GOING TO COLLEGE
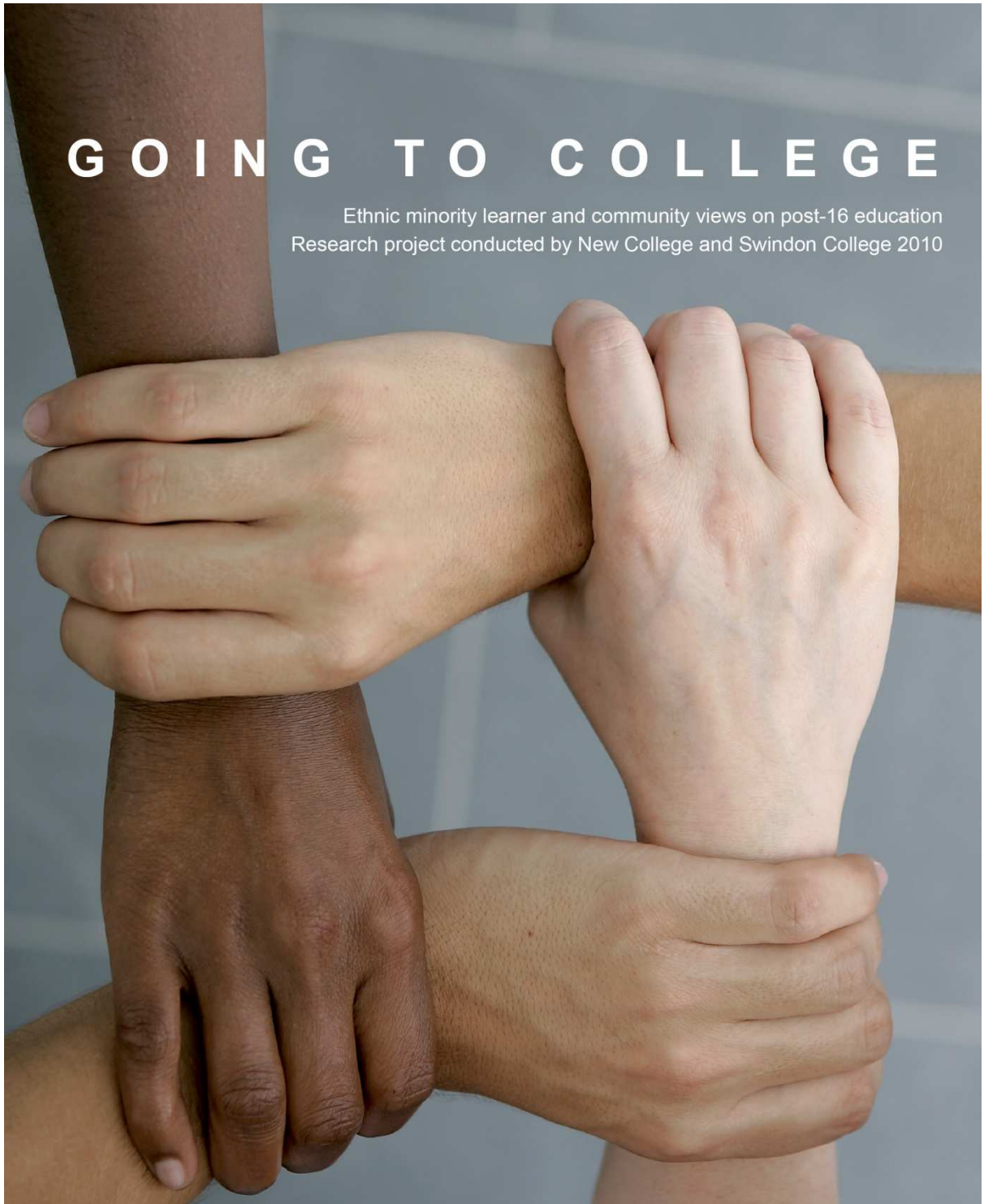
Ethnic minority learner and community views on post-16 education
Research project conducted by New College and Swindon College 2010

New College *Swindon*

Swindon College

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Going to College
Views on post-16 education from Black and Asian minority ethnic learners and community members

Contents

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1. Summary of Findings

Are young people from Black and Asian minority ethnic (BME) groups likely to attend college in Swindon?
- Young people (16-18) of BME background are well represented in both colleges (11% and 14% in 08 09) as against 11% in the whole Swindon secondary school population.

