



iCoCo

Institute of Community Cohesion

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Prospectus

Summary

Since October 2005, when iCoCo was established, we have built up a formidable portfolio of work and established ourselves as a leading and significant player in practitioner support, research and policy development. We now wish to move to the next stage of our development.

The Institute seeks to expand and become more proactive in tackling one of the key issues of our time: how we live together and build a cohesive society. iCoCo will build the evidence base, shape public debates, and develop new policy ideas. It will also advise and guide the private, public and voluntary sectors on how we build communities where people interact with each other in a meaningful way, experience true equality of opportunity and are active in civil society.

Context

Britain, despite its status as one of the richest economies and one of the most diverse societies in the world, is still a place of inequality, exclusion and isolation. Segregation - residentially, socially, within schools and in the workplace - seems to be growing. Extremism, both political and religious, is on the rise as people become disillusioned and disconnected.

We live in a time with rapid and significant change generated by globalisation, demography and technology. Looking at Britain alone, the speed and scale of change is unprecedented. Society is grappling with changing notions of identity, belonging and citizenship as well as the rise of faith in the public sphere.

Britain is now characterised by what is termed 'super diversity'. Population mobility is on the rise and ease of international travel and communication means that we cannot any longer have fixed notions of what constitutes a 'community'.

Half of all our migrants arrived in the last generation and a third have come in the last decade. People come from a wider range of countries than ever before and new migrants often face difficulties accessing English language classes, lack practical knowledge about the UK, can face public hostility and lack opportunities to meet local people.

The role of Government is limited. The creation of the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) in May 2006 did help to provide a new focus for community cohesion. However, to really develop workable and effective solutions, rigorous research and policy development requires a degree of independence, which draws upon the expertise of the private and voluntary sector and one that transcends party political differences.

The work requires specialist knowledge and understanding, not just issue-based campaigning. We expect that the focus on equality issues will be maintained by local race equality councils and activist-led NGOs. However, solutions that will build a cohesive society require an organisation which can consider the wider context and develop a partnership approach. The challenge faced by our society is to develop policies which are flexible enough to simultaneously see the big picture and understand local needs.

Community cohesion – the policy debate

Integration and community cohesion are issues high up on the public policy agenda, particularly since the disturbances in several northern English mill towns in the summer of 2001 and the terrorist attacks that took place on September 11th in the US, and in London in July 2005.

In response to the community conflict of 2001, the Home Secretary commissioned Ted Cantele to lead a review of community cohesion. The Cantele Report provided a national overview of the state of race and community relations. It drew attention to polarised and segregated communities and argued that many people were living 'parallel lives', with little contact across ethnic boundaries, with ignorance providing an easy breeding ground for fear of the 'other'. The report also argued that little attempt had been made to determine what values defined modern, multi-racial Britain.

There has also been considerable academic debate, both within the UK and internationally, between those who have promoted a policy of multiculturalism and have stressed the importance of minority rights and those who have argued in favour of a more explicitly integrationalist approach. Influential arguments have also been made about whether or not diversity reduces social solidarity and trust.

The case for integration was led by the Commission for Racial Equality who argued for the need to deliver equality for all sections of the community, interaction between all sections of the community and participation by all sections of the community. A meaningful programme of interaction remains to be developed however – despite 2008 being declared the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue – and many organisations are only now beginning to develop 'living together' projects to build understanding and trust.

There has also been an increasing focus on the concept of 'Britishness' and to define what it means to be British today. Much of the debate around Britishness has focused on attempting to define the values that underpin this identity with perhaps less attention given to the impact of diaspora communities, especially in respect of faith, and how, in an ever more globalised world, local identities might be formed and contribute to supporting community well being.

Community cohesion – the policy framework

We believe that the way to approach the challenges we face is through an agenda based upon a developed notion of community cohesion.

To achieve a cohesive society, we need to encourage civic engagement and a richer notion of British citizenship with its attendant rights and responsibilities, promoting greater interaction within and between communities. The best and fairest societies are those in which people share experiences and common ambitions whatever their racial, religious or cultural backgrounds. In essence, we need to reassert the need for a society based on solidarity in which everyone's life chances are unaffected by what or where they were born.

