really know how to play them and I felt kind of quite at sea. When I reached that lowest rung in the BBC management structure I really felt then that I was quite isolated. - **Independent producer**

▫ Not in the Executive Club

People who have experience of the senior echelons of the BBC were particularly critical of this sense of being excluded from a club.

I think there are issues of class which you can't ignore. Race is sometimes important but so is class. I am from an immigrant background, dad is classic working class, worked in a factory, my mum worked in the rag trade, and for me reaching the lower rungs of the BBC management structure meant suddenly meeting a whole bunch of people that felt like they were from a different background really. It is a whole group of people that I don't feel that I am part of. It is now nothing to do with talent so what I am describing to you is the nuances of that culture which allows people to get on really to the next stage and I am not part of that. - **Independent producer**

▫ **Outside the loop**

Senior people in the industry who are from ethnic minorities or who are disabled described similar experiences of being “outside the loop”.

It is the dinner party circuit, it's the networking thing. They went to similar schools, they have dinner with each other and that sort of thing and I don't know how many Black people have dinner with White managers and colleagues here. This is my honest opinion. I don't think they do. So if you are not in that network you are unlikely to be pulled up with somebody – you won't get the same sort of mentoring or patronage, you are going to hit the glass ceiling probably a lot quicker than a lot of people do and then you leave ...and a lot of people that I know have left the BBC because of that. - **Senior producer**

In a sense it seems to me that to get on in this business it is not just a question of working with people that we know, you have to be friends. To get on you have to be friends with the White people otherwise when you get into the office you are not going to be in the line of vision for the promotion, for that job which is going to make your name or anything like that, they will work with their friends first, that is my perception. - **TV producer**

There are lots of people who say it's who you know, not what you know, and even getting on to work on one of these other shows, if I had a friend that was on one of the bigger shows it would probably be much easier to get onto something. I know some people go for drinks and go networking but I think it is by working with people that you form relationships and theoretically carry on and they take you with them, but I have had no experience of that so far. - **Director**

I couldn't do that. I had the skill to make the films and be with ordinary people, I didn't have the skills to work the system. - **Former TV producer**

I think it is interesting that I have never been very good at playing that BBC game. I am always deeply uncomfortable at BBC social functions and that is partly to do with the fact that I am a disabled person. I am mentally confident as a programme-maker, I was mentally confident in my own ability but I am no good at the chat that goes with that. I just kind of tell it as it is and that is to do with my disability, and it is to do with my cultural background which doesn't chime in with the BBC. - **Former editor**

▫ **Playing the corporate game**

There are particular ways of getting on in institutions, you have to “give good meetings” at the BBC. What that means is you have to make perceptive comments about stuff you don't know anything about, you have to shoot from the hip in a corporate sense. Out in the independent sector you don't play that game because actually commissioning editors don't want to know that sort of stuff, but inside a corporation that is how you get on. - **Independent producer**

▫ **Top jobs go to those who have been groomed**

If you don't have someone to drag you up with them then you are at a disadvantage often because that's the way the media works. – **Senior BBC producer**

If you look at how senior people have got to senior jobs it is very rarely the result of open competition, it is always a result of having a hand on your shoulder and that means you need somebody who can put their hand on your shoulder, means you need a mentor, a more senior figure. -**Independent TV producer**

I don't really apply for those sorts of jobs because I think somebody has been groomed for those jobs and it certainly ain't me so there is probably no point in doing it. I don't think I would get it and I don't think it is even worth thinking about it. – **Independent TV producer**

There is a lot of nepotism going on, you recruit your mates. When you have seen that going on at a very senior level, what is the encouragement for us to operate an open recruitment policy when you know that people at very senior level don't? People miraculously appear in a certain job and you know how these appointments are made and you think that is just terrible. - **BBC Senior manager**

The new Head of BBC Diversity expressed her bemusement at the lack of people development in the broadcasting industry.

We have employment targets for people from ethnic minorities, but no strategy to keep talent, or develop the talent, or help the talent develop itself. Broadcasting is the only industry in the free world which treats its people like that! So if you say to managers the problem is that the BBC isn't developing its ethnic minority talent, they will just nod sympathetically and agree with you that it's a problem and then they will deliver the killer blow. They say *But we don't develop anyone.*

Are specialist units the answer?

Many of the people from minorities working in broadcasting today started their careers in specialist units at the BBC, such as the Asian Programme Unit, the African Caribbean Unit and the Disability Programmes Unit (DPU). They all had stormy histories, management support for them waxed and waned and two were disbanded amidst much acrimony. Today only the Asian Programme Unit survives.

As already noted, the pendulum has mostly swung away from targeted programmes, commissioning and production units, now it's all about "mainstreaming". But many of the producers I spoke to felt that African-Caribbean and disabled people have found it harder to get in to the industry since those units were disbanded.

Most of the disabled people who have worked in television or who are working in television are there because of the DPU, no question that that is the case. There were people who simply would not have been entertained by people in other areas of the BBC. - **Former editor**

Why is there not more diversity in the people making programmes?

There was widespread acknowledgment that specialist units suffered a number of problems.

They are very good for recruiting people, pretty good way for developing people in the early stages of their career, not taken seriously by broadcasting in general, not fantastically well-budgeted and, for a lot of the staff, it becomes a cul-de-sac which they can't get out of. - **BBC Manager**

Many of the people who worked in the Units were also quite ambivalent about them. I really didn't want to go to do ethnic stuff, I thought I don't want to get pigeon-holed here, don't really feel that the quality of programme making is very good here. I found it provincial, I found the thinking provincial, found the ideas very basic. I thought I am new, and part of the new wave; I don't need you, thank you very much, to negotiate my way in, and I don't need to be surrounded by Asians to feel comfortable. - **Producer**

But even those who expressed such sentiments agreed the Units had provided a valuable stepping stone.

I did buy into the fact that the DPU did help, it did facilitate people to at least experience the way that the BBC works. There were no guarantees of jobs, there was just a guarantee that if you were willing to participate and get stuck in then you would learn something to your advantage but that is life, in a way. What I did like about it was that there was a sort of hothouse atmosphere, you learnt things very quickly and the quicker you picked up on things the more you got done and the quicker you got on really. - **News producer**

In the case of the DPU one of its major advantages was that it offered a complete package to ensure a disabled person's access needs were met with the minimum of hassle.

They provided facilitators, organised any equipment and funding that you needed, liaised with the Employment Service and the Access to Work scheme. So although I was involved, they did all the admin which made my life a lot easier. It meant I could focus on the job, learning the skills rather than having to worry about disability-related things. - **Producer**

After six months on the Unit's own output, DPU trainees were sent out on attachments to other BBC departments but with the continued availability of access support such as facilitators. The DPU was able to shoulder the burden related to access needs for both the programme department and the trainee concerned. This was recognised as putting the trainee on a level playing field with non-disabled people.

If someone is in London that you need to interview then you can't wait until tomorrow, it is a rapid response, especially in the area which I am in which is news. So that access support gave me confidence that I was in control of my life and that is a real boon because it gives you the confidence to focus on learning the craft, knowing the skills and actually producing good work. - **News producer**

Having the peer support of other disabled people in the Unit was also highly valued:

It is really important actually because it works both ways. I was able to go to other disabled people for advice like going out filming with someone and just seeing how she worked and having ideas about how I might work. No one who is not disabled is going to tell me. That is not because they are evil or bigoted; it is just because they don't know. That was useful and as I had been there longer and was more experienced I started getting more enquiries from newer people, and it was just obviously useful for them to talk to me as well. -

Assistant producer

There are several disabled people from the DPU working successfully in TV and radio now. Many others left when the DPU disbanded. The concern is that, without the DPU, fewer disabled people are now coming into the industry and those that do are likely to be people with less marked physical disability, as the current arrangements do not provide the same support and resources that were so valued by the DPU trainees.

It lacks an infrastructural approach, what the DPU gave it – and this is not a plea for a ghetto into which disabled people can go and stay because the DPU was never like that. The DPU was a conduit, a point of entry. - **Former editor**

The main replacement for the DPU has been the *Extend* scheme and this was heavily criticised by the people I interviewed, including Human Resources personnel and producers who had sat on the *Extend* interview panels.

The *Extend* scheme for disabled work placements is only for three months. It's not very effective. No one understood how to manage access requirements for interviews, never mind actual placements. It's too short to be much use. I feel that it's all about ticking boxes, being able to say we've had so many disabled people working here rather than meaningful employment opportunities. -

Human Resources manager

Some of the most successful people from minorities in broadcasting acknowledge they would not even have joined the industry if it had not been for the specialist units, and several felt it was time to consider whether they should be reintroduced - but to apply the learning from previous experience and not allow them to become ghettos.

I would argue that we do need them because we haven't reached the point in society where you can let go without that kind of intervention. Channel 4 has tried it (dropped its multicultural commissioning unit) but look at what's happened, nobody is commissioning it, they didn't hit their target. So I would say that we need those units because they foster talent and the biggest breakthroughs in the industry have occurred when there has been a critical mass of Asian and Black people. - **Independent TV producer**

If you are going to do it, don't put the Unit in Pebble Mill, put it in one of the big departments and you fund it like a proper department and you see it as an entry thing and you pride yourself on people leaving it, you pride yourself after three years you probably had an almost wash through of staff and they may have gone to ITV or Channel 4, the indie sector, but our job is to train the industry. - **BBC Manager**

Is there institutional racism in the broadcasting industry?

I think people are obstructed and I have seen it happen. Only recently have I started to understand the term institutional racism. I had never really thought about it. When Macpherson raised it I thought this is just bollocks really, what does it mean? It is such a nebulous thing. Now I do understand what it means, I think there is a cultural bias in the way institutions operate that actually makes it difficult for certain people to progress. - **Former BBC Producer**

Most people associate racism with name-calling and violence. That definitely does not appear to be an issue for ethnic minority people working in the broadcasting industry. None of my interviewees mentioned any such incidents in their careers and it was generally not seen as a problem. However, virtually all of them described experiences where they felt they had been treated unequally, made to feel invisible or out of place. Most were reluctant to talk about these experiences for fear of being seen as “chippy”. A common reaction was:

This is a small industry and you can't let people's prejudices get to you because, unless it is really blatant, you don't really know what the politics are, what's going on and so you just have to log it and move on. - **Director**

Is it 'cos I is Black?

One of the difficulties in talking to programme-makers from minorities about their experiences is how to disentangle those aspects which affect all people in the industry and those which specifically arise from some form of discrimination or, as comedian Ali G famously put it, “Is it 'cos I is Black?”. In many cases it is almost impossible to unpick what is going on. If you don't get the job or get promoted or get your ideas made, it is unlikely that you will ever be able to establish it was because of prejudice. Yet this should not be a reason for not looking closely at the experiences of programme-makers from minority groups. If we want to understand why there is still so little diversity in the output or in the workforce, we have to examine the working practices that may be disproportionately affecting those people who are already under-represented. In looking at the question of institutional racism I was also interested to explore any parallels between the experiences of people from ethnic minorities with others such as gay and disabled people.

▫ Pressure to conform

I think that British society would like nothing better than to turn us all into a bunch of brown and black-skinned English people where our cultural background and identity was kind of forgotten, that we just took on all the values and become like English people, like White people but with different coloured skin and then we could all be the same. - **Producer**

Several people described the lengths to which they had gone to fit the perceived norms of the industry.

It took me about four or five attempts over a year and a half with different boards. A number of times I came close, I was called “also suitable”, you know, old formal boards and a degree world but not quite me, and I went through a very extensive period of self analysis, I changed my glasses, the clothes, I read all the books about psychology of attending interviews and how one comes across and I kind of tried to understand the psyche of it. I was determined to crack it and it worked, I guess. - **Producer**

My accent belies my background basically, something I have had to pick up in order, I felt, to get on really and I am part of a generation that didn't think regional accents were cool so I changed mine. I did a Joan Bakewell, went into the loo and completely changed my accent to make it more London. - **Former BBC Producer**

Others described feeling tolerated as long as they were seen to be the same.

There's this lovely colour blind thing which comes in *Oh you're just one of us.* - **Editor**

You're just like us. It's a double-edged sword: it places the onus on you to challenge them with your difference. That's why people say they leave their ethnicity on the threshold when they come to work: you're not really permitted to be fully yourself. - **TV producer**

I know that basically the way to get on is to fit in, don't rock the boat, fit in. - **Radio producer**

The BBC was seen to be particularly limited in its acceptance of people who didn't conform, both on air and in the workplace.