How do they choose? How are the colleges perceived?
- Young people make their own post 16 educational choices based upon interest in subjects, courses and career aspirations.
- Parents encourage post 16 education and influence the choice of college and type of course.
- Ethnic minority learners hear good news about both colleges from friends and relatives, good experience and good results.
- Parents and prospective learners have positive views about both colleges and the information and events provided by the schools and colleges are perceived to be helpful.
- Learners notice and value the ethnic diversity, visible in the colleges, portrayed in marketing literature and in college activities.
- Asian community leaders have high expectations of young people and the colleges, recognising the many social influences impacting on learner progress.
- Academic qualifications are valued, with two thirds of interviewees aspiring to A levels and a route to university for themselves or members of their family/community.
- Location of the college was perceived as important by a third of respondents.

What do Swindon BME learners think of their college experience?
- The college experience, atmosphere and learning environment at each college were positively described by learners past and present for their college.
- Personal experience of racist bullying or harassment at either college was much less than at school (3% of interviewees). The adult environment was identified as the main reason.
- Opinions on methods of teaching and learning identified no obvious barriers. Suggestions such as better access to computers were similar to those recorded on whole college populations.
- Requests for additional on course support were made for subject specific topics and for English language for immigrants whose first language is not English.
- Comments on college facilities were in line with other students, although cultural adaptations such as prayer room provision or food observances were mentioned.
- College learner opinion surveys confirm that ethnic minority learners agree that they are treated fairly and equally and that they feel safe at college.

How successful are Swindon BME learners at college?
- Detailed analysis of results for college courses in Swindon generally follow national course trends for achievement at 16 -18 for the whole population with aggregated BME groups achieving 77% and 83% success rates at the colleges in 09 10.

What can Swindon colleges do to improve the experience and attainment of BME learners?
- Maintain dialogue with BME learner and community groups.
- Increase awareness amongst school students and families of options other than A levels.
- Review on course support.

2.   Background and rationale

This project was funded by the Learning and Skills Information Service (LSIS) and undertaken by the two Equality and Diversity Coordinators at New College, Swindon and Swindon College from May to November 2010.

The aim of the work is to enable the colleges to improve learner experience and success at college with projected outcomes as follows:

Better informed analysis of national and college data to identify achievement gaps and better address these
Greater awareness of the experience of selected groups of college learners
Greater awareness of the perceptions of prospective learners and parents
Greater collaboration between the two colleges through joint investigation
Presenting further education to community groups in a cohesive way
Initiating on-going dialogue with the local community

Project description: Research into factors affecting academic under-achievement by identified ethnic groups in post-16 further education, in the Swindon area and recommended actions to address these. The principal focus is on 16-18 year old minority ethnic learners studying for long courses.   College contributions included detailed analysis of participation and achievement data and internal learner opinion surveys. Funding was used to elicit opinion from learners and the local community, largely through informal interviews. The learner voice and community views will shape the actions drawn from the project.

Analysis of achievement data at both colleges over recent years shows variations in the performance levels of individual Asian ethnic groups around the college and national benchmarks and the survey sample set out to include interviews with learners of these types. This qualitative research was also intended to be inclusive and promote community cohesion.

3. Methodology

From the outset this project was designed to elicit opinion from the BME community, particularly the largest Asian groups, in order to inform local provision. The existing statistical data had been explored before applying for funding and so this research project was clearly focussed on qualitative investigation. The project coordinators, Equality and Diversity Advisers at each of the colleges, undertook the project, conducting the interviews and producing the report. Interviews were conducted at each college, three youth groups and community associations based at places of worship.