Cohesion does not ignore the ongoing challenge of the structural inequalities in our society. A cohesive society is one in which the statistical chance of any member of society gaining access to a service, acquiring a job or achieving educational success is not related to his or her race, faith or cultural background – only to his or her talent, ambition and desire.

There has been much debate over an exact definition of cohesion. We believe it is both a process and an outcome, comprising at least six facets:

- **Interaction** between individuals, communities and wider society to promote trust and common understanding
- **Active citizenship**: participation in civil society, in public institutions, the workplace and in political life
- **Equality** of access to the labour market, housing, education, healthcare and social welfare. Evidence of progress towards equality of outcome across society
- **A society at ease with itself**, with a real sense of security, welcome and belonging
- **Respect** for the rule of law and the liberal values that underpin society
- The possession of civil, political and social **rights and responsibilities**

We believe that cohesion enshrines the relationship between the individual and their community with wider society. It is important to stress that cohesion is a process and condition that applies to every member of society, not just migrant or minority households.

We consider cohesion and integration takes place within different domains: the institutional domain of the workplace and places of learning; the social and socio-spatial domain of the community and neighbourhood; and political domain of trade union, political party and civil society organisation.

The **Institute of Community Cohesion** will not only develop this holistic view of what cohesion means, but also address some of the most important current challenges surrounding integration:

- Cohesion in the context of **super diversity**: with migrants from a wider range of countries than ever before, the old assumptions about integration based upon several well-defined, ethnic minority communities may no longer hold.
- **Segregation**: there is considerable debate over whether Britain is becoming more or less segregated by ethnicity and faith. Understanding patterns of segregation is complicated by the coincidence of income and ethnicity, and by differences in birth rates between communities. One key issue in this area is whether segregation in education leads to wider patterns of segregation.
- **Citizenship and social capital**: much intellectual energy and some small-scale policy initiatives have developed in recent years that look at ways of increasing civic and civil engagement. However, these have suffered from being piecemeal and often distanced from mainstream policy. Work is needed to understand how greater levels of mutuality and civic responsibility can be generated.
- Economic issues: **economic activity rates** among BME groups remain lower than among the white British population. The most striking case is that of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, whose employment rates lag a long way behind that of their white British counterparts.
- The rise of **extremism**: the 7 July 2005 terrorist attacks on London have cast light on religious extremists operating in the UK and seeking to recruit British-born Muslims in order to carry out attacks on the wider community. There has also been a rise in the share of the national vote won by extreme nationalist political parties such as the British National Party, particularly in deprived areas.
- **Language issues**: government policy has been contradictory in this area – for example the cutbacks in ESOL provision came at the same time as calls to make English language ability a condition of entry for some migrant groups and a questioning of automatically translating documents into community languages. A common language is crucial in our view for both social integration and participation in the labour market.

The Institute of Community Cohesion – the story so far

The Institute of Community Cohesion was established in 2005 to provide a new approach to race, diversity and multiculturalism. Our work focuses on building positive and harmonious community relations, using applied research to constantly develop practice and to build capacity of all the agencies and individuals involved.

iCoCo represents a unique partnership of academic, statutory and non-governmental bodies, which combine the experience and expertise of four Universities - Coventry, Warwick, DeMontfort and Leicester, with practitioners from a range of diverse backgrounds and professions. We are a not for profit organisation; any surpluses generated are used to fund further research.

We have grown our portfolio of work substantially since our inception and now wish to move towards a larger core establishment, substantially increasing our research and policy development capacity.

We believe that the Institute represents a unique organisation in this field, combining detailed knowledge of local issues and practice with a rigorous intellectual approach. We wish to capitalise upon this in a proactive advocacy, policy-making and debate-shaping role.

