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BRITISH
ACADEMY

for the humanities and social sciences

Key lessons

“If you could do
one thing...”

Local actions
to promote
social integration



1 Introduction

Britain, like most other highly developed societies, has become increasingly diverse over the last half century, and will become even more so in future. From around 3 per cent in 1950, the proportion of the British population with a migration background rose to nearly 20 per cent in the 2011 census, and among young people the proportion was considerably higher. The origins of these young people have also become increasingly diverse. Migrants coming to Britain today include refugees from a wider range of countries. Increasing diversity brings both opportunities and challenges.

A long series of government reports and legislation has sought to tackle some of these challenges – but there has never been an integration policy as such. While there exists a good body of evidence on social integration in the UK, little has been done previously to draw together the evidence from different sources and provide local government, charities and other organisations with practical tools to help them to tackle issues that affect their communities. The British Academy aimed to change that.

Through the production of two companion reports *10 Local actions to promote social integration* and *The integration of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers*, we present a range of practical, evidence-based interventions which could be implemented at a local level to promote integration, both of long-settled minority communities, as well as newly-arrived migrants including refugees, asylum seekers and children.

This document provides a brief summary of the project and presents the key lessons, drawn from both reports.

2 What we did

The British Academy commissioned a collection of 11 essays, drawing on the expertise and experience of academics and practitioners to suggest a series of local actions. Each essay offers a simple, practical idea to improve social integration, with the understanding that local bodies have – and are likely to continue to have – constrained resources. The collection covers a range of aspects of integration across language, education, employment, social relations and political engagement.

In addition, drawing on the findings of a major call for evidence, which received 45 submissions and led to more than 150 individual leads, as well as a review of existing literature, the Academy sought out a series of 8 case studies. These focussed on the integration experiences of recently arrived migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in different parts of the UK, with a particular emphasis on young people. The case studies were generously supported by Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

3 What we found

The sheer volume of information we received, in addition to the conversations sparked by this work, demonstrate that there is a huge range of effective activities going on around the country. These range from small charities, schools, universities, the police service and other public sector organisations, often working together in effective local partnerships. What stands out is the thoughtful, creative and innovative approach they have taken to deliver interventions that are making a real impact – not only on the lives of migrant communities, but in many cases the established community as well.

Many of the projects emerged from a deep-rooted commitment to and identification with the local area and promote social integration through a shared understanding of the neighbourhood, town, or region. Despite this, many of the examples we gathered demonstrate serious potential to be emulated or adapted, in whole or in part, in other localities, regions, or for different communities.

The initiatives featured across both research reports – as well as numerous projects we came across but were unable to include in this work – have many common features, and highlight some key lessons, both for any organisation wanting to make a difference locally and for Government, in the design of a national integration strategy with local delivery components.



What stands out is the thoughtful, creative and innovative approach taken by the featured projects

Key lessons

- Social integration is a **two-way process**; the most successful interventions offer something back to the existing community. This includes learning experiences; the opportunity to socialise and make new friends from different backgrounds; to gain leadership skills or exchange language skills; or simply to participate in something creative.
- Many of the interventions featured in the reports have grown organically over time and have emerged from a **clear need** and been able to **adapt** as needs changed. Having access to, and being able to use, **good data** is crucial to understanding the challenges faced by a local area.
- **Involving members of migrant communities** in the design and implementation of projects is important. Many of the initiatives identified and trained **local ‘champions’** to help them deliver their services, including people of all ages and gender. **Volunteers** are a key resource in many of the interventions although many projects require modest resources as well, including at least some paid staff.
- Whilst we deliberately tried to seek out interventions that did not take significant resources to deliver, it seems clear that some things which make a real difference for migrant communities do not cost anything at all in financial terms. Taking the time to **listen, understand** and offer words of **welcome** are all hugely important.
- Creating a **safe space** and building **trust** with people, especially newly arrived migrant communities, was highlighted by many of our initiatives. This takes time and effort to build up and maintain, but clearly pays dividends. Many of the programmes also highlight the role of the **trusted individual** as the central point of contact. This person may well help with issues beyond the initial scope of the intervention, but this is one of the key reasons for their overall value to migrant communities.
- The need to **confront and resolve tensions** and not allow them to fester also comes across in the interventions we feature. Dealing with local grievances not only helps to dissolve local tensions, but also prevents these undermining the effective social integration work already going on. Some of our examples have successfully developed **positive narratives** and **challenged misconceptions** of different migrant communities, using a variety of methods from social media to involvement in oral history projects.
- Developing **local credibility** has helped many of the featured interventions to be more effective and develop and expand their services. The value of building and investing the effort in maintaining effective **local partnerships** should not be underestimated. Many successful projects have pulled together the efforts of a wide range of organisations in a local area for a coordinated whole community approach, with such interventions often filling in gaps and complementing, rather than seeking to substitute for, existing statutory provision.
- **Local authorities** that were celebrated by many of the featured interventions had several factors in common: **hosting and supporting dynamic forums** to bring people together and share ideas; having a good understanding of the roles and expertise of each partner organisation to deliver activities and achieve their goals; **being seen as more than a source of funding**, but as a positive body to galvanise people and act as a focal point for integration efforts; and **fostering two-way communication** with local stakeholders.

4 Conclusion

Integration can't be taken for granted. Social integration needs to be supported and planned, taking into account the needs and challenges of different localities and communities. As our reports demonstrate, a developed understanding of and empathy with local needs is a critical building block to successful social integration. But no one intervention will be sufficient in and of itself. Integration is multidimensional and there is a need to involve a wide range of local organisations from the voluntary, public and private sectors. Complementary initiatives and collaborative working are both required and mutually reinforcing.

To find out more about the project and read the full reports:

<https://www.britac.ac.uk/if-you-could-do-one-thing-local>

5 Next steps

The Academy will use the findings from this project to continue to support and feed into the Government's proposed Integration Strategy. The Academy also intends to build on the work which this project has started and use the breadth and depth of expertise that our Fellowship and funded research represent to examine more closely what makes for cohesive societies. More detail on this will be forthcoming on the Academy's website in early 2018.

To find out more about the British Academy's policy work please visit: <https://www.britac.ac.uk/about-policy>

Get in touch: policy@britac.ac.uk



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