Local bodies who contributed to the research have included:
New College, Swindon
Swindon College
Swindon Borough Council: Community Development, Connexions, Children's Services
Ridgeway School in Wroughton
Wiltshire College
Sikh Temple (Sri Guru Nanak Gurdwara)
Broad Street Mosque (Thamesdown Islamic Association)
SKEETZ Youth Club at Broadgreen Community Centre
Muslim Youth Development Programme, Drove Centre
Asian Girls Group, Drove Centre

The project ran from May to November 2010 and the report published in March 2011.

4. Interview Results

4.1 Introduction

All responses have been analysed by way of a coding frame in order to turn the subjective and individualised views into a statistical analysis. A sample of responses were taken to tease out themes and then the emerging themes were applied to all responses in order to gain a weight of views.

As the project sought to obtain views on specific matters then it is natural that these themes emerged. However, additional angles were also obtained and this "free-text" method permitted respondents to put their views forward in an unfettered way and the themes are therefore in their words not the interviewers' words.

The respondents can be divided into three categories: current learners, communities (leaders, families & young people) and prospective learners (met at an open day at one college). The range of people interviewed is such that some outputs are suited to current learners alone, some to views of communities where apparent and some to all respondents.

Interviews were conducted in New College Swindon, Swindon College and other community settings between June and November 2010 with 90 people who identified as ethnic minority people in 83 interview situations. 39 were current learners, 17 were open day visitors and potential learners and 34 other members of ethnic minority communities. Interviewees were drawn from both genders, 7 religions and none, 12 ethnic groupings and a wide age range (Detail on Page 9).

No patterns of difference by gender were observed.

4.2 Making the Choice - Current Learners

4.2.1 People influences

Half of current learners stated that the main or even only influence of their choice of college or course was theirs. Where someone else was the main influence then a further quarter said they were the second influence.

Parents were the next strongest influence and featured in more than half the decisions.

Other family members, teachers and friends were lesser influences but still featured.

Only one current learner mentioned community and one made the choice in spite of parents' views. Where parents and learners disagreed otherwise then on every other occasion there was an accommodation by the parents.

Table 1 People Influence

Person	People Influences in order		
	1st	2nd	3rd
Self	19	9	1
Parents	12	5	4
Friends	2	8	1
Teachers	3	2	0
Cousin	1	1	2
Older Sibling	2	0	3
Community	0	1	0
Against Parents	0	0	1
Total	39	26	12

4.2.2 College/Course/Career Influences

The most important item of these was the actual course. 35 learners cited this and for 30 of these it was the main influence or second influence.

27 learners cited career as an influence. For 20 it was the specific college that mattered.

The next most important influence was the value of academic qualifications, notably seen as A levels and going to university. 19 cited this but this was a third influence for most of these. This cannot be disconnected to the association of A levels with New College, so the two tend to follow.

Table 2 – Academic & Career Influences

	Academic & Career Influences in order		
Choice items	1st	2nd	3rd
Career	10	9	8
College	6	7	7
Course	16	14	5
Proximity	4	2	5
A/Uni	2	6	11
Alt 6th Form	1	0	0
Web search	0	1	0
Assessment method	0	0	1
Total	39	39	37

11 said that the proximity of the college was an influence and came highest for some.

Of the 39 current learners, 9 cited Open Days and taster sessions as being particularly useful, 12 were strongly influenced by school teachers or other guidance and 3 changed colleges following introductory sessions.

Every current learner and many past learners spoke of their appreciation of the atmosphere and learning style being right for *them* at *their college*, some saying the other was not right for their personal learning style.

4.3 Experiences at College – Current and Past Learners

4.3.1 Bullying & Racism

97% of respondents had no personal experience of any racism or bullying from peers at college. 10% had heard racist remarks not directed at them within a college site but not whilst any member of staff was present.

This compares well to their experience at school where 62% stated they had experienced racist bullying or racist remarks directed at them. Most respondents explained that both colleges challenged racism well but the biggest influence was that the learners themselves were more mature (some said self-governance).

93% of learners felt they were fully respected by staff.

74% commented on the ease of making friends and those that didn't tended to be at college with established friends. There was no sense of exclusion.

Those that commented knew the college systems to report anything if they did experience it, having taken this in during induction.