Achievements

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has designated iCoCo as “the one stop shop” for cohesion, following the report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion. **In under three years, the Institute has expanded rapidly, taking on a wider range and greater number of projects.**

These have included:

- Major city/borough-wide reviews of community cohesion for a number of local authorities and local strategic partners, covering many different parts of the country and types of authority
- Creation of a national network, sharing advice and good practice, of over 300 cohesion practitioners
- Production of toolkits and online resources for tension monitoring, schools and cohesion, communications, population dynamics and other areas
- A major review of the scale and impacts of migration at the local level
- Development of an innovative methodology for mapping the diversity of communities and understanding rapid population change
- Leadership development programmes
- Delivery of a range of learning events, including 9 regional conferences on the new duty on schools to promote cohesion
- A new awards scheme to celebrate grass roots organisations and their contribution to cohesion and intercultural dialogue
- Provision of support to an extensive range of partners and clients including CLG, DCSF, IDeA, the LGA, the British Council, Sport England and many local authorities and other public service providers
- Creation of a number of international collaborative projects

Vision

The **Institute of Community Cohesion** works to build a more cohesive society.

We believe that:

- **Diversity is good for society – socially, culturally, economically**
- **Diverse societies work best when they have a sense of social solidarity and mutual responsibility**
- **Every individual will benefit from a richer notion of citizenship and fuller involvement in civil society**

We need to develop policy solutions that enable us to live together rather than side by side; that promote greater shared identity; that support new migrants to adapt to life in Britain; that define what it means to be a citizen and instil a greater sense of civic responsibility amongst all those in our society.

Objectives

The Institute of Community Cohesion will:

- Become a national and international centre of expertise, as a leader in research and policy development for cohesion and integration issues
- Shape the national debate through the development and delivery of independent research and innovative policy solutions
- Develop practical solutions affecting community relations, citizenship and cohesion
- Conduct and commission research analysing current and emerging issues, helping to build the much needed evidence base on what works and why on cohesion
- Work with public and private sector organisations to test, implement and evaluate policy solutions in order to say with authority 'what works'
- Engage more actively in combating the activities of extremist groups that impact upon community cohesion
- Be a source of advice and guidance for public and private sectors on issues of community cohesion and integration
- Continue to build a database of good practice and action-orientated toolkits and train and develop professionals and practitioners
- Build capacity at all levels and provide development opportunities, ranging from the training of community leaders to postgraduate research-based programmes
- Bring together best practice and policy support for dealing with arrival of new migrants, population change and 'churn'
- Promote informed debate rather than advance a political agenda

Strategy

iCoCo will look to achieve its objectives through a number of routes:

- Producing high-quality, rigorous research and policy analysis
- Offering innovative and tested techniques to break down barriers between communities, to build trust and understanding and to improve integration and cohesion
- Being a key partner for governmental and statutory bodies in the field, adding value to their work
- Using its expertise and experience to build networks of those involved in the world of integration and facilitate discussion and debate
- Providing practical support to help agencies develop strategies and action plans
- Providing training and professional development at all levels
- Having a strong public affairs function to ensure that it is a visible and significant player in the public debate

Partnerships

iCoCo will be a key partner for public, private and voluntary sectors.

We would seek to augment and encourage the work of **government and statutory bodies** through activities such as:

- Advising central government on the legislative framework and institutional structures for cohesion and integration
- Working with central government departments to ensure that their core activities promote integration (e.g. developing educational materials covering cohesion issues for use in schools or advising on how enterprise policy might promote socio-economic inequality)
- Advising statutory bodies, such as the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, on policy development; there should also be scope to host events and carry out commissioned research for these bodies
- Evaluating current and planned citizenship testing programmes
- Hosting events and discussions for highlighting best practice on integration within public bodies
- Working with regional and local authorities on local integration strategies
- Assisting with the follow-up to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion

As outlined above, we plan to engage in a more commercial relationship with some organisations, particularly in the **private sector**. There is a growing market for specialist advice on improving equalities outcomes within the private sector. iCoCo could add considerable value within the existing market by providing strategic advice on how businesses can promote cohesion and integration.

In addition we seek to work with other organisations in the field and build partnerships with **academic and research institutions** such as universities and think tanks. We would also seek to forge formal partnerships with **overseas institutions** in order to find policy ideas that have been successful elsewhere, establish whether they are relevant to the UK case and develop an understanding of best practice. For example, iCoCo could work with the Migration Policy Institute in the United States, drawing on the findings of the Transatlantic Task Force on Immigration and Integration.

Notes