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## Citizenship and Participation

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### Britishness and social cohesion

Trying to create a fixed sense of 'Britishness' will not achieve social cohesion

Addressing deprivation and how people connect is more important for social cohesion than trying to get everyone to adhere to the same fixed notion of 'Britishness'. This is according to research published today (21 July) by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The report also found that limited opportunities for British people in parts of the UK are undermining attempts to ensure new migrants are well received. It found a stark divide between places that are equipped to adapt to new migrants, and places that are not.

The research, Immigration and social cohesion in the UK, found that many people valued their children growing up with cultural diversity. However, some felt that their, and their children's, prospects were reduced because of immigration – particularly when it came to housing and education.

Lead Researcher Professor Mary Hickman, Director of the Institute for the Study of European Transformations (ISET) at London Metropolitan University, said: 'We found that although many British people value the UK for being multi-ethnic and multicultural, poverty and lack of opportunities undermine social cohesion, especially in certain parts of our towns and cities. A key factor influencing whether new migrants are accepted is the dominant story in each locality about who belongs there.'

Communities who saw their locality as belonging to everyone tended to be more open to new arrivals. Whereas communities who thought of a locality as belonging to them in particular were more likely to blame new arrivals for problems that often already existed.

The report also looked at feelings of Britishness among both the settled UK population and new migrants in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. It found that minority ethnic long-term residents and new arrivals were the most positive about what was good about Britain.

White English people who were questioned often found it difficult to reflect on their feelings of belonging to Britain, because they had not previously considered it. Whereas people in Scotland and Northern Ireland felt they belonged more to their respective nations than to Britain.

The authors conclude: 'The findings of this research go against the grain of the idea that we need a fixed notion of Britishness and British values. Rather, 'cohesion' is about negotiating the right balance between difference and unity.'

This press release summarises information from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report Immigration and social cohesion in the UK by Mary Hickman, Helen Crowley and Nick Mai.

21 July 2008

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