4.3.2 Choice of College and Course

Every learner stated they were completely happy with the college and course they had chosen. A minority of these had sampled the other college or had an experience at a college in another town or city and had not been as happy. This was based on a range of issues but especially teaching styles and the whole atmosphere at the colleges they had been at. Part of this was a distinction between "academic" and "non-academic" views of themselves and identifying a college as thus.

A number of learners had started off on one course and found it was not for them and were now completely satisfied. They also found that the process of changing course and the advice they received was very supportive.

4.3.3 Teaching and Learning

No specific barriers to learning and success were common among the responses. 84% of learners found that the teaching and learning styles suited them either completely or nearly completely. Those that found a few issues or the very small numbers that found as many issues as positives, named different ones. A few examples are: access to computers, crowding in certain places, too much or too little interactive teaching.

Many commented on the responsibility as a learner for their own studies and thriving on this. Most felt that high attainment was expected by their teachers and they tried to meet these expectations.

"High-Tec" equipment such as interactive whiteboards was popular. Moodle and college systems were less popular, particularly when used as messaging systems between tutors and learners.

It is suspected that these comments would be in any report on learner preferences and these issues are not necessarily connected to ethnicity.

Six current learners (15% of those surveyed) specifically requested additional help, four with maths at different levels, two for support classes associated with subjects and two speakers of other languages who had acquired sufficient skill for entry to courses but suggested further English language support as something that would assist their progression. The latter was also raised by other community members and both colleges recognise this as a potential difficulty for recent immigrants who have acquired English Language skills as they progress to higher level courses.

4.3.4 Facilities - Other Issues

A number of learners at one college mentioned specific issues pertaining to the college. Many preferred to eat off-site as they complained of high prices at college. A lesser number mentioned the lack of Halal or Kosher food as a choice and fewer still said they would use a prayer room if it was provided. The other college has the latter in both buildings but does not cater for Religious food requirements specifically either.

4.4 Views from Religious & Community Leaders

The number of religious groups and community groups that have been interviewed was limited by the time limits of the project and the coincidence of religious practices.

The researchers visited the main Sikh and Muslim places of worship in Swindon and Youth Clubs specifically catering for Asian and/or Muslim young of both genders. The sample specifically included religious & community leaders (male) to discuss their views and influence. It also included parents and families as well as young people from early teens through to post graduates (both genders). Many of those now parents also related their own post-16 educational experiences.

The results of the research are reported in two sections as the outcomes were in quite different forms.

4.4.1 Choice of College and Course

Perhaps the most telling finding was about the route young people should take. It was expected that certain communities would want many of their young people to take "A" levels prior to a degree before entering certain professions but this "stereotype" of Indian backgrounds was just as strongly held by those from Pakistani Muslim backgrounds. Similar views were expressed by Bangladeshi young people too.

Nor was it a case of some young people following this route. All leaders (and many parents) assumed a default for *all* young people to take "A" levels and a degree *at a traditional* university. What happened next they were less concerned about, but it was hoped that every young person possible from their communities would and nearly all were expected to do this. It seems that the "3rd generation" should not have any of the disadvantages their parents and grandparents may often have suffered in starting their adult working life.

When pressed on alternative routes they did not belittle more vocational study or other qualification types but made it clear that if at all possible their young people should do "A" levels. This did not appear to be linked to an analysis of the chances of success or failure, although access to job opportunities in vocational areas was important. None of this was related to the status of the two colleges as both were explicitly held in high regard; it was the qualification that mattered. Work with the communities post-project to ensure they are aware of the viability of alternative approaches is seen as important and for both colleges.

They expressed positives for those learners that did take other forms of study at both colleges stating that they did well. For those entering vocational areas or trades they again stressed the importance of good qualifications to lead to success in running their own businesses. High attainment was the key to them for every learner whatever the course, but this does not change the default expectation around "A" levels and type of university.

Another generational issue that came from leaders was that young people were not interested in working anti-social hours. This was seen as something they had witnessed their elders do and their expectations were "higher" and more demanding in how they lived their lives. They had high aspirations for their own lives in terms of financial and other status but were not keen to achieve this through long hours of work whether in family businesses or their own work.