You will be allowed onto the airwaves if you are behaving as a White person, if you are speaking in RP (Received Pronunciation) and if you are behaving in the way that Angela Rippon would behave, then you have a chance to get on the airwaves. When do we ever hear some of the thousands of intelligent, capable Asian women who don't speak with RP, when do we hear them on our airwaves, radio or TV? - **Producer**

I was very good at the duality, I come here as a professional, I am interested in that, I am part of the chattering classes, I read the right novels, I go home, switch into Pakistani mode and I can do my bit there, I am very good at that. I have always done that but when I went through a crisis, I realised the lack of integrity, it began to sit quite uncomfortably with me. Perhaps then I wanted to be totally authentic and say to them *If you are going to accept me then you need to understand that I am part of this.* I revealed myself in a way that made people feel uncomfortable and all of a sudden they were like, *My god, this guy has gone fundo, he is turning a bit Muslim, what is all this about and why should we care anyway?* - **Producer**

I think that the biggest problem is cloning people in their own image. That is not necessarily just a colour thing because they just want the right cultural references. There was a BBC reporter, an Indian woman, who said that once she wanted to do a report wearing a hijab and she was told by her news people that she couldn't do that, because it would be too disturbing or

distracting - quite interesting remark to make. As long as you wear western outfit it is okay. Wind the clock back ten years and they would say that you can't have a woman doing this news broadcast because it would be too distracting, so there is a long way to go in acceptance of diversity. At the moment there is an acceptance as long as we all conform to their normal values. - **Producer**

▫ **Every day racism in the workplace is about being ignored**

In fact our normal experience of racism isn't being shouted at and being called a *Black bastard*, actually. It's when everyone else is going down the pub and they come back the next day saying *That was a great night down at the pub!* and you weren't even told everyone was going. You certainly weren't asked or invited to go. It's when you're excluded on a moment by moment basis ...when you're just there to function in your job and you're meant to go back into that little Black world that Black people go into and disappear and stay there until the next day. This is basically what the characters often do in TV drama. You'll have the Black best friend who never has a wife or girlfriend where as the White star has a big love story going on and you think what did the Black friend do for sex?! - **Producer**

I feel like a ghost from nine to five, my opinions are not sought and my contribution not valued. The two of us in the department who are non-White are not seen as British and we are often made to feel as if we don't have anything to offer. For example, we have both been pushing to do a piece of work by a particular writer but we are ignored. A White man joins the department and suggests producing work by the same writer and the idea is taken up enthusiastically. - **Assistant**

▫ **You all look the same**

I remember I was working with a writer: a Black woman with glasses. When we were working everyone kept calling her my name. By the end of the day she was so insulted, so angry about it. I literally had to grab her, she'd told them a thousand times. She's way smaller than me, she doesn't look like me, why did they call her my name? My friend said *You've worked here for 8 years and they still don't know what you look like!* - **Producer**

There was another chap who was actually a Palestinian Jew, wore glasses, much taller than me and a bit younger. He joined about three months after me and the whole time everyone called him me, and me him. I said to someone, *Look, I'm really quite unhappy about this, it feels like the only thing people notice about me is the colour of my skin, 'cos we're both brown.* She said *I think you're over-reacting.* - **Producer**

There was another actor who is also British Chinese and they kept confusing us, calling each other by the wrong name. I told them five times in the course of one day but they didn't seem to care. It was maddening because they got the scripts mixed up and the cabs as well. - **Actor**

▫ **Not expected to be a professional**

This is a terrible anecdote to tell but it tells you something about radio and radio culture. Three times now since I've been working at the BBC, I've walked in to someone's office to see someone and I've been waiting and they say *It's over there*, I say *What's over there? The computer, it's over there* and I say *Why should I be interested in where your computer is? You have come to mend it haven't you?* And I say *No, I'm here to see your boss* and they say *Sorry, sorry*. Now that's happened three times and it's a bit like the only Black people in the BBC are in the canteen. And there is an element of truth in that. It's astonishing. And a lot of people are very well-meaning: there's not a lot of rabid racism, anything like that. But Greg Dyke was right to say the BBC is hideously White, particularly radio. - **Producer**

People often talk about institutionalised racism and I think there is an institutional sense in the BBC that the default mode is to think that certain people can't do this. I think the Disability Programmes Unit proved – and Peter White has proved and other disabled people have proved - that disabled people can do it, but it doesn't seem to be proof enough for that majority of people who still feel that we can't do it. - **Former editor**

They don't make it easy and I think I was in a generation where there was management that, as soon as you walked into the room you knew, as soon as they looked at you: *Oh well, on paper it looks like she can do this type of stuff but can she really?* You always feel like that. - **Senior BBC producer**

▫ **Alienation**

I have not experienced obvious discrimination. I think I have experienced cultural alienation which is something similar. - **Former TV producer**

The job is fantastic: it is second to none and I feel extremely privileged to work in a country where I'm paid to do something I would do anyway. But when I first started I found the actual place, the building, the people, the environment, all alien to me. I'd never been in an all-White work or social environment. This was in London! In the middle of London! And it was an all-White environment. It hadn't occurred to me. It was so alien. - **Producer**

Several other people described the “weirdness” of working in buildings full of people that didn't reflect the population mix outside their office building.

White City – now why is it called that? We're in one of the most multicultural parts of London but you wouldn't know it from the mix of people in here, it's like a colonial enclave in some outpost of the Empire. - **TV producer**

▫ **The challenge of being unique**

I had assumed that this work environment was part of the same world that I lived in: a place where people were of every race, every background, an extremely exciting place to be. I had never entered this world before, so immediately I was at a disadvantage. Give you an example. When I first started I'd be walking around the corridor, people were saying *Hi (my name)*, *Hello (my name)*. It took me six months to get to know all *their* names. People

knew my name instantly; they didn't have to work at it. They didn't know how scary it was. I didn't know whether I'd met them before...I was very easy to identify. - **Producer**

The disability imprints on the brain straightaway because people do remember you. I have thousands of people who know me, I have absolutely no clue of their names, and I have to play this game two or three times a week and my mind is like a strobe because I am trying to work out who this person is. You are asking all the questions and sometimes you lose it completely. - **Producer**

▫ **One is one and all alone**

Most of my interviewees from ethnic minorities described "clocking" the fact of being the only non-White person in the room, in the production team or on a set.

I spend my entire life in meetings where I'm the only non-White face. And that shouldn't go unchallenged. I'm fine with it but it's something I notice. Women are well represented in parts of radio and that's great, but if you were a woman in a room full of men it would create a certain sort of "noise" and it does sometimes. You sometimes feel: I'm not being listened to properly here. I'm not chippy about it but it is there and I know other Black and Asian people who have similar experience and who feel the same way. I can't think of a single person in the radio hierarchy who is not White. - **Editor**

It is also about a level of comfort, it is not *Look, oh there is five*, it is *Oh, there are others!* Because at the time when I walked into the big production office, there wasn't one minority face that I saw, and I just thought *Oh my God!* I do think people are looking at me and seeing somebody different, or basically just looking up and all they are seeing is my colour. - **Director**

I was born in the West Indies and a very wise Caribbean friend said to me once *We are people who see colour and we don't see colour at the same time* because we come from this sort of melange of people where you can go from five past midnight Black to Nordic White and you're still Caribbean – probably still in the same family. But yes, I'm very aware in institutions, I'm very aware of the absence of Black people. That's one of the signature concepts of our struggle: to fill these absences and how we do it. Although to be on a set with a crew of about forty and you're the only Black person, there is always a kind of surprise ...in the middle of Birmingham, in this day and age! - **Director**

▫ **The industry is culturally White**

As we have already seen in the previous chapters, there is a perception amongst interviewees that the broadcasting industry practices cultural apartheid in the selection of ideas and perspectives. Several people gave examples where they felt they were simply not being heard as creative people because the industry worked on its own exclusive criteria.

It wasn't just physically White, it was culturally White. I had to learn a different language to be heard artistically. – **Producer**

It's as if people who aren't used to seeing particular faces, just don't take them seriously. - **Producer**

Experienced producers with a knowledge and authority with different cultural groups felt ignored and humiliated.

My ideas and my knowledge of my community have been treated with contempt, but the worst is just being treated as an outsider to their club. They simply didn't comprehend the gold they were being offered, and they didn't care. – **Producer**

I had a fantastic proposal about a really exciting new trend in the dance world: a fusion of hip hop and classical theatre dance. It's a world that I know really well and it's about contemporary mainstream culture and where it's going. So this idea gets sent round the houses at the BBC, no-one replies, I call and call, eventually I get a letter saying *There's nowhere in the schedules for this*. I don't even get a conversation. It makes me want to weep. It's such a terrible humiliation. Because I know for this society it's important: validating what young people do and making sense of what's happening on that scene, what's happening to young Black males, all these things. And here is this lovely friendly way of handling it, and they don't even want to know. - **Independent producer**

▫ **We're offered crumbs**

My interviewees gave many examples where they felt that they were not given the same resources to make a programme because it was seen as "minority" or they were seen as people whose ideas didn't deserve equal endorsement. Smaller budgets and less time on air were the two main areas of concern.

I went to Channel 4 to pitch a documentary. They offered me *The Slot*, which is a series of five minutes. - **Writer**

▫ **They don't know us**

I remember going into a big script meeting with *Eastenders* and there was discussion about why they didn't have more Black and Asian characters in the show, and there was myself and a Black writer there and one of the other writers put his hand up and said, *The thing is that I don't really know any Asians, the only Asian I know is my window cleaner, I only ever see him from the inside of the house*. And I remember thinking *I can't believe he has just said that and got away with it!* Everyone just laughed and it moved on, I just thought again, *What world are we living in that somebody can actually say that?* He was one of the main writers at the time. No-one says anything because it doesn't affect them directly, they don't feel it in the way that we do, how offensive and upsetting that is. I am sitting there, he knows me, I am an Asian person, do I not exist? I have had a nice conversation with him earlier in the day. It is unbelievably blinkered.

It is like the old racist *I don't mean you, love, you are different from the others*. The fact that I speak another language, it just never would have occurred to them it is really interesting. The other question they often ask is *Did you have an arranged marriage? Are you Muslim?* I say *Yes, well I was beaten up when I was growing up and dragged to a cave by my father! My middle name is Abdullah you know!* They don't know us and they don't make any effort. - **Writer**

I would meet some of the other producers and they would be like *Cool, man, Bhangra!* I would be like *What? I am interested in William Morris, stop patronising me!* – **Producer**

I went to a commissioning editor with a story about the Chinese and she kept telling me how she's been to Japan and making completely inappropriate comments based on her "knowledge" of the Japanese. In the end I lost my rag and said *Look we're not the same!* That didn't go down too well.- **Producer**

▫ **Disadvantaged at job interviews because of people's prior prejudices**

So many people have a different agenda around race which at times I find very disturbing and very, very dangerous. Two categories: race is either something that's different, that's unusual (which is probably why I was appointed). Or race is: *very like me, but slightly tanned*. It's one or the other. So I think the Black or Asian person going to the interview is at a disadvantage because they're not being interviewed really for what they are totally as a person - **Producer**

I once worked for the Chinese TV Channel in Hong Kong and was talking about my ideas. It was the first time I experienced men looking me in the eye and taking me seriously. Here, they don't know how to place me, don't seem to take me seriously. - **Director**

▫ **You're only here because you are Black**

And all I wanted them to know was that I am not being bought in just because I am Black, it is because I can do it and the only reason why I am not your boss is because things are not level, because otherwise I could easily have been. I just get tired of it sometimes. It's very frustrating. - **Producer**

One of my colleagues made me very angry: You know why you got the job don't you? I said, *Yes, I do: I got the job because I am far better qualified than you are or anybody else in the department*. Because I was. - **News producer**

The perception that some ethnic minority staff are only in jobs because of some sort of positive discrimination also suggests that all other staff are there because they are really good and there on merit, which is not the reality - some are great, others good, some just average and some really poor. It's the same for all of us, and the idea that ethnic minority staff are any better or worse than their White peers is really just nonsense. - **Producer**

This view was echoed by several of the interviewees who were disabled.

I know whatever I do, I am always having to overcome this sense that I shouldn't be here in the first place. Guilty until proven innocent. – **Researcher**

▫ **Talent is not developed in the same way**

Several people described instances where they saw their peers being given opportunities such as training and professional development which they had been refused. But there were also examples where people were pushed too quickly, for example, put on screen or on air before they had developed the necessary skills either in order to meet diversity targets.

If you find one good Black writer generally people take them and push them through to commission really quickly whereas with White people there is a longer nurturing process. Look at Michael Frayn, he spent twenty years developing his skill and now he is at the top of it, whereas with Black writers, as soon as somebody shows they have done something good, they get picked up and pushed forward and then, the first time they do something bad, they get dropped and labelled a failure. There is not enough of the nurturing process. - **Producer**

▫ Pigeonholing

Award-winning directors and producers with substantial track records described how they had had to constantly fight to be seen as professionals who don't *just* do Black stories.

There was this whole kind of thing where that's what you did, you did Black programmes, you couldn't possibly do anything else even though I had never done a Black programme in my career up until that point, I'd done all sorts of programmes, mainstream programmes, I had never done this and as soon as I got in there and did it for a season it was almost like *That is what she does*. That's the way they pictured me working. - **Former producer**

I have built up a body of work that seems to focus on British Chinese so people think I can't do anything else. People say (as a criticism) *why do you only do British-Chinese subjects?* But no one asks Martin Scorsese why he only does Italian-American subjects! - **Director**

I was saying to them *Look it doesn't matter if it is Black or White, I just want to learn and develop those skills more* but the answer was *Well, there is nothing for you meaning, there is nothing Black* so they couldn't see a role for me really. Even now I only get offers to work on Black shows, nobody calls you otherwise. - **Producer**

People don't know how to place me. I've got diverse interests. I have an area of expertise: British Chinese. But I don't want to be pigeonholed as exclusively that. There's a lack of understanding of what I might be able to bring to the mix, a certain uncomfortable-ness with that. I can almost sense them pulling away; it's such a subtle thing. - **Director**

We're not yet extricated from what they see visibly from the outside. Plenty of roles are still not open to me; we're so defined by our culture, so defined. - **Actor**

▫ Minority talent not recognised

Black and Asian producers and directors often don't get the plaudits and career advances when they do something that is successful. Whereas if a White producer does something with Black people in, he's hailed as a hero for "*making a great programme and...wow, he can work with Black people too!*" - **Producer**

Institutional discrimination arises from a dominant industry monoculture

So does all this amount to institutional racism?

On the basis of the examples given by my interviewees from ethnic minorities and others such as gay and disabled people, I feel that to call it institutional *racism* is to limit our understanding of it. What exists is a very strong industry monoculture which excludes and discriminates against all sorts of difference in subtle and often, on a personal level, unintended ways. The cumulative impact of the sort of day to day marginalisation described above means that few people who come from a different background or bring a different perspective remain and rise through the industry. The ones least likely to do so are those who are perceived as most different and made to feel most different.

▫ **Oxbridge: the great leveller?**

It was striking that the few ethnic minority or disabled people who described feeling they had been equally treated and had had a good experience of working in the industry were those who “matched” most closely the norms of the dominant monoculture. For example, they were most likely to have an Oxbridge degree, least likely to be overtly different in their accent or cultural reference points.

I think that is the secret of my success actually. I had the right credentials, went to the right schools, I spoke like them, so in every way I was like them so I was conveniently not White but I certainly wasn't scary. The classic, *what college did you go to?* I could answer the question and I wasn't scary. - **Producer**

It is ironic, I'm seen as this example of the BBC diversifying but if you look at my background, I went to grammar school; I went to Cambridge, I'm White middle-class. I'm not, in many ways, an obvious example of diversity! I'm sure having Cambridge on your CV helps to overcome that initial barrier that people have about disabled people: that they see us as not being able to do the job. If they see Cambridge on your CV it makes them think twice. - **Producer**

Such people may help to change the monoculture in small ways from within but they are too few and far between - and may not be themselves equipped - to make a substantial or lasting impact to the industry, nor to the range of voices in the National Conversation.

Why don't we talk about it?

I just wish that it was easier to have the conversation about who you are bringing in and what impact it is going to have because you do feel like a bit of a whinger. Internally they think: *hobby horse, guilty, chip on his shoulder*. Externally, people don't know that because they never see this side of me and they might just think he's Uncle Tom, looks after himself. I don't think they probably realise the problems you can cause for yourself because you are a professional Asian in people's eyes, I always will be. It would be a lot easier just not to bother with these things and just get on with your stuff and completely assimilate to a point where you are no different. - **Commissioner**

Most of my interviewees described this difficulty with being able to talk openly about the practical issues around diversity, and the awkwardness that it created when they did. Many people who attempt to challenge the status quo feel they risk being marked out as troublemakers.

We will demand truthful content and it will cause offence and I guess you are marked off very, very early on. - **Independent producer**

They don't want disabled people getting political; they see a disabled person's contribution as worthy, aggressive, hitting people over the head. - **Producer**

I think in the push for assimilation, the price will be let's not talk about these things. I think what will happen is that those people will find that as long as they don't rock the boat or raise these kinds of issues they are okay, they will get on but, as soon as they do, that is a mark against them. - **Producer**

The fear of damaging career prospects is also a very real one in an industry which is all about relationships and getting on with people.

As a director you are in a really difficult position because you are freelance, you want to be employed again. Especially at the BBC there is a focus on *Is that person nice?* So you don't want to be seen to be difficult. If you are not seen as a nice person or if you are awkward you know that you will not be employed again so even raising the suggestion, maybe it is the wrong thing to do because you have a mortgage to pay. - **Director**

It is funny because I am not exactly shy but commenting on other people's programmes on disability I have got myself into sticky situations... It is a really tricky balancing act. - **Assistant producer**

This sensitivity means that people are often forced to skirt the real issues, denying the opportunity for an honest exchange of views that would improve programmes.

The way you talk about these things: I had to say it was the plot ... it was just a bad narrative, a poor narrative, it didn't really deal with characterisation very well.

Q. So you did it in terms of the technical and professional aspects rather than portrayal?

You can't go round saying that it's racist. That just doesn't work with these people. - **Producer**

If you are a White person getting into these waters you have to be prepared to be really hated, to really take a lot of flak and that is another reason why a lot of White people don't go there, because you set yourself up to be told you are taking people's voices or whatever. I think a lot of White producers are scared of that as well. I think you have to understand where the anger comes from and you just have to be secure enough in your own politics. I don't take it to heart, these kinds of rows, any more because I think I can stand by my track record but it is no fun to be a White person at those meetings sometimes. In fact, it is bloody horrible. - **Producer**

Managers charged with implementing top-down diversity strategies also described feeling gagged.

I don't think as managers we are trusted and so therefore if you want to test or challenge policy or strategy, dissent is discouraged, you are looked upon as a heretic. In fact I am incredibly enthusiastic, I admire the BBC as an organisation, I love what I do, but that is not the same as saying that I shouldn't challenge or test people's arguments. If you can't test and challenge you can't improve things and diversity is one of those areas in which dissent is not really acceptable. - **BBC Manager**

What these comments show is that the National Conversation isn't happening effectively on the airwaves because it isn't happening effectively in broadcasting organisations or production offices. We lack the language and the vocabulary to talk freely about difference and diversity. This poses a serious handicap to a creative industry which is supposed to reflect the nation and help to shape a shared cultural identity.

How can we make it better?

So now here's the fun bit: I asked programme-makers for their ideas on how to move beyond simply articulating the problems. How could we overcome the initiative-fatigue and resistance to cultural diversity as it has been framed until now? How can we develop a shared language that moves away from box-ticking to talking about creative opportunities?

It's The Programmes, Stupid

The message loud and clear was that audiences are ready to be surprised, challenged and stretched, so *focus on the programmes*. It is not diversity policies or employment targets that create an inclusive National Conversation; it's good programmes that bring audiences together.

Comedies that aren't funny, dramas that don't touch you, documentaries that are superficial or poorly researched, news reports that ask the wrong questions... in the end bad programmes which happen to feature the demographically correct quota of minority faces don't do anyone any favours. You can't have a National Conversation through broadcasting if millions of people switch off. As in any conversation, if people feel insulted or patronised they will turn away and once trust is lost, it's far harder to win it back.

Recent broadcasting history is littered with programmes that have alienated people from minorities. Examples most frequently cited by my interviewees were the first series of *The Crouches*, *All About Me*, and the Ferreira family storylines in *Eastenders*. All these started with a good intention: let's put some under-represented people on screen. But they all failed to introduce any authentic voices. On the other hand, there have been some excellent programmes which have been recognised for opening up many new avenues for communication:

If you make something like *Every Time I Look At You* which is good telly, a love story which happens to have two disabled actors in the lead role, you are probably doing more for changing attitudes towards disabled people in that one programme than three series of documentaries about the problems of access for disabled people. Nobody wants the sympathy vote. - **Director**

Unlike all those documentaries which tend to highlight the differences, say *look, how odd and strange these people's habits and customs are*, what *Goodness Gracious Me* did, and what comedy does anyway (if you don't understand it you aren't going to laugh), is say that fundamentally we are all the same. Fundamentally we all have families and we all live in houses and we all fight over who had the last creme egg, that is what happens and everyone goes: *They are the same as us*. Revolution, my God! - **Producer**

If the aim is to have more programmes that build imaginative bridges between the different groups that make up our society, we need to learn from the mistakes and recognise the successes. We need to identify those elements that contribute to effective communication across cultural divides and create a language to talk about them in programme-making.

▫ **No more special pleading**

There was also a strong consensus that the term *cultural diversity* had been too narrowly interpreted as meaning special pleading for a few. What was needed now was to broaden the issue out and find a common language that was about improving programmes and working practices for *everyone* and which didn't favour, or marginalise, any particular group. There is no intrinsic reason why we should need special programmes or special employment schemes targeted at a particular group in order to take part in the National Conversation. These merely underline the continuing failure of the broadcasting industry to address its own dysfunctional working practices. We need to turn the spotlight away from minorities and look at what the mainstream industry is doing to keep so many voices unheard.

▫ **True cultural diversity**

Several people suggested that the term cultural diversity was redundant, having been so often misused to describe ethnic minorities; we are all culturally diverse. Others felt the phrase actually embodies all the right ideas but we've just lost sight of them.

Each of us belongs to many different and overlapping cultural groups. These are defined, for example, by our generation, our gender, our social network, our employment, our geographic connections, our religious and ethnic origin, our sexuality, our health, our education, our interests and our politics. These cultural groups may be based on shared values, shared history or common experience – being gay or disabled can link you to a cultural group as much as being Liverpudlian Irish or Liverpudlian Chinese. It's about life experience, not skin colour.

Speaking as someone who has been somewhat converted to blind culture and disability culture, I find this life really cool. I like being a subset. I like exploring my new found disability heritage. I like the difference. I like the gadgets that come with being blind. I like illegally downloading books in the online blind underworld scene. Of course I do. It's a rich sub-culture. I get off on it. It's part of me, I'm part of it" **Damon Rose editor of the BBC *Ouch!* Website**⁴²

We live at a time when more and more people are moving out of the rigidly defined cultural groups they were born into and where the boundaries between many different groups are becoming more porous. (A nice example is Markie Mark, presenter of BBC 1Xtra's *Punjabi Hit Squad*, who is English but grew up in the Punjabi community in Southall and developed a taste for the music of his Asian friends.)

In few other places on earth are people travelling across so many cultural boundaries of geography, religion, class, ethnicity, discovering new and varied identities for themselves. The stories of those journeys are filled with often startling new insights into how we think, behave and feel as human beings. At times the cross-cultural journeys may be fraught and messy but all offer different lenses through which our own experiences can be refracted, ideas on how to navigate our own journeys better and how to forge new shared identities in our communities, as a nation and as global citizens.

▫ Creative opportunities

The diverse make-up of Britain offers a huge range of creative opportunities for programme-makers. As much as air travel, it is armchair travel through the media that has expanded our horizons of what we can expect to do and see in our own lifetimes, and of the variety of people we may meet on our own doorsteps and further afield. When we move away from what we know, it's those armchair journeys made through television and radio that can define whether we see strangers as potential threats or potential friends. They also offer the possibility of breaking down the rigid boundaries that may exist between certain groups.

Minority groups, especially those currently at the margins, should not be seen as a burden requiring special assistance but as people with a right to express themselves as fully as everyone else and so expand the variety of what we currently think of as mainstream. Just as the range of foods introduced by immigrants has transformed our diets and encouraged us to create new fusion recipes from hitherto unknown ingredients, the ideas and experiences of people from minority groups offer the same opportunities. In art as in life, it is through juxtaposition with the unfamiliar that we see things anew. If we want programmes to be innovative and relevant we cannot ignore what is happening at the margins.

So that is the proposition. But while the term cultural diversity describes what we are aiming for, it doesn't tell us how to get there.

Cultural intelligence

My interviewees used many words to describe what they would like to see more in programmes: *truthfulness, integrity, authenticity, cultural knowledge, cultural specificity, and a variety of perspectives*. These seem to be elements of something more fundamental to how broadcasters portray diversity and I have called this *cultural intelligence (CQ)*. Just as the term *emotional intelligence* has helped to promote insight and sensitivity in relationships, *cultural intelligence* may offer a way of valuing diverse cultural knowledge and experience in programme-making.

Culturally intelligent programmes:

- are inclusive in their portrayal of different groups, particularly those who are currently marginalised in society;
- seek to represent different groups of people to each other accurately and authentically;
- enable people to speak for themselves wherever possible
- find universal human truths in surprising places and are not afraid to look in culturally specific areas of British life that are outside of the mainstream;
- seek out hidden connections, reveal shared histories;
- help us to understand ourselves and each other, our place in this country and in relation to other people around the world;
- encourage informed debate on controversial issues by ensuring all viewpoints are thoughtfully represented;
- recognise the subliminal messages programmes transmit are as important as the explicit ones.

Without cultural intelligence, broadcasters cannot fulfil their public service remit to build social capital or facilitate the National Conversation effectively. It is an essential ingredient for getting to know each other better.

Making culturally intelligent programmes

- **Cultural intelligence in commissioning** is about spotting and developing culturally intelligent ideas in a creative and engaging way. It is about understanding the diversity of the audience when choosing the mix of talent to be involved in a project. It is about recognising that the allocation of time, budget and network slot will profoundly affect the perceived value of a programme or series.
- **Cultural intelligence in production** is about the relationships between those involved and the relative power they have to contribute to the way the programmes are shaped, look and sound. It is about combining creative and editorial skills with a willingness of writers and programme-makers to move beyond what they think they already know and seek authenticity from those who have insider knowledge. It is about seeking connections of understanding and empathy, not just accentuating conflict and difference. It requires having a political awareness of one's society and sensitivity to the position and prevailing stereotypes of minority groups within it.
- **Cultural intelligence in scheduling** is about positioning in prime time programmes which will help to build bridges between communities, foster greater understanding of shared histories or common experience. It is about recognising that scheduling decisions also affect the perceived importance of a programme, its subject matter and the people in it.
- **Cultural intelligence in promotion** starts with prioritising those programmes which are culturally intelligent in their execution and reach beyond the specificity of their setting or characters. It encourages collaboration with communities and imaginative targeting of different groups by means best suited to them. It is confident in promoting talented people whatever their background or the colour of their skin.
- **Cultural intelligence in programme review** is about encouraging feedback from both contributors and audiences, particularly from those people who have a strong connection with the content or are most likely to feel its impact. It is about creating a dialogue with audiences, being open to learning from the feedback you receive and responding to criticism with courtesy, honesty and humility. It is also about the sharing of experience between programme-makers and feeding the learning into future programmes.

Cultural intelligence in broadcasting thrives when people move across cultural boundaries with curiosity, sensitivity and openness. It develops best in an environment where constructive debate is encouraged and which values the learning that comes from experience.

In the rest of this section I would like to explore how broadcasters can put this idea of cultural intelligence to practical use.

Use commissioning to drive the engine of change

I think you have to drive it through commissioning actually and you need to have a social, racial, gender mix in commissioning because they are the ones that tell you what they want and they are the ones who ultimately say if they take it or not. At the moment we don't have that. What is interesting at the BBC is that over time we moved from a very male commissioning body to a female commissioning body and that made a difference to the output. - **Former commissioning editor**

Commissioning power currently rests in the hands of people who lack wide cultural intelligence. My interviewees suggested several strategies to tackle this.