4.5 Families and Young People - Choice of College and Course

These views were consistent with the community leaders but not as steadfast. 69% of those interviewed were firm about the "A" level and degree route, but did not say it had to be a "traditional" university that followed. Further that left 31% seeing other routes for post-16 education. In practice many learners are choosing Level 3 courses other than "A" levels at either of the two colleges.

Many then hope that a degree will follow and entry into the professions is the preference for 63% of respondents, but this is not such a firm a view as the leaders.

The reputation of both colleges was high with only one person reporting less than favourably. 33% had high regard for both, 17% specifically for one and 50% specifically for the other. Most of these spoke favourably of both but some had a preference linked to their learning style. The researchers are aware of these differences but this is not the place to discuss this further. The importance in this report with regards reputation is that it is very high for both colleges amongst BME communities and therefore it is qualification type not reputation that affects their choice.

The preference for "A" levels and degrees is somewhat balanced in reality by the provision of alternatives and strong reputation based on the experience of adults who had attended some years ago. Many learners were influenced by older siblings and peers more but generally it was again the young people who most often made the choice of college and course.

More than half of respondents said that it was the young person who led the choice and some said it was them alone. The vast majority saw it as a supported process but nearly all said the young person was the prime decision maker or closely second. What differed was the order of those providing support to their decisions or guiding them the most. Parents featured strongly but for many it was siblings that were more influential.

Cousins, uncles and aunts also featured. Peers were less influential but some were influenced by them. A few took the advice of other family members ahead of their parents. No-one said that their parents did not support their decision once made though. Other than the specific influence of wider family members, there seem to be no special issues for these communities around who makes the choice.

Specific courses were more important to some learners rather than a type of qualification or a specific college. For some, it was the proximity of the college to their home that was the first part of their choice. Some only considered one college and one route and this included a few who simply wanted to stay in their school as they offered a 6th form (2 schools and one Academy do this).

BME students are represented in the two 6th forms in proportions suggesting that this is largely progression within the school. Family members expressed strong affinity with school 6th form.

There were no barriers to learning voiced. Some found certain teachers at one college were too didactic or formal but most were very happy with most teaching and teachers.

Advice and Guidance for some worked well, but some wanted different types of guidance. That received was often linked to specific courses at a specific college. One college was complemented more on its Open Days and work in schools than the other and seems to be more effective with these communities than the other. This will be looked at post-project.

Just to show that the reality worked out differently for some past post-16 learners to the default view, a number of adults who had taken vocational courses at that age had either gone on to do degrees straightaway or more commonly later in their careers or lives.

So although not as strict a view for families as that of community leaders, the most popular choice was that post-16 education should be "A" levels and degrees for most young people.

5. Interviewee data

Table 3 Interviewee Demographics

						Ethnic Group Self declared		Religion	
Total	90			Disabled	1				
Female	40								
Male	50					Any Other	1	Muslim	29
						Afghan	3	Sikh	22
Age Counts	13	1	**Age Groups**	11-15	20	Black African	8	Hindu	3
	14	2		16-19	47	Black Caribbean	4	Buddhist	7
	15	16		20-29	10	Black British	1	Christian	5
	16	14		30-39	2	Bangladeshi	10	Catholic	6
	17	20		40-49	1	Chinese	1	Jewish	1
	18	6		50+	10	Indian	27	Atheist	1
	19	7				Pakistani	14	Other	2
	20	3				Other Asian Includes Nepalese	19	Unknown	5
	21	2				Mixed White & Black Caribbean	1	None	9
						Mixed White & Asian	1		

Table 4 Status of interviewee

School learner	23	Current New College	31	University student	3	Parent	2
6th Form learner	2	Current Swindon College	10	Working	3	Community Leader/member	16

Some interviewees whose status is recorded as other than a school or college learner had studied at either or both colleges on a full or part time basis.

6. Contextual Information

6.1 Background information on BME learners at New College, Swindon

Participation
We have approximately 500 BME 16-18 year old learners with the aggregated BME proportion at New College exceeding the local school population with a year on year 1pp.