▫ Need more of a mix of people in commissioning jobs

Ken Loach put it perfectly, bless him. Not until the oppressed people take into their hands the means of production that things will change, and he's right. Not until we have disabled commissioning editors and disabled producers that we will get that. Eventually, hopefully, non-disabled people in those roles will be so au fait with disability that it won't faze them to commission away but at the moment they are very scared because they don't know it. So, at the moment, what we need is people to make sure they are in line for getting that promotion, getting to positions of power because we need power. - **Presenter**

All broadcasters need to devolve more of the commissioning decisions and create opportunities for different people to develop experience in that role. It was suggested that there should be a way of using guest commissioners rather like guest editors to try new people out and bring a different set of value judgements into play. Whatever paths are chosen it mustn't be tokenistic; we need to give people who bring different cultural knowledge real power to influence what is chosen.

While there are very few such people in broadcasting at present, it is clear that they do make a difference to the output. Aaquil Ahmed, commissioning editor of religious programmes at Channel 4, describes how he has very direct conversations with production companies about the make-up of their teams and how they cast their programmes:

I just tell them! I am very specific. I make suggestions about members of staff. Often the problem is that it is all about availability, experience, it's about who has been working on the idea already. It is all about who they have got working in the company, it is not that easy. But you can. To me it is about portrayal as well. For instance on *The Ten Commandments* it was very clear from day one what I wanted in contributors. I was looking for diversity, disability, I was looking for lots of things and you have leaders in the Sikh community, Indian community, Muslim community, you have a Methodist, Asian, Blacks. It is in there, not because I want to tick boxes but because, if we do a programme like *The Ten Commandments*, I want to see the country, whoever the representatives are, I want to see them on that programme.

Maxine Watson, a Black commissioning executive in BBC Factual, also described this hands-on approach:

It is part of the fabric of what I do. It is not a case of forcing the issue or anything: it is crucial to reflect Britain's multi-ethnic population in key areas such as talent and within big subject areas: in history, the arts, science, landmark documentary. Making sure that there are a diverse range of contributors on prime-time shows that we commission.

But Aaquil Ahmed also recognised that his recent successes arose from a winning combination of expertise and understanding:

You have producers who completely understand issues of diversity, you have a commissioning editor who understands issues of diversity and who has a good level of freedom from bosses here, and that is how you get those films. If you don't have the senior people who are pitching these things to you as well with that cultural diversity then you are never going to get *God is Black*.

▫ **Ensure the right expertise is at hand**

Simply having a more mixed group of people in commissioning roles will not of itself ensure a better diversity of stories and voices across the board. There also needs to be a presumption that those stories which bring under-represented voices to the fore and have the greatest potential to connect different groups are given priority. With the best will in the world, it is difficult to understand the cultural significance of stories coming from areas which a commissioner has no personal familiarity with. So broadcasters need to look at how they can bring that expertise in on every such proposal to ensure commissioners are equipped to make a judgement which is based on more than their own taste and knowledge. One suggestion was to build a database which listed the cultural knowledge of different people working inside and outside the industry so that they could be consulted on specific proposals.

▫ **Make value judgements explicit**

There was a strong desire to make the commissioning processes across TV and radio more open and accountable. Programme-makers felt that commissioning editors should explain the detailed criteria on which they make their judgements and that there should be mechanisms for challenging those who failed to bring diverse voices into programmes. One suggestion was that broadcasters should record the meetings at which channel controllers and commissioning executives determine what will be commissioned.

There is also a need to ensure that value judgements are applied fairly: the commissioning process should treat programmes featuring minority voices equally in, for example, expectations of editorial rigour and allocation of budgets as well as scheduling and promotion decisions. Several interviewees suggested that the BBC should give up quotas for independents which protect in-house production, and commission every idea on its own merit, as the present system is seen as inherently biased against diversity. Commissioning of independents should be done by establishing an arms-length and independently regulated commissioning body to create a level playing field between independent and in-house producers.

▫ **Connections not differences**

If public service broadcasting is about building social capital then there should be a willingness to prioritise this in the programme ideas that are selected and in how those programmes are made. A conversation, whether it is between two people or across a nation, is likely to work better when people seek connections rather than simply identify difference or focus on each other's peculiarities. One approach draws people together, the other pushes people apart.

At the moment, it is premised on *difference* to peg a story. We have to change that premise to what is the *connection*. What is the connection between a White miner in Yorkshire and an Indian neurosurgeon? What is the connection? Six degrees of separation, you can look anywhere in the world and beyond the sixth level you'll find a connection...that's a far richer vein, a far more necessary premise in the 21st century world. Otherwise we are going to stick to the Aristotelian premise that has bedevilled theatre, that drama is essentially about conflict. Indian aesthetics on the other hand says *Truth is Joy* and suggests a coming together. That's two different ways to approach the resolution of difference, I think that word *connectedness* opens up a whole other way of looking at, wanting to look at and constructing narratives about a nation like this one. - **Director**

In his report *Watching Alone: Social Capital and Public Service Broadcasting*,⁴³ Martin Brookes posits three levels of social capital based on the type and extent of shared experience that programme-makers might seek to create, starting with the most basic level of programmes that create "water-cooler" conversations. At the second level he suggests a broadcaster might aim for programmes that produce water-cooler conversations across very diverse groups of society. At the third and most ambitious level he says programme-makers could specifically design programmes to include messages that boost understanding and empathy across diverse groups of society. This framework offers one way of examining the "connective" value of a programme idea.

▫ **Develop formats and stories which offer more opportunity for CQ**

The creative challenge for programme-makers is to come up with formats and stories which offer opportunities to demonstrate connections across different cultural divides. So, not to think of doing another all-Black comedy, but to look for ways of developing a more natural mix of people who interact and relate as fully drawn individuals.

A recent successful format was the BBC2 series *Who Do You Think You Are?* in which well-known personalities traced their family histories. The format allowed for a wide range of social and cultural history to emerge and the casting added to the richness of connections that the series made. And the viewing figures proved that audiences were just as willing to follow Moira Stuart and Meera Syal on their family trails as they were Ian Hislop or Amanda Redman. Maxine Watson was the commissioning executive who oversaw the project:

I know that having Moira Stuart in something like *Who Do You Think You Are?* has much greater impact than having a one-off doc about some kind of obscure Black subject that they are going to play at 11.20. Because, again, the amount of people who saw that series appreciated the fact that she agreed to do it, the fact that she went to the Caribbean, the fact that her history was tied up with so many other people's history, the fact that it was a counter-intuitive story, a story about education – social mobility. A family that achieved a

fantastic amount in such a short space of time, a phenomenal story that everybody connected with. It got a huge response and connected with the Black audience in an emotional way. I loved the Moira Stuart programme. If the BBC doesn't do anything else in that year this was just worth so much more, being part of a big landmark series. So I think for me those things were key and I think you have to be strategic about what programmes you do and where you put them.

It is also important for programmes to come out of a variety of departments and in a variety of genres to showcase diverse talent in innovative ways.

Bollywood Star for instance, not only was it a clever idea, that was just a factual entertainment programme, they didn't make it because they wanted to make an Asian programme, it was a factual entertainment programme that made sense, so it had a real focus, a real vision. - **Commissioning editor**

▫ **Feel the fear and do it anyway**

It needs a real cultural shift not to think about whether this will offend the BBC heartland. Don't think about the BBC heartland; just think about what is the best thing to do, what is the best programme. - **Producer**

One of the terrible things about the broadcast mind is that they want to do what has already been done before. *That worked then, let's do another one like it.* Then someone comes along and does something amazing then they all go *oh can we have something like that?* I remember someone saying to me *I want to find an English Jacky Brown* (Quentin Tarantino film) and I was thinking would they themselves have commissioned *Jacky Brown* in the first place? That's what we need is people with that sense of pioneer adventure, openness - **Writer**

One of the opportunities presented by the explosion of digital channels should be the nurturing of new talent and new voices: a stepping stone to more mainstream output. It was felt that to a small extent BBC3 has done that with comedy such as *Three Non-Blondes* but there needed to be far more readiness to develop material coming from less expected places.

Production

▫ **Recognise the subjectivity of the process**

Like commissioning, programme-making is not a mechanical process. It involves hundreds of subjective judgements at every stage of the process. No one trains programme-makers to make those judgements explicitly; most are "picked up on the job", absorbing the culture and values of the industry and from watching and listening to output. There are checks and balances built into broadcasting hierarchies which aim to minimise serious breaches of editorial rules relating to impartiality and decency. But beyond that there is a lot that is left to personal judgement and simply following the unwritten rules of how things are done.

Value judgements occur in so much of what we do: the choice of story, the range of people we select to work with and contribute to a programme, where we record them, the relative status we give them and the narrative and social context in which we place them.

All these are informed by our own experiences and knowledge. Making high CQ programmes is about recognising where everyone is coming from and making this part of the conversation of programme-making.

▫ **Create an inclusive environment**

The way in which production meetings are run and the chemistry of a working environment all contribute to whether people feel equally valued and heard. Many of my interviewees described experiences where they felt exposed and vulnerable if they tried to bring a different perspective. It should be the responsibility of everyone to ensure this does not happen, and training should be offered to assist those in charge of production teams to work with them in an inclusive manner.

▫ **Recipes for Success**

One of my interviewees put it aptly when talking about the limitations of colour-blind casting:

You don't get cultural authenticity by pouring a ready made Chinese sauce over your Roast Beef. - **Director**

He was making a plea for more imagination in the commissioning and writing process as a way of getting genuine diversity into characters and storylines. To develop his analogy: if you want a varied diet for your audience, you have to develop dishes that come from different cooks who are au fait with the cultural traditions behind the recipes they cook - and who can recognise when the ingredients are genuine.

▫ **Here's One We Made Earlier**

I would like to mention two examples which were widely recognised as successful programmes and which displayed most of the characteristics of high cultural intelligence that I listed earlier. *Every Time I Look At You* (BBC 2004), a love story featuring two disabled people in the lead roles, and *The Stephen Lawrence Murder* (ITV 1999), a powerful drama documentary based on the experiences of Stephen Lawrence's parents. The authenticity of the portrayals was in each case down to the synergy of a talented *mixed* team.

In the first case the project was masterminded by someone who was politically and creatively au fait with portrayal of disability: Ewan Marshall is disabled himself and had many years of experience as a theatre director but was relatively inexperienced as a television drama producer. He had produced a couple of shorts for the BBC disability season *What's Your Problem?* which showcased several disabled actors successfully. He managed to persuade the BBC2 controller she should be doing more drama featuring disabled people.

And then they went, *Okay, high risk: two disabled actors. Yes, we have seen them in shorts and we know they can act and we have identified those two as the people who are going to carry the film - but it is a bit risky.* So they got Lizzy Mickery on it, TV writer, she wrote *Flesh and Blood* and *Dirty War* and a few other things: tried and tested. Director Alrick Riley who had done *Baby Father* - in fact everybody on the film was tried and tested for its insurance. That probably was a very good decision.

But the most important thing was that Lizzy, off her own back, said *I don't really know anything about disabled people, I am just going to write a love story*

because people are people but maybe I should check. So she had a two/three hour interview with both of us, going: Okay Mat, tell me the short arm stuff, I really don't care about it, it's not the story but if it says "He then throws the table through the window" and you can't, I need to know how to work that scene out.

And because of that we got what 90% of drama that portrays disability gets wrong because the writer didn't ask and made the wrong assumptions, you get an authenticity to do with our physical reality.

The Stephen Lawrence Murder was the brainchild of producer Mark Redhead and Writer/Director Paul Greengrass.

Paul and I are two White middle-class blokes and we thought, we're making this Black story and we have to make sure that in order to compensate for our deficiencies in terms of our own experience we should have the maximum input from Black British people in the production that we could.

It was partly obviously to do with the appearance of the thing, it seemed obviously wrong to have this vast White crew on this Black subject. But it was also in terms of understanding the story better: obviously it is better to have people who had been through experience and understood it – not to lecture you but as part of the collective endeavour to make sure you weren't approaching it with a whole collection of prejudices.

In fact the creative route to getting authenticity was unlocked for them by the actress they hired to play Doreen Lawrence, Marianne Jean Baptiste, who had just finished working with director Mike Leigh.

In the process of auditioning, we had done a lot of impro ourselves and decided we should apply the improvisational technique to the making of the film. We knew that with an actress like Marianne at the core of it, that you had the intelligence and talent to sustain it.

With both Neville and Doreen Lawrence themselves on hand to be consulted, the actors Hugh Quarshie and Marianne Jean Baptiste developed their characters right in front of the camera.

So we in a sense gave them authorship of their own scenes: the script was written and the structure of the piece was worked out in discussion with the Lawrences, also in discussion with the principals, but actually moment by moment in each scene the actors would find the words, their own words.

So the magic ingredients in each programme were:

- making connections - they started from what initially would seem to many people a different cultural setting to draw out universal human truths;
- the characters were fully and truthfully drawn from the inside out;
- the mix of people and the working methods allowed CQ to develop;
- both creative and cultural experience were valued.

These are the types of ingredients that should be sought in the commissioning of all culturally intelligent programmes.

▫ Mix It Up

If we are to learn to know each other as a society we need to work together closely to understand how we each see the world. Specialist units where one group of people are making programmes aimed only at their own kind are not healthy. This applies as much to the White ghettos of comedy or drama as it does to African-Caribbean or Asian programme units. We need to actively mix it up at every stage. That is not to say you cannot have programmes that specialise in race or disability where the editorial control is led by people who have particular expertise in those areas. This was the case with the BBC current affairs series *Black Britain*, but, crucially, it had a *mixed* production team.

I would argue that race is a specialism actually in the same way that economics is and finance is and housing is. If you want someone who knows who to listen to and who not to listen to, who's got legitimacy and who hasn't, and how to go and find the stories that actually matter, that requires a degree of specialism which I think has been lost by not having a *Black Britain* type setup. That said, there are now a number of people dotted around BBC News and Current Affairs who have had that experience, and what was interesting about *Black Britain* was there were White and Asian people who got experience of working with the Black community. - **Former editor**

Similarly with drama series *Babyfather* there was a concerted effort to mix it up:

The director was fantastic, he said *I want the best talent, we are going to make the best show, it's got Black people in it, it is going to be the f***ing best show we can make*. So I said we will see all suitably qualified Black candidates but we will appoint on merit. I just said we are going to have the best people and that's what we did. That process led to us having about half and half Black crew. Our DOP (director of photography) who was White, was fantastic, a Scottish DOP, brilliant.

There are certain roles for which you need a certain amount of cultural knowledge and input. My head of make-up actually was a Black woman on *Baby Father* because there is the whole issue of afro hair and skin and whatever which are completely different issues. Now I did see one very good White make-up artist whose partner was Black and had mixed race kids, and, in fact, she understood all those issues as well so, again, it is not about skin colour it is about cultural knowledge. - **Producer**

But it's not simply about bringing together such expertise on programmes that are specifically to do with race or disability, it is about having a range of views and life experiences to inform *all* programmes. Simply having a varied mix of people in the same office can create a different chemistry around a project.

▫ **Double Exposure: spreading CQ**

That experience of working closely with people from different “cultural” groups is something cited by many of my interviewees as being important to raising awareness and dismantling prejudice. A BBC broadcast journalist who is a wheelchair user, described how he relished the “*a-ha!*” moments.

There is no better way of changing attitude than someone working with you. I have had a couple of occasions where I have been as a producer on something and the person who was being interviewed didn't know who I was but thought I was along for the ride, it was a day out or *Jim'll Fix It*, and in that situation you have to make it very clear, very polite and in a short, sharp shock sort of way that I actually am the producer, I am calling the shots here. So you have to go out of your way and do that which is quite fun and it is quite nice to see someone - not necessarily learning a lesson because I don't work in that sort of way - but watching a revelation taking place ... because it does change attitudes. - **News producer**

Mat Fraser, who is thalidomide-impaired, described a similar experience on the set of *Every Time I Look at You* where he and his co-star Lisa Hammond were working with a crew of eighty nine people, most of whom had never worked with disabled actors before.

The most poignant moment was when we kissed on the bed in the great big loving-making scene. Fifteen people in a hotel room with you and of course as any actor will tell you it is not about being turned on but making sure the light falls in your face the way the director said it should. We finished and we looked up, reasonably pleased at what we felt was a reasonably authentic snog to find fifteen dropped jaws looking at us, and we were like *What - have we done something wrong?* And they went *No, we have never seen this before, it has not really hit us until now quite how radical a production we are all involved in because we are all quite shocked at what we have just seen and all you have done is have a kiss on the bed.* They were self aware that they shouldn't be shocked but acknowledging that they were.

There were practical things that every one on the crew from director to sparks to wardrobe also learnt from the experience.

...certainly everybody else involved who was not disabled went away from that production buoyed up by the experience of disability, not scared of it any more. The wardrobe people were delighted in dressing me and Lisa because we were interesting shapes and that's interesting work for them. - **Actor**

The experience proved that disability was no bar to making a great programme.

In terms of me working with them the first thing that Lisa said to me She said *hey, don't treat me any different, I want to do this, it must be done and you have to get the best out of me and I am going to give you my best but you just work as you do normally* and so I did. Everyone had to work really, really hard, six, seven, eight, nine, ten takes of very emotional scenes. They just went for it because it is a performance thing, that is what we are relying on - **Director**

▫ Cultural specificity

There are many programme situations where cultural specificity of the contributors or characters may not be relevant to the story and simply having a mix of people on screen and on air without drawing attention to, say, disability or ethnic origin is appropriate and desirable.

But if the project of public service broadcasting is *how do we get to know each other better?*, we should also be alert to opportunities to enrich any programme by bringing out specific cultural knowledge, experience or perspectives. It is the detail of people's lives that makes them interesting and stops the National Conversation becoming bland and ill-informed.

Most mainstream programmes aimed at a general audience currently lack culturally located moments featuring people from minorities. This represents a real missed opportunity to connect with diverse audiences. One of my interviewees described these as *sit-up* moments: when they start taking notice of a programme, start believing it wants to engage them. The success of programmes like *The Kumars at No.42* and *Life isn't all ha ha hee hee* has demonstrated that culturally located moments don't have to be heavy with meaning but they do need to ring true.

Here are a few examples from my personal viewing diary and from my interviewees; some are fleeting moments, others are complete programmes. All reflect something specific about the diversity of modern Britain.

- Channel 4 documentary *Happy Birthday Thalidomide* in which presenter Mat Fraser takes a personal look at the history and impact of the drug thalidomide. This was full of culturally located moments with a strong sense of a particular disabled person's perspective shaping the story being told.
- George Alagiah returning to his childhood home in Sri Lanka for a BBC News report on the Boxing Day tsunami.
- A moment in the second BBC2 series of *The Crouches* when the couple go to a country hotel for the weekend and the wife turns to her husband and says *We must be at least an hour from the nearest Black person!*
- Sem Komurcugil, the Turkish Cypriot woman from Birmingham in BBC1 series *Fat Nation* whose personal story seemed to touch everyone who saw the programme.
- BBC1 *The Lenny Henry Show* routine about all the Asians he knows who mend videos and computers – a small but rare example of revealing that we do actually interact with each other.
- BBC2 *The Deaf Holocaust: Deaf People and Nazi Germany* - a piece of history powerfully told from the inside.
- The Northern Irish participant in BBC2 series *The Monastery* talking about the impact on his life of his involvement with the UDA.
- BBC2 *Luton, Actually* A Pakistani singer with pet chickens called Tracey and Dizzy describing his love of Luton – a gem of a moment.

- BBC1 series *Skint* revolving around a pawnbroker shop which revealed, with dignity and insight, the lives of people coping with dire financial insecurity and mental health problems.
- Saira Khan haggling with an Asian shop owner for a Freeview box in BBC2 series *The Apprentice*.
- Channel 4 Drama *Born To Two Mothers* was a high CQ programme which oozed truthfulness from all the characters. In a courtroom to decide the fate of an IVF baby born to the wrong couple, the Black father (played by Lennie James) presented a powerful case for why a Black boy born in Britain needs to grow up in a Black family. Anywhere else it would have been a soapbox speech but in the context of this drama it was absolutely spot-on.
- *Blue/Orange* BBC4 version of Joe Penhall's play about a young Black man diagnosed with borderline personality disorder who runs rings round the two psychiatrists in charge of him.
- BBC1 *10 O'Clock News* report on the rise in Islamophobia experienced by Bradford Muslims in the wake of the London bombings. At a time when the media was having a feeding frenzy on the "problem with Muslims", a short report of no more than a few minutes by the BBC News Arts correspondent Razia Iqbal brought a calm, thoughtful analysis from the perspective of the people we rarely hear: children, ordinary young Muslim men, housewives and mothers, interviewed in locations which we don't usually see, in the ordinary settings of youth club, classroom, living room.
- *Question of Security* A BBC1 *Question Time* special presented by Huw Edwards in the wake of the London bombings. This was described as an extraordinary programme not just for its range of contributors but the chemistry it achieved as a result: a real sense of an emotionally and culturally intelligent dialogue at a very difficult moment in time, and one which would have resonated with many people around the country, whatever their views. There was a moment when Huw Edwards addressed the studio as "my friends" which just caught the atmosphere exactly.
- TV News images of the candle-lit procession of hundreds of people of all colours and ages to the place where the young Black teenager Anthony Walker was brutally murdered in Liverpool. The demonstration of community solidarity made a moving counterpoint to the standard news coverage that follows murders and televised family appeals for help.
- *Red Dust* BBC2 Drama based on Gillian Slovo's novel on the Truth and Reconciliation process in post-Apartheid South Africa. The casting, the use of different languages and the story itself were all handled with great CQ, but it was the evocation of universal themes of forgiveness and understanding others that lifted it way beyond the specificity of its geographical setting.

In any programme, every sequence, every scene, every line offers the opportunity to make connections with people we don't know. Each of these can be *culturally intelligent*, *culturally neutral* or *culturally ignorant*. At the moment we have far too much which is culturally neutral or culturally ignorant and not enough which is culturally intelligent, which reveals the truth of who we are to each other. Every contributor, every character potentially offers a door onto a different world, yet as programme-makers we often miss the opportunities to reveal those worlds.

There are two main planks for getting cultural specificity. One is through the mix of experience you have in a production team and cast; the other is through diligent research. Those of my interviewees who had worked on TV and radio soaps believed you can't have authentic characters, storylines or dialogue without it – particularly if writers themselves lack the cultural intelligence about specific characters or setting.

I think research and more research even to the extent of having a shadow doppelganger (ie a real person whose history, family and attitudes you can borrow for your character)... there is no other way you are going to write confidently for them - **Producer**

There is a lot of fear about getting it wrong: need to get the message through that they won't get shot down if they use the wrong language or don't know whether someone is Muslim or Hindu – it's okay not to know *but* they do need to be willing to find out. - **Director**

▫ **Work at creating diverse stars**

There were many calls for broadcasters to give people from different backgrounds a more equal chance at becoming household names.

In soaps the rule should be what you do with your White characters you should do with the Black characters. If you're making White stars then you should be able to make Black stars. Stars are made by the status of the characters, so if you have a character, however bad, if he's high status in the soap he'll become high status in society, he'll become a star. If your Black and Asian characters are low status they cannot become a star. It doesn't matter how much exposure they have, it's to do with status and that is purely down to storylines. So those are some of the rules and you have to be careful to apply them across the board. Same with the way the characters look. If all your White women have make-up looking glamorous then it is seriously dangerous to have a Black woman looking like a scarecrow, looking like she's been dragged through a hedge backwards. What are you saying? - **Drama producer**

Invest in Black writers and performers and have faith in them. You couldn't have had *Absolutely Fabulous* if they didn't invest in Dawn and Jennifer and when they do, you can see the rewards of it. Maybe that's run its course now but it has had a long run. That wasn't just investing for a year or two or ten, it is long, long commitment and that is the kind of thing that you need more of. - **Comedy Producer**

It is like just because there is an Asian or Black person it doesn't mean that it has to be an issue based drama. You have someone like Parminder Nagra you have to find a vehicle for her. Parminder is a great actress; they should be finding a great drama for her, full stop. - **Writer**

▫ **Look for diverse contributors**

I asked programme-makers for tips on extending the range of voices and perspectives on programmes.

It's an attitude: I am always on the look out for new voices in unexpected places. I carry a notebook so if someone catches my eye, or my ear, I make a note. You never know when an opportunity to use them might come up. -

Producer

I have networks that I am plugged into where I can turn if I want, say, an Asian paediatrician in the NHS or a Chinese midwife. It's about knowing your patch. -

Reporter

As an independent producer based in the North, I do think I draw on a different pool of talent. That should be seen as a strength of indies, to be able to do that. - **Producer**

Sometimes it's about asking people a bit further away who might be rooted in a different sort of community. Local radio perhaps ... That's where the *One BBC* idea can really come into its own, people are usually quite helpful.

Sometimes just asking the question prompts an idea of where else to look. -

Assistant Producer

One of the problems mentioned by several people working in the BBC was how little flow of information and sharing of experience there was between different areas, for example, between television and radio, London and the Nations and Regions, World Service and the rest of the BBC. Yet this seems to be a waste of the very resource that the BBC uniquely owns: a nationwide network of contacts and sources of local cultural intelligence. They felt it should be possible to make the communication channels work more effectively to identify potential contributors from a more diverse range of backgrounds.

▫ **Confound expectations**

One of the other indicators of a high CQ programme is one that avoids predictable narratives and encourages people to challenge prevailing stereotypes. One good example of this was the BBC2 programme *Luton, Actually*. When Sarfraz Manzoor was initially approached by BBC Birmingham to do a programme about Luton, he was very ambivalent. He feared that they had a stereotypical view of what they would get: a current affairs documentary about Luton as a hotbed of terrorism, with alienated Muslim youth falling prey to the militant imams. But he decided he would accept the offer and do something that would confound expectations.

It was intended as a personal look at Luton where he grew up and he made the decision that he was not going to include any interviews unless they were surprising for a mainstream White audience. He also decided not to use any Asian music ("because that's what these programmes always do, don't they, use some Bollywood mix with a strong beat?") but his own teenage pop soundtrack of Abba and Springsteen. The resulting programme was a surprising and touching portrait of the town from many different residents' perspectives. When he arranged a screening there, a very diverse audience turned up to watch it. Different people came up to thank him afterwards and said they identified with his personal story even though they were, for example, Irish. He had touched on universal themes that subtly encouraged connections.

▫ **More comedy**

Several people noted the importance of comedy for connecting minorities to the mainstream.

If you can master comedy and wit you've mastered a lot of cultural codes, you're at ease with the society you live in. - **Performer**

What makes me most proud of *Goodness Gracious Me* was talking to some kids, and they said it is great because when the show is on we go to school and everyone wants to talk to us asking *What was that about? What were they saying in that bit?* When I was in school you didn't really talk about being Indian, it wasn't a cool thing to be and so you think if the show has made it more socially cool for kids to be in school and be Indian and people now have a good understanding of who they are, then I think that is a good thing.

Hopefully people watch it and enjoy the show and go *right, you are just like us.* - **Producer**

Producer Anil Gupta's own career began as a runner on *Spitting Image* and then writing material for other comedy shows as well as working in BBC Comedy where he was reading scripts and developing ideas. He became familiar with the professional milieu, saw the possibilities of making comedy and gained an understanding of how the commissioning systems work – if only so he could later circumvent them! This insider knowledge gave him the skills and confidence to push his ideas to fruition. But it was insider knowledge of another kind, of the British Asian community that was the impetus to look for comedy in places that no-one else had looked – and to recognise what would crossover to mainstream audiences. With one foot in each camp he was what might be described as the perfect cultural navigator to put together the *Goodness Gracious Me* team and guide them to success, first on radio and then television.