Table 5: New College participation by ethnicity		BME (Not White)	All White	Unknown
09 10	Students 16-18	15%	84%	1%
08 09		14%	84%	2%

University Entrance 2010
At New College 408 learners stated that they were starting a university level course in 2010, with a higher rate from black and minority ethnic groups than their representation in the 16-18 New College population, ie, 19% against 15%.

Success rates are closely monitored and vary around the college rate year on year. There is considerable variation between individual ethnic groups and variation year on year.

Table 6: New College success by ethnicity (Totals less than 100% where Ethnicity unknown)										
16-18	BME (Not White) % by Enrol-ment	BME Success	Nat Rate	White British % by Enrol-ment	White British Success	Nat Rate	White Other % by Enrol-ment	White Other Success	Nat Rate	Whole college Success
09 10	18%	77%	77%	77%	78%	79%	3%	76%	80%	78%
08 09	18%	79%	77%	77%	75%	79%	3%	76%	80%	76%

Nat Rate refers to the 08 09 national benchmarks for general FE colleges taken from ProAchieve.

Student Opinions
Three College-wide student surveys conducted in 08 09 and 09 10 revealed that total responses from aggregated ethnic minority groups were equally or more positive than White British students in all three surveys. There is great variation between the minority ethnic groups item by item and year on year which makes trends difficult to discern, for example, in 08 09 agreement that *My teacher treats us all fairly and equally:* BME 97%, White British 95%, White Other 97%.

6.2 Background information on BME learners at Swindon College

Participation
We have approximately 450 BME 16-18 year old learners with the aggregated BME proportion at Swindon College close to matching the local school population. Every ethnic background is represented and across most curriculum areas. There is higher participation at 19+.

Table 7: Swindon College participation by ethnicity		BME (Not White)	All White	Unknown
09 10	Students 16-18	10%	89%	<1%
08 09		11%	88%	<1%

University Entrance 2010
48 learners from Swindon College were known to be going straight on to university but this destination data is not complete. Many learners were going on to higher level studies with the intention to study at degree level in the near future.

Success rates have increased significantly for all learners in the last few years and are now above national average for the whole college. Ethnic minority learners' success rates have risen at an even higher rate to match and now exceed White learners. There is some variation between ethnic groups and year on year but most differences occur between 16-18 & 19+ provisions for each ethnicity suggesting that no ethnic group underachieves in general.

Table 8: Swindon College success by ethnicity									
16-18	BME (Not White) % by Enrol-ment	BME Success	Nat Rate	White British % by Enrol-ment	White British Success	Nat Rate	White Other % by Enrol-ment	White Other Success	Nat Rate	Whole College Success
09 10	11%	83%	77%	88%	78%	79%	1%	78%	80%	80%
08 09	12%	76%	77%	87%	79%	79%	1%	88%	80%	76%

Nat Rate refers to the 08 09 national benchmarks for general FE colleges taken from ProAchieve

Student Opinions
Learner and parent surveys are conducted each year. Those from ethnic minorities tend to have a lower expectation than White learners when they enter college but mid-year surveys show that their actual experience is more positive than White learners in all respects. Questions around fair treatment and lack of bullying return 97-98% positive responses.

6.3 Local Demographics

Swindon is a town with a population of 192,000. Swindon has experienced recent changes in population with current estimates (Swindon Borough Council, 2008)[1].

Table 9	Swindon Population	All Ages
	Asian or Asian British	3.16%
	Black or Black British	1.07%
	Mixed	1.45%
	Other Ethnic Groups	1.23%
	White Minority Ethnic	4.56%
	White British	88.53%

Neither the local population data nor the learner data at either college is sufficiently robust to accurately report on specific sections of the community such as Nepalese or Goan students. Learners interviewed from these groups identified their ethnic group as Asian, given the choices available. Both groups are increasing with notable growth in the Goan community, many of whom attend the local Roman Catholic school.

Swindon has a history of good community involvement, social inclusion and little evidence of racial conflict. An incident in 2006 involving white and Asian learners at a local school alarmed all sections of the community and education providers were amongst those who examined their policies, procedures and practices and renewed their efforts to promote good relations.