I have spoken to several people who have tried to emulate the success of *Goodness Gracious Me* from a different ethnic or disability perspective. They have struggled to get off the starting block because the driving force behind each has lacked the insider know-how of the TV and radio comedy business. This has forced them to work with producers who often lack the insight and passion which, for example, Anil brought to *GGM*. This was the experience of a disabled performer:

After having assembled a good list of writers and performers and bringing on board some well known non-disabled comedy writers to liaise, to spruce up presumably the good ideas, every single creative decision was made by a non-disabled person. None of the good humour, the grotesque situational stuff was allowed to come forward, it ended up being a bland nothing, scared again, piece of eggshell walking. - **Actor**

Comedy is harder than it looks and even more so on TV and radio. Coming in as untried talent and lacking the media savvy means that, however promising the ideas, very few are going to make it. And since there are far fewer people from minorities who are even trying to do it, the odds against another success like *Goodness Gracious Me* are huge. There is clearly a need to support the development of comedy by giving promising talent the exposure to the *craft* of comedy programme-making, through attachments to BBC and other comedy script units.

▫ **You need to get out more**

We each carry around a mental map of the place where we live: of the routes we take and the places we go to, of the people we meet and what we do for work and for pleasure. This map is also scored by invisible lines we never cross. They block our way to places that may contain all kinds of possibility for enjoyment, learning and creativity, but which our preconceptions have prevented us from exploring – or which we have never even wondered about. If the maps of many people in a community are marked by the same lines, the result can be ignorance and intolerance – and enormous wasted potential for exchange and understanding.

Crossovers need to take place and these themselves are extremely creative. Culture and creativity are at their best when different movements, forces and ideas meet. Creativity sparks off that kind of mix, because creativity thrives on the new.⁴⁴

The need to get out and cross our imaginary boundary lines was a recurring theme in how to make more culturally intelligent programmes. All broadcasters in positions of creative and editorial responsibility, be they commissioning executives, producers or script editors, need a closer firsthand experience of the lives of the people they are making programmes for so that they can bring that knowledge back into the scripts and treatments they develop.

As an industry we need to find ways of getting people to move out of their comfort zones and have meaningful engagement with communities that they do not know. Part of this is normal programme research, but research is only as good as the questions you ask and the sources you seek out, both of which are far better developed through longer term relationships and deeper understanding of different communities. This would also help to shake up the industry monoculture, find new talent, get closer to audiences and bring a greater variety of voices into the National Conversation.

I would have most of the BBC out working in the community and it wouldn't just be about moving the BBC to Manchester, it would be lots of smaller departments working all over the country. If you had Radio 4 and Five Live people and television people, say, all working in my building, and so on across the country, you would have far more diverse content and voices. - **BBC Local Radio manager**

Such an approach would also minimise the reactive knee-jerk response reporting that happens when a community is suddenly brought into the headlines. Building longer term relationships would enable programme-makers to understand the themes and issues that are important to different communities, understand the significance of stories that affect them and identify a variety of spokespeople and perspectives, so that a community is not portrayed through a narrow and possibly out of date lens.

▫ **CQ Master Classes**

We need to encourage greater dialogue within and outside the industry about what makes a high CQ programme so that people become more alert to what they see and hear, with their cultural antennae constantly on the lookout for ways to enrich the mix of what they do in their own programmes.

As an industry we currently don't have enough open dialogue about the way we formulate our programmes, the decisions we take about our production teams or our casting. As a result these crucial value-laden steps in mediating the National Conversation are simply not examined. A series of facilitated master classes, for example, by people like Pam Fraser-Solomon, Anil Gupta, Mark Redhead and Anne Edyvean about their award-winning work would be a stimulating and enjoyable way of examining some of the many issues around cultural intelligence in programming. They could also be web cast in order to reach a wider audience.

▫ **Promote High CQ programmes**

The message from my interviewees across all genres was that when you have made a high CQ programme you need to shout about it, not hide it away in the margins of the schedules and listings. One of the great challenges the broadcasters face in the digital age is how to direct audiences to the programmes that they are making for them. Programme information, building brand loyalties, using innovative techniques to reach different groups – all these need to be developed in a more sophisticated way across different sections of the audience.

A few years ago the BBC used to run a service called BBC Alert where you could register your interests and receive emails identifying BBC output on TV and radio that might appeal. The service was discontinued to save money but it was a good example of how broadcasters can build a more customised relationship with their audiences.

What is important (and something several of my interviewees thought better recognised by Channel 4 than the BBC) is to apply CQ to your programme promotion as much as to your programmes, so that the people who are featured are diverse and the projects you choose to promote show your faith in them to cross boundaries and appeal to diverse audiences.

▫ **Include the Public**

Technology and the increasing interactive possibilities it offers are taking broadcasting in a direction where traditional ivory tower attitudes will soon be obsolete, blurring the margins between broadcasters and audiences. As an industry we need to embrace the possibilities of where a more informed and media-savvy audience can take the National Conversation, rather than simply watch it fragment into innumerable private conversations happening elsewhere.

There have been some steps in this direction. BBC and Channel 4 have led the way with websites that encourage audience feedback and online chat about programmes. User generated content where ordinary people shoot their own video material, like the BBC *Video Nation* project twenty years ago, is another way of bringing in more diverse voices.

But could we be doing more to include audiences in the debate about what goes into programmes, and create a real sense of ownership and identification?

Programmes cannot be made by committee but we can learn much more from the concerns and aspirations that people have about the representations of themselves and others. Websites inviting comments on the previous day's output under suggested headings, production blogs describing the way a project is being put together could help develop the dialogue in more creative ways than at present.

Employment and career development

▫ Focus on changing the mainstream

The focus in the past twenty years has been on seeing minorities as the problem that needs to be addressed. Hence the plethora of special entry schemes and diversity targets in employment and on screen, rather than looking at what it is about the mainstream working practices of broadcasting that prevent natural diversity. The strong monoculture, the informal approach to recruitment and performance management and the lack of openness and accountability in how people get jobs all serve to prevent diversity in the workforce.

Many interviewees felt that a useful parallel was to look at what changed the position of women in broadcasting since the 1980s. Social and educational changes had already led to more women seeking employment in the broadcasting industry but it was still common for women to stop working when they had children. The prevailing workplace attitude was: if you can be like a man, you can stay, if you have children, it's up to you to cope. Not surprisingly many found they could not combine childcare with jobs that demanded long hours or frequent travel. Women might have had a sympathetic boss but it was very much up to them to try and make it work. (I recall observing an incident when a male producer tried to lead a team mutiny against a part-time female editor, accusing her of lacking professionalism because she had to go home to a sick child.)

It was only when the industry started to examine itself that things really changed. This happened when more working mothers reached positions of power and were able to influence the debate by their presence and professionalism. More of them sat on appointment boards and changed the ethos of the working environment so that it became more accessible for other women who were juggling careers with their role as carers. Flexible working, job shares, career breaks, home working and a generally more family friendly working environment have made it possible for more women in broadcasting companies to remain and to develop in their careers and contribute at all levels to commissioning and producing programmes. These benefits haven't reached all women (particularly those who are freelance or working in independent companies) but it is interesting to note that while the changes that were introduced by broadcasting companies were for the benefit of *all* staff they have undoubtedly reduced the barriers for women most.

We now need to look at how the industry can adapt itself in ways that reduce the barriers for other under-represented groups. This represents a very different approach to the present "colour by numbers" thinking where a few supposedly diverse people are let in every now and then. It does not offer quick fixes and requires a sustained cultural shift in how the industry works.

My interviews have thrown up many suggestions about where changes in working environments and practices are long overdue:

- make cultural intelligence a core value for editorial staff;
- make movement within the industry easier;
- promote inclusive environments and working practices;
- advertise all jobs and monitor all appointments;
- rigorous selection and recruitment for all;
- ensure diversity in interview panels;
- develop and apply objective criteria of performance management.

▫ Value people with cultural intelligence and diverse networks

It was noted that people who rise up through the broadcasting industry tend to do so because they are opinionated, articulate, quick to form judgements and defend them. However, cultural intelligence comes from taking the time to listen, engage and reflect. It requires humility and the willingness to accept you have to learn from others and give other people space to develop their voice.

What is needed is a broadcasting culture that values those who have cultural intelligence and people who make an effort to gain wide cultural knowledge which they bring into their programme-making and decision-making. That cultural knowledge should be made explicit on people's CVs and programme proposals so it becomes part of the language of how we talk about programmes, and of who makes them and commissions them. Wide cultural knowledge and diverse networks should be a critical factor in deciding who is employed and promoted.

▫ Cultural Navigators

In the course of my interviews I came across several people (White, Black, Asian and disabled) who had developed an exceptional combination of **broadcasting skills** (ie editorial and/or creative programme-making) and **cultural intelligence**, born partly of personal background but largely of personal motivation. These *cultural navigators* were people who were comfortable with crossing cultural boundaries, were able to unearth stories from many different sources, recognise and develop authenticity in their portrayal of diversity, and for whom integrated working came very naturally. They all had a political awareness about media representations of minorities and the need to challenge stereotypes which informed, rather than dominated, their creative choices. They instinctively understood that *It's the programmes, stupid* and won many accolades for their productions.

Far from being highly valued, held up as examples and used to inform good practice elsewhere, I was surprised to hear how many had been poorly treated (one had been made redundant by the BBC three times!) and labelled as difficult by their superiors.

I am not called in for advice and if anything I am probably seen as a trouble maker. - **Producer**

Yet if you look at their track records, these people are like gold dust. In the National Conversation they are the people who can change the frames of reference, taking them away from hackneyed old narratives and helping us make sense of what is happening at the cultural boundaries between seemingly different groups, because that is their daily lived experience.

I still live in one of the biggest Pakistani communities in Britain and you will see me in their praying, I go and pray in the Mosque. So I am part of that which then suddenly makes the liberals think *well, hang on: you are one of those then are you?* Calm down, I can still go to the Groucho Club! It is that constant to-ing and fro-ing. - **Producer**

Meeting such cultural navigators gave me a huge sense of optimism because I could see they offered an answer to the question *So what would it look like in a perfect world?* The answer is that we would have more people like them in senior positions throughout the industry and they would recognise and bring on others with similar skills. Until now, people from minorities have always been in the position of going as supplicants to broadcasters, almost

nagging to get heard and often fighting for crumbs. What I have seen is a small band of media-savvy people with multiple cultural lenses, getting more skilled at playing the game on their own terms.

I pitch a good story, I pitch what is sexy. I think headlines. I just think of the title of the programme and I am playing the game ... their title was *21st Century Imams*, and they said we have this programme and I said *I will come but, you know what, the title is Who Wants To Be a Mullah?*, and they just wet themselves laughing saying *Can we say that?* I said *Who wants to watch 21st Century Imams?* *I wouldn't want to watch that* so it goes from there. - **Reporter**

▫ **Developing CQ in all staff**

However we cannot rely on just a few existing cultural navigators to improve the diversity of the output; we need to look at developing similar skills in all broadcasting staff. There is no doubt that people who have grown up with one foot in two very different cultures are often at an advantage. Just as being raised bi-lingual makes it much easier to pick up more languages, people who have grown up with cultural stereovision, learning to see things from a different perspective often comes more easily. It's not just immigrants or people who have been raised abroad who have that opportunity. Many people who have grown up outside the mainstream, for example, through being disabled or gay, develop these cultural navigation skills. Having to cross boundaries and having constantly to test your assumptions against those of other people helps to create a flexibility of mind and an inclusive attitude.

Developing CQ is a matter of personal motivation, of being willing to go outside of your own comfort zones and engage with people from other cultural groups in a meaningful and long-term way. But it is also something that should be encouraged and supported by broadcasters so that they are better tuned into their audiences. You cannot orchestrate the National Conversation if you don't know what your audiences want to say.

▫ **Nurture writing talent**

Many of my interviewees in drama and comedy felt that there was too much emphasis on bringing in untried talent on special entry schemes and that there was a pressing need to look at developing existing talent, particularly of writers and directors.

I think this thing of forever looking for new talent is nonsense. I think you have to really invest in the talent that you have got there. It's not true there are lots of geniuses and we don't know where they are hiding; there aren't that many of them and the truth is it is hard work and it's knowledge and expertise that gets you through. - **Producer**

All channels, especially the BBC have done so much with the emphasis and awareness about casting actors that are not non-White. Now I think they should stir the same effort with the writers because drama writing has not been nurtured. That is why television is so bad, one of the reasons, because the writing is so appalling. - **Director**

There's a wealth of talent already out here; they just need to do a little audit. - **Writer**

▫ **Create more opportunities to develop new talent alongside experienced talent**

A problem identified by several drama writers and directors was how to develop talent from under-represented groups, especially to make the leap from small budget drama series such as *Doctors* to the big budget prime-time fare. There is clearly a need for more intermediate stepping stones.