6.4 Participation in post 16 education in Swindon

All but two secondary schools in Swindon are for ages 11-16. There are two large further education colleges in the town, Swindon College having a more vocational emphasis and New College more academic. Both offer Higher Education. Approximately 65% of Swindon learners study at a further education college, while approximately 10% study at one of the two Sixth Forms (Connexions 08 09 cohort at August 2010)[2], one of which is at the local Roman Catholic College, with BME learners represented in the same proportion as the secondary school population.

"Swindon has a relatively self contained learning market with **85% of 16/17 year old residents attending learning in the Borough**. Cirencester College accounts for a further 10% of enrolments. In this age bracket, New College is the biggest provider accounting for 51% of enrolments (not students) and Swindon College for 34%." (Swindon Borough Council, 2008)[3]

The same study analysed the data on learners who had left further education without completing courses and noted that there were slightly more males (53%) than females (47%) and that they were very marginally more likely to be White and less likely to be of BME origin.

In the same dataset Connexions report the young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) as 8% of the total cohort of whom ethnic minorities featured as follows:

Table 10		Not in Employment Education or Training
	Asian or Asian British	3%
	Black or Black British	1%
	Mixed	2%
	Other Ethnic Groups	1%
	White Minority Ethnic	2%
	White British	86%

The catchment areas for each college are wide with approximately 27% of New College and 26% of Swindon College's 16-18 learner body being from outside Swindon.[4]

Table 11			
08 09 Learner populations	White British	% BME Learners	Of whom % Asian Learners
Swindon Secondary School population	84%	11%	6%
New College Swindon 16-18	81%	14%	7%
Swindon College 16-18	88%	11%	5%

6.5 Achievement in education (local and national)

For the year 08 09, Swindon Borough Council reported overall achievement in Swindon at 46% for 5 GCSE A-C including English and Maths, with White British achievement at 45% and considerable variation amongst the other ethnic groups (range 38% to 86%).

Throughout England the Equality and Human Rights Commission concluded that ethnic differences in GCSE (5+ good GCSEs or equivalent including English/Welsh and Maths) results in 2008/2009 have narrowed …
  "A high proportion of Chinese (72%) and Indian (67%) pupils achieved 5+ good GCSEs in 2009. The proportion of Bangladeshi, Black African and White British pupils was close to the average (of 51%). Black Caribbean and Pakistani learners fell below the average at 39% and 43% respectively. Girls outperformed boys in all ethnic groups". (EHRC, 2010, Pages 325 and 332)[5]

For Higher Education, the EHRC report that
" ….the gap in attainment between ethnic groups has narrowed more clearly, with some previously low-performing groups catching up with the average. Whereas a generation ago almost all the learners on the university campus were White British, today 1 in 5 are from ethnic minority groups…" (EHRC, 2010, Page 300)[6]

6.6 Bullying at school (national)

In England as a whole, according to the Youth Cohort Study and the Longitudinal Study of Young People, White pupils were most likely to report being bullied, with around two-thirds (67%) of White pupils reporting being bullied (2004-06). Mixed Race pupils (66%), Black African (62%) and Black Caribbean pupils (61%) also reported relatively high rates of bullying compared to Pakistani (58%), Bangladeshi (52%) and Indian pupils (49%) (EHRC, 2010, Page 321).[7]

References

[1] Swindon Borough Council Mid 2008 estimate based on 2006 data
[2] Swindon Borough Council Connexions Swindon LA 16-18 Destinations August 2010 by Ethnicity
[3] *Raising the Participation Age A report on Phase 1 of the Swindon Trial*, Swindon Borough Council, April 2010
[4] Data supplied by Colleges based on 08 09 learner population on long courses
[5] *Statistical First Release, Key Stage 4 Attainment by Pupil Characteristics, in England 2008/09*. Statistical First Release 34/2009. DCSF 2010b.
[6] *How Fair is Britain? Triennial Review*, Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010
[7] *Youth Cohort Study and Longitudinal Study of Young People in England: The Activities and Experiences of 16 year olds: England 2007*. DCSF 2008, in *How Fair is Britain? Triennial Review*, Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010