Programmes like *Doctors* don't give the opportunity to do signature pieces. I am of the school that says, why not give people a chance to have their own voice and by that I mean doing a programme where new writers might work with established directors, and new directors might work with established writers, overseen by a really strong producing and executive producing team and a strong crew that nurture these projects through ... you could encourage them to have an individual voice, so this half hour film can show you whether this person can actually do it, and they sort of fly on that if their projects work out very well. - **Director**

▫ **Make it easier to move between creative media**

One of the striking things I noted in the course of my research was how few of the successful drama and comedy producers from minorities working in TV and radio had developed their artistic confidence in the broadcasting industry. Almost all of the people I interviewed had come into broadcasting with that confidence already developed elsewhere. This enabled them to surmount the barriers that left many of their peers struggling, perhaps because they didn't need that validation of their colleagues and seniors in order to know they were good at what they did. Many developed their creative judgement and their eye for talent in independent film or theatre and saw that these were transferable skills:

If you know how to craft story, it is not that difficult to change mediums. What is difficult is spending all those years learning the craft of dramatic story telling, working with actors, script editing, crafting scripts and getting beneath the surface of scripts to bring out the universal truth, that you can't learn in a week, but how to work in a radio studio that is not that difficult. - **Drama producer**

Theatre director Paulette Randall also found the cross-over to television comedy was not a huge leap.

I had been directing, and also having trained as an actress and as a writer as well, so I had quite a lot of experience in theatre but none whatsoever in television but I went in as a trainee assistant producer. A lot of it was just as you would do as a director working with new writing, a lot of it was because you were developing sketches and they are like mini plays, so a lot of it you knew. The only thing that you didn't understand was the medium of television but you understood communication, so there were lots of things that you were learning very quickly about the difference between television and theatre but there were a lot of things that crossed over.

Those actors, writers and directors who have had experience of community theatre are also likely to have more awareness of diversity issues, to bring a more multicultural lens to their work. This was certainly the experience of drama producer Anne Edyvean.

I had been working community theatre in the East End of London. Obviously community theatre had been very politicised during the eighties. I came in with, I suppose, a political agenda, about what we now call diversity.

It also made her more inclined to go out and look for talent amongst people from minorities working in theatre. This is also where Paulette Randall sees hope for the future.

When you look at what is happening in theatre, you start to see what is going to happen in television in the future. The television writers of the future come from theatre and the more development you get in theatre then you are going to start to see the rewards of it in TV. That is beginning to happen but it has taken a long time and also it has taken a long time for it to consistently be developed and nurtured. But that is beginning to happen so we will start to see a change: it has with women and it has with working-class people.

It is currently not easy for experienced writing and directing talent to move into broadcasting. There used to be a BBC Television directors' course especially for theatre directors but this has long been discontinued; perhaps it's time to re-introduce it? There is also a need to offer pay scales commensurate with experience that such people offer.

I think you have to acknowledge that there are some terrifically talented people out there ploughing their own furrow, running their own theatre companies, doing all sorts of extraordinary work and they are not going to come in and make the tea and do work experience. - **Producer**

Shabina Aslam, Head of Diversity in BBC Radio Drama and a former theatre director herself, has also identified partnerships with theatre as a key route to getting greater diversity of talent into broadcasting.

The idea is that we have producers actually going out into the community and talking to these theatres, trying to build up a relationship and ultimately hopefully it is about theatres and radio drama being able to share actors, share the training of those actors, develop potential together and then do co-production, pass one writer or project from one medium to another, nurture youth theatre groups, that kind of thing.

▫ **Openness in recruitment**

You need to advertise all producers' jobs externally, advertise these jobs or you are never going to change the mix. And acknowledge that there are skills and there is experience out there. - **Drama producer**

The industry as a whole has a poor record on rigorous and open recruitment processes. Managers in the BBC and in the independent sector have estimated that more than half of all jobs are not advertised. Reasons given for not advertising jobs are: too little time to staff productions once they are commissioned; lack of funding for independent production companies to advertise; the number of applicants for advertised jobs is too great to administer; when a job is advertised, suitably qualified people form a very small proportion of the total applicants.

These are not, however, insurmountable problems. Solutions suggested by interviewees included: clearer job descriptions; software solutions for sifting applications fairly; establishing registers of qualified production staff that can be contacted when a job is going

to be advertised; earmarked funding in programme budgets for independent productions to cover costs of advertising.

When I am an indie and I go seeking commissions (a) they should give me the time to recruit which they don't, (b) they should give us the money to recruit properly because it takes time to recruit. I can see why people don't recruit but we have to stop that because actually all that is happening is that the same bunch of people is circulating around the system really. We have to tackle it. I would say let's put an end to the kind of word of mouth recruitment. -

Independent producer

▫ **Ensure diversity of interview panels**

Who sits on boards, mainly, they're not diverse. I sit on boards and the result is my area is ethnically diverse.

And do you think you have to make allowances for people?

No, you just see them differently.

Can you give me an example, have you got different reference points?

Yes, it's partly that but I just think you aren't scared by difference – that's part of the issue. There's no substitute for intelligence, intelligence will express itself in the same way across a range of people but I do think sometimes people are more likely, when they're faced with two candidates of similar ability, to plump for the one that just feels more like them, and that is often the White candidate. - **Editor**

There needs to be better guidance for interviewing disabled people, how to meet their access requirements and so on. At present there are no guidelines, no support, no rules, no disability adviser to turn to. Everyone who is likely to sit on boards at the BBC has to do Fair Selection training but that doesn't equip you for hiring a disabled person. The fact that I am disabled I think did make a difference to who we hired. – **Producer**

▫ **Promote inclusive working practices**

Many of the difficulties experienced by producers from minorities arose from the way the industry operates. They gave descriptions of low CQ commissioners and colleagues who didn't value diversity, production environments which disempowered people, the negative impact of short-term contracts, the general lack of political awareness about under-represented voices, a lack of openness in dealing with difficult issues. All these prevent people from being equally heard in the workplace and contributing fully to making programmes that are the most creative and culturally intelligent.

There were many calls to shift the balance of power away from the people who preserve the status quo.

The balance of power has to shift: people who are racist, who are obstructive, who just don't bother to look beyond what benefits them personally need to be rooted out or reformed. At the moment no-one speaks out because if they do they are the ones that get penalised, not the person they're complaining about.

– **Producer**

The industry needs to decide whether it genuinely wants disabled people's input or not. If it does, it needs to understand there are consequences to that. A disabled person may need to do things differently; there may be certain roles a disabled person can't carry out. At the moment the burden of responsibility is entirely on the shoulders of disabled people to prove they can do things and make it happen without being any trouble to anyone else – that's simply not realistic. The burden needs to be shared more equally. The industry has to be prepared to adapt how it does things. It needs to change from seeing us as people who can't do things to people who can do a lot of things if we're given the opportunity. - **Producer**

The following suggestions were made to equalise the opportunities for disabled people in broadcasting.

- Working environments such as studios and offices should be physically accessible and information and resources should be available in accessible formats.
- While Access to Work does provide funding for equipment and facilitators, the industry needs to be made more aware of how it works so that it understands how it can employ disabled people and be supportive in meeting their needs.
- Just as working parents have been given more flexibility to choose the roles that fit in with their childcare needs, there needs to be a willingness to adapt to disabled people's personal situation so that they are not prevented from participating.
- Permanent or long-term contracts make it easier for a disabled person to get equal access to work opportunities:

If you approach editors with no experience of disability it can be hard to find someone to take you. If I was an editor faced with three people and one had an impairment and was going to cause a few more complications, it's perfectly natural that I'd go for one of the other two. That's why a permanent contract is important. Then the organisation has a vested interest in adapting work to suit us, focus on what we can do. - **Producer**

▫ **Develop and apply more objective performance criteria**

The broadcasting industry is not very good at managing and developing people or getting rid of those who are not up to the job. The lack of objective and fairly applied criteria is a real barrier to establishing a meritocracy. Several people suggested it should be possible to develop more specific, objective criteria to assess competency in different jobs, creative and managerial.

What I have noticed interestingly is that many of the competencies for a manager are very similar across organisations and so even when it comes down to a journalist, it still might be about creativity, about judgement, as it would be in a widget making factory so I would say that you can extrapolate the competencies. - **BBC Manager**

In programme-making it was felt that there could be a greater effort to make explicit the criteria for recognising someone's success so that they could be compared in a more systematic way. Audience figures, Audience Appreciation Indices, press coverage, audience feedback could be combined with other criteria such as the programme's mix of perspectives, bringing in new voices, reaching a different section of the audience and so on. This would help to create recognition of people who had good CQ.

▫ **Use assessment centres for all senior editorial jobs**

Managers described how the BBC was very stringent in its assessment of applicants for some jobs but when it came to senior editorial jobs, all the sophisticated protocols “went out of the window” and the jobs went to whoever someone decided they wanted to appoint. Greater use of assessment centres was one suggestion to tackle this.

▫ **Mentoring and career development**

Mentoring, coaching and career development opportunities should be available to all staff as a way of maximising their creative contribution to broadcasting. There is clearly a particular need to ensure that talented people from under-represented groups do not fall by the wayside because industry working practices discriminate against them.

I would like to see much more encouragement by managers of people like me. I'm never encouraged like that. No one's ever said to me *So what's your next step?* - **Editor**

The presumption should be that everyone is allocated a mutually agreed mentor, preferably a senior person in the industry. There should be industry-wide guidelines about the role of the mentor so it does not simply become an act of patronage.

Special entry schemes

There were many interviewees who felt that such schemes should be unnecessary but reluctantly acknowledged they may still be needed in the short term. The feedback from those who have experienced such schemes was that they need to be run properly, with careful targeting, rigorous recruitment, a planned exit strategy and effective mentoring.

▫ **Targeting special entry schemes specifically to people who need the help**

I don't think it is a problem for most Asians to get into an organisation, so I don't think we should spend huge amounts of money trying to get Asians in television because it is pointless. I think Afro-Caribbeans have a problem at the entry point; there is not enough of them or the Chinese. You should spend money at the entry point on the groups that are not very well represented; it is easy to work that out. - **Commissioning editor**

Channel 4 has recently introduced a trainee researcher placement scheme for people from ethnic minorities to work with selected production companies for a year. The intention is to train people who will bring something different to the industry.

At the end of the day you don't want to continue simply employing mini-me, you want someone who has different life experience, who just sees things from a different perspective. Generally they all come with a great sense of identity, of family, of who their cultural group is. A lot of White people don't have to think about that because they just are the majority. Whereas if you've been brought up in the Turkish community, you've eaten Turkish food, your friends are Turkish, you listen to Turkish music but you've been educated and brought up here, there's just something different about you and you understand how important it is to value everybody. - **Editorial Manager, Cultural Diversity Channel 4**

▫ **Ensure rigorous recruitment**

Special entry schemes can only be effective if there is an industry-wide trust in them. This has to begin with proper recruitment so that once someone has been awarded a place, the expectation is that they are up to the job and will be fully supported in developing their career. People should be recruited in the expectation that they will contribute to the industry in ways which extend beyond their knowledge of disability or race so they are not ghettoised in such areas during training.

▫ **Ensure the schemes offer genuine skill development opportunities**

Schemes need to be planned to give a variety of opportunities to develop different skills and experience different working methods. Several disabled people who had started at the DPU identified this as its key benefit over current schemes.

It was a two year contract where you spent the first six months on the Unit's own magazine programme *From The Edge* but then you went on three placements of your own choosing to programmes that interested you. At the end of the two years I felt equipped to apply for other jobs. - **Producer**

▫ **Ensure schemes are not too short**

Everyone agreed that schemes shorter than one year were a waste of time for most people new to the industry. This was felt to be particularly true for disabled people for whom there may be an additional need to develop an understanding of their own access requirements.

▫ **Mentoring is key**

Several senior industry figures described how they had taken on a mentoring role to help develop newcomers to the industry and regretted that the value of this was overlooked in most special entry schemes.

I think it requires somebody to say right we are going to hire this person and we are going to move them on. Mentoring is so key. You have got to identify that talent and then try and nurture it. - **Independent producer**

▫ **Planned exit strategies**

Special entry schemes should be premised on the expectation that the people who are taken on them will continue to work in the industry. Otherwise they are a waste of time and money. - **Producer**

Much better to say, right, these are the competencies we are looking for, focus on making sure that you don't just recruit another load of post-grad journalists or whatever so you get people from a wide range of backgrounds, and then ensure that there is a job afterwards so they go through a year on the training scheme and then they roll into the post. - **BBC Manager**

▫ Share the Experience

Too many diversity initiatives are seen as a temporary patch here and there with no learning of what works and why. There needs to be greater industry-wide sharing and evaluation of such schemes so that good practice can be built on and spread to other parts of the industry.

Cultural Crucibles

Many of the people from minority backgrounds working in senior creative and editorial roles today owe their success to just a few programmes or departments that have existed in the past. These people have been pioneers in changing the agenda for what is heard in the National Conversation and I wanted to explore whether these “cultural crucibles” might offer any clues to how to get more diverse people into senior roles in the future. The three most frequently mentioned were London Weekend Television under John Birt, the drama department at BBC Radio 5 (now Five Live) in its original incarnation; and the BBC Current Affairs programme *Black Britain*.

What all these cultural crucibles appear to have had in common was:

- rigorous recruitment
- ethnically mixed staff
- a high CQ ethos: diversity valued from the top
- high editorial standards
- an acceptance of the political agenda as a tool for diversity

▫ London Weekend Television

Narinder Minhas, now Director of Programmes at the independent production company *Diverse*, began his career at *Weekend World*.

I think LWT was critical: I can't think of any other collection of people that have done as well than that category and that is twenty years ago, that is a long time ago, we have not had a whole new bunch of people. Those units can create and foster that kind of talent and help those people to get on.

As an illustration of rigorous recruitment, Samir Shah, now head of the independent company *Juniper*, recalls his arrival at LWT fresh from university:

LWT was an extraordinary place in the early eighties, a good clue to that I was interviewed for a lowly researcher's job, which is the lowest in the food chain, my final interview panel consisted of John Birt who went on to be Director General at the BBC, Greg Dyke who went on to be Director General of the BBC, Barry Cox who is the Vice Chair of Channel 4, David Cox who saved *Weekend World* and Nick Evans who went on to write *The Horse Whisperer* that became a massive thing, so it was an extraordinary place.

Very interesting was the recruitment procedure at LWT, the top people interviewed the most junior people coming into the company and they left everybody else to promote them. At the BBC it is the other way around; the more senior you are the bigger the knobs that interview you. At LWT it was the other way round, they wanted to make sure that they had a real hold on the people arriving.

▫ **Black Britain**

Pat Younge was another graduate of LWT, in his case *The London Programme* and went on to work on the award-winning series *Black Britain*.

And if you look round TV at the moment, Gillian Joseph who is the presenter on BBC London, she came to us as a radio reporter with no television experience, we gave her a reporting break on *Black Britain*. I got my first opportunity to series produce at the BBC. Kurt Barlin was a TV producer who we made into a reporter, and he also works for BBC London. Henry Bonser was a radio researcher who we gave some reporting opportunities to - he went on to be a radio presenter.

Fatima Salaria, an Asian woman on our team, she got her first opportunity to produce items and is now a producer at BBC Current Affairs. Joanna Burgh was an assistant producer who we gave the opportunity to produce and she is now a freelance producer, Sam Anstice was another AP we gave another opportunity to produce and she is now series producer for BBC Current Affairs (*Sam was White*). So that entire team made a massive difference to I'll argue a central part of the BBC in terms of London and Current Affairs.

▫ **Radio 5 Drama**

Turan Ali (now an independent producer), Pam Fraser-Solomon and Anne Edyvean (BBC Radio and TV drama producers) were part of the mix of talent that launched Radio 5 drama.

I was one of the three people from the outside world who was brought straight into the BBC as a producer, and it was particularly for the multicultural drama that I might be able to bring because in 1990 when I joined the Beeb, radio drama was wall-to-wall White Home Counties really. The other producers who were brought in also had experience of working with diverse communities as well.

The commitment to encouraging diverse voices came from the top, according to producer Anne Edyvean:

At that stage I saw very much ethnicity as being a key feature. I saw women as being a key feature, we were making for a youth audience and I thought there were issues around teenage-hood, teenage girls, that I found interesting.

Q. Did you find that the commissioners were responsive to that?

Absolutely. Those of us who worked in Radio 5 will all agree. I went to my first commissioning meeting, I had six projects, I thought I would die for these two and argue these two and give these two up. And I went through all six of them and they went *All right then*. I went *What all of them?! And she said Yes they sound good to me*. I think we were very lucky to come in at that stage, at that time.

The opportunity to develop their skills while doing the sort of work that was valued for its diversity was a good investment. All these producers have all taken those skills forward in their subsequent careers. None of these cultural crucibles exist today and I wasn't able to find anything that resembles them. They clearly served a very useful purpose: perhaps it is time to look at where some new ones could be created?

Who is going to ensure it gets better?

The ideal situation would be for improvement to happen organically without any formal regulation or monitoring, arising simply from creative leadership and culturally intelligent behaviour on the part of broadcasting managers and programme-makers alike.

But it is clear that it isn't going to happen like that. There is a danger that the strong monoculture that exists in the industry will continue to be as resistant to change as it has been for the last twenty years unless there is continuing external pressure. Where is that pressure going to come from?

Ofcom

The obvious place to look is to those responsible for the regulatory framework in which broadcasters operate. In a draft document produced as part of its review of public service broadcasting, the media regulator Ofcom has recently spelled out the ways in which public service broadcasters might demonstrate how they are fulfilling their obligations on cultural diversity:

Broadcasters should give a separate indication of how their programmes will reflect the cultural diversity of the UK. Examples of how this could be demonstrated are:

through the level of use of on-screen and off-screen talent
the range of perspectives engaged
the depiction of different communities.

However, these representations should be underpinned by a qualitative sense of diversity that demonstrates an approach that goes beyond tokenism. In particular, therefore, broadcasters should point to: where their output reflects the contribution of various ethnic groups to British society; any innovative or creative ways of achieving that, across various genres; and what commissioning strategies have been instrumental in delivering diversity to the screen.

Another dimension here would be a review of the scheduling of culturally diverse programming, or programming targeted at different communities. Other issues of diversity should also be given regard, such as age, sexual orientation, disability, etc.⁴⁵

This is a very welcome expression of the way we should move forward, one which does not focus on box-ticking but encourages a proper consideration of the many factors which make a difference to what appears on air and how that contributes to the National Conversation.

Ofcom should require a detailed response from broadcasters every year on how they are fulfilling these obligations. It needs to work with the broadcasters to agree who the under-represented people are (in detail – not just terms like Black and Asian, and not just in terms of ethnicity) and to require that they establish strategies to ensure their voices are heard across a multiplicity of programme genres.

The broadcasters' annual reports should not just list of a handful of programmes that they think are diverse but concrete evidence of infrastructural changes that have delivered diversity on a daily and ongoing basis across their output.

Ofcom should also ensure that broadcasters collect and publish information on the way in which different voices are being represented. This needs to be done in a way that is practical and not overly onerous, for example, as part of the compliance forms that producers already have to complete for each programme. This information could be collated to demonstrate, for example, the number of programmes made by people from currently under-represented groups, the time and channel they were broadcast, the mix of people in the production team, the stories being told. Ofcom could work with broadcasters to develop an industry-wide standard for such monitoring.

It is the recommendation of this report that:

- the above Ofcom guidance is adopted in the awarding of all licences to public service broadcasters and used to inform the new BBC Charter;
- broadcasters adopt these principles and, in the case of the BBC, incorporate them in the service agreements they draw up for each channel;
- Ofcom monitor the fulfilment of cultural diversity objectives across the entire industry, including the BBC

These recommendations are in line with those of the report on *Social Capital and Public Service Broadcasting*⁴⁶ which calls for broadcasters and regulators to address the explicit ways in which programmes build and maintain social capital.

Professional membership organisations

In talking to my interviewees it became clear there were certain longstanding issues facing all those in a particular professional group but which often disproportionately affected those people from minorities. An example was the long and convoluted drama commissioning and script development process for writers and the lack of a television directors' training course for theatre directors. These issues need to be addressed by the relevant trade bodies which could also play a more significant role than they currently do in ensuring diverse voices are fully represented in our broadcasting. Examples include:

PACT	Directors Guild of Great Britain
Radio Independents Group	Women in Film and Television
Equity	NUJ
The Writers Guild	BECTU

Some are already alert to the issues facing members who are from minorities, many have barely acknowledged them. All should be looking at their own organisations as well as their membership and asking which groups are under-represented, what are the experiences of their members when working with broadcasters and how can they address the difficulties they face. They have an important role to play in lobbying broadcasters and ensuring their members' voices are heard.

TV and radio critics

A positive review can give programme-makers the power to get a better slot or budget for their next programme, or simply to *get* their next commission. Commissioning editors' reputations are also secured on the reviews their commissions receive. So, identifying high CQ programmes and questioning those that are superficial or stereotypical in their portrayals of minorities, or are lazy in their casting, is a vital part of the role of the critic. Many interviewees identified particular critics who seemed particularly alert to these issues but also suggested that there should be more diversity in the people who are selected for those roles.

Broadcasting awards

Like the stamp of approval of critics, winning an award for a programme affects how much power that programme-maker has for the next twelve months. There is nothing at the moment which rewards high CQ programmes, programmes which successfully transcend cultural boundaries, make connections and bring insights from different perspectives. Perhaps that is something the Cultural Diversity Network could institute?

Forums for media debate

Several interviewees commented on the failure of media journalists to pursue the broadcasters on their lack of progress over the past twenty years. Publications such as *Broadcast* and *Guardian Media*, and events such as the *Edinburgh Television Festival* and the *Radio Festival* could all take a more critical and sustained approach to investigating and reporting on the broadcasters' actual achievements.

And how could audiences be engaged to demand more inclusive public service broadcasting? Several producers recalled that in the 1980s there was much more pressure on broadcasters from different minority groups, but that pressure seems to have receded now, even though the dissatisfaction over inadequate representation still exists. Is this because those audiences have become disillusioned and don't think their protests will make any difference? What can be done to ensure they do not give up on believing it is *their* public service too?

Online forums such as *britishbornchinese*, *Asians in Media* and *Ouch!* offer an opportunity to develop informed debate around specific programmes and reach out to wider networks of people. Rather than regarding each other as competition, organisations representing different minorities could be more effective if they worked together to raise awareness among the general public and apply joint pressure to challenge the industry monoculture.

The Vision Thing

The whole ecology of broadcasting is changing rapidly as audiences gain more choice in how they obtain their information and use their leisure time. Public service broadcasting's central role in people's lives can no longer be taken for granted. In order to remain at the heart of the National Conversation it has to stay at the forefront of the changes that are taking place in society, not be forever trying to catch up. Continued failure to respond to the diversity of today's audiences is a certain route to rapidly becoming irrelevant.

But it needn't be that way. Britain still leads the world in having a strong tradition of well-funded and high quality public service programme-making. It could also lead the world in demonstrating how its rich cultural diversity is a source of unparalleled creative opportunity and take delight in the programme-making possibilities that offers. Our music and fashion industries are thriving because they have recognised the value of cross-cultural experimentation and found a ready market for the resulting innovations. Broadcasting can do the same - but only if we enable a much wider mix of people to get involved and help to reshape the way we do things.

We need to make programmes that really resonate with modern Britain so that audiences of all backgrounds see public service broadcasting as the natural arena for a culturally intelligent dialogue with each other. A place that makes them feel equally valued and heard. A place they are drawn to because it makes them feel good about belonging to and participating in this society.

So let's do it.

About the author

Mukti Jain Champion was born in India and came to Britain at the age of four. While studying geology at Oxford University, she became involved in student radio and in 1981 won a place on the BBC's highly competitive television production trainee scheme. At the BBC she worked on a variety of news, magazine and entertainment programmes including *Breakfast Time* and *Tomorrow's World* and two major international documentary series *The Sea of Faith* and *Lovelaw*. In 1987 she left to set up her own independent production company. As well as making television documentaries and educational videos, her company provided production training to new recruits at the BBC Disability Programmes Unit.

Since 1995 Mukti has also produced a wide range of programmes for BBC Radio 4, with emphasis on bringing diverse stories and perspectives to the airwaves. Highlights include *Crossing the Black Waters*, an acclaimed history of the English East India Company which examined the rich exchange of goods and ideas between India and Britain prior to the establishment of the Raj, and *Beyond The Takeaway*, a series about the lives of second generation British Born Chinese. (For details see www.culturewise.org)

Alongside her career in programme-making, she has written several books, and been involved in many national and international initiatives to develop information and support for parents with disabilities. She was the founding editor of the journal *Disability, Pregnancy and Parenting International* and in 1997 won lottery funding to establish an associated national information service run by disabled people. As project director, she launched *Right from the Start*, a NHS initiative to improve maternity services for women with learning difficulties. Her books *The Baby Challenge* (Routledge 1990), *Who's Fit To Be a Parent?* (Routledge 1995) and films *Isobel's Baby* and *Learning To Be Mum* have been internationally influential in raising awareness and changing professional practice. She has also lectured widely on issues of parenting and social inclusion.

She is married with two teenage children who have grown up enjoying a strong sense of their mixed Indian, English and Highland Scots heritage.

Appendix

Details of Interview Sample (N= 102)

Interviewees by genre (%)

Comedy	8
Drama	27
Factual	44
News	8
Sport	2
Children's	3
Music/entertainment	8

Interviewees by job description (%)

Producer / Executive Producer/ Editor	49
Commissioner	3
Writer/ Director/ Performer	20
Researcher/ Assistant Producer	6
Journalist/ Reporter/ Presenter	22
Other	3

Interviewees by medium (%)

Television	54
Radio	28
Television and Radio	18

Interviewees by location (%)

London (Within M25)	83
Rest of UK	17

Interviewees by self-identifiers

Most people used more than one way to describe themselves in the course of the interview. Apart from professional titles, their descriptions included:

African
African-Caribbean
Afro-Caribbean
Asian
Bengali
Black
British Black
Buddhist
Caribbean
Catholic
British Chinese
Christian
Disabled
East Asian
Gay
Geordie
Ghanaian
Guyanese
Hindu
Home Counties
Indian
Londoner
Mancunian
Middle-aged
Middle-class
Mixed
Muslim
Northern
Oxbridge
Pakistani
Punjabi
Scottish
Sikh
Someone with an impairment
Sufi
Turkish Cypriot
Visually Impaired
Welsh
Wheelchair user
White
Working-class
Yorkshireman

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Look Who's Talking

Cultural Diversity Public Service Broadcasting and the National Conversation

Public service broadcasting has a vital role to play in mediating the National Conversation and in helping the diverse communities of the UK to learn about each other. To do this effectively it must reach as much of the population as possible and be trusted to portray all groups accurately and fairly, particularly those who are currently marginalised in society.

However, there is a widespread recognition that broadcasters have been slow to make progress on what has become known as *cultural diversity*, reflecting the full variety of people and perspectives that make up Britain today. This report sets out to examine the reasons why.

Based on the views of over one hundred programme-makers from across the broadcasting industry who have personal and professional experience of the barriers to diversity, the report highlights the ineffectiveness of existing industry approaches. It examines in detail the many aspects of the programme-making process which can marginalise voices outside the mainstream of society, from commissioning and production to scheduling and promotion.

The report demonstrates the value of a diverse programme-making workforce and explores why there are still so few people from minorities in senior creative or editorial roles. It reveals how people throughout the industry frequently feel powerless and frustrated because they cannot talk openly about the problems they face.

In its final sections, the report draws on the experience of programme-makers to identify practical ways forward. It proposes a new framework for making programmes which are inclusive and authentic in their representation of diverse voices, and makes recommendations for holding public service broadcasters to account in achieving this.

Report also available online

<http://www.nuff.ox.ac.uk/guardian/lookwhostalking.pdf>