

**The Science Communication Conference**  
**22<sup>nd</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2003**

**Session 4 – Inclusiveness – reaching new audiences with new approaches:**

Chair: Dr. Gill Samuels:

**Trevor Phillips, Chair of Commission for Racial Equality: Are there colour bars in a digital universe?**

Well, thank you very much indeed for that introduction. I'm here actually partly because I am as interested in you in asking the question and I hope that some of you have got the answer because I certainly haven't. But first, let me fill a few minutes by maybe sharing my confusion with you, and perhaps as a consequence of that we might begin at least to outline the contours of this particular problem as it were, let's define the research task, and then perhaps we might begin to think of our methods to deal with it.

First of all, let me just say a bit about my position, obviously I am really in my general life a reasonably useless creature being a journalist, I spent 20 years in investigative journalism but my background academically is a sort of....I was going to say theoretical chemist, but I think the theoretical part of it was that I wasn't actually doing any chemistry at all. I was more interested in parties – both political and the other sort. When I was a student at Imperial College, which I don't know if there are any people from IC here, it's a pretty damn weird....okay you'll know it's a pretty damn weird place....When I went there and I joined the chemistry department it was a very, very strange place, where as far as I can recall really what happened was they recruited undergraduates in order to work out who were going to be the PhD's who would help, I think at that time there were 4 Nobel Prize Winners in the Department...who focused on which students were going to help them with their next piece of research, and undergraduates were really just a bit of a nuisance. Other undergraduates were a bit of a nuisance....This doesn't explain why I am not a chemist, I think I might as well own up and be quite clear about it. The reason I'm not a chemist is that I wasn't very good at it. And I didn't have the patience for it, and my brilliant third year thesis, which was as I recall it, I was trying to remember it today, it's so long ago, was 'a disquisition on the flora fluoroluminescence of

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ichloranals' as far as I can recall, had only one potential practical use which was maybe to build a better bicycle reflector. This didn't seem to me to be the epitaph I wanted....sent me off on a slightly different course in life. But I have to say, and this relates to some of what I want to say, the truth of the matter is that in that particular place, and I know that Imperial is an unusual place, but it is, as it were, the leader of the pack, which sets the standards and the image to some extent for everybody else, this was a place of very, very strange people, monstrously clever, hugely motivated. To some extent insanely separated from the world. Now, is this the right advertisement that you want for the best that might be available in scientific education? I wonder?

I say that not sarcastically because as I will come back to say, I think there may be some virtues in this if you spin it the right way. I know 'spin' is a discredited concept and you know New Labour and all of that, but I think there may be some virtues that one can use in the practical sense. I am now the Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality. The job of the Commission for Racial Equality as I discovered, after I got it, is rather more complicated and difficult than I anticipated. Most people think it's really a body that goes about telling people not to be racist, that's a little part of the function but in fact the function is rather bigger than that. We exist under two Acts of Parliament, the 1976 Legislations Race Relations Act and the amended Act of 2000 which essentially sets out what you are not allowed to do, essentially, by law, what discrimination is, how we tackle it, and also one part of the function of the Act which is usually forgotten, 'how do we promote better relations between communities of different kinds?' part of which is 'how do we bring more people from different backgrounds into places which they would not otherwise be?'. In 2000 the scope of the Act was extended to take in public bodies. Previously everybody was banned from discriminating, either directly, i.e. saying 'I'm not going to give you this job because you are black' or 'because you are brown' or indirectly that is to say, setting conditions which mean that though the commissions don't say 'a black or a brown person can't have this job', there are conditions which make it much less likely that a black or a brown person might get the job. That is to say...I don't know, one might say in television that, as

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was true when I started in television you might say that 'it's very difficult to because of the technical demands of lighting a studio, it's quite difficult to light a presenter with black skin' and that means, you know, that there are lots of difficulties that are associated and therefore 'though we don't have anything against black people, the truth is when a black person comes along and they want to present News at 10, oh it adds to the cost and all the rest of it'. That would be an example of indirect discrimination. Of course, by the way, the person for whom I am quite frequently mistaken.....When I give a talk there's usually a point, and it's usually round about now, when I can see you know, at least a third of the audience nudging another bit of the audience, and I know what they are saying....'doesn't sound anything like he does on the News at 10'. Or a more memorable occasion I was asked 'how does your Dad feel about moving the timing of the news bulletin?'. But actually since I've gone to the CRE things have got better, nobody confuses me. In fact I was in Manchester not so long ago, and a lady came up and said 'I know that you are here to give a talk, and my friend thinks that you are Trevor Phillips from the CRE, but I think you are Howard from the Halifax, which one of us is right?'. Anyway, the point is that part of our job was to deal with direct discrimination and part of it is to deal with indirect discrimination. Until 2000 virtually everybody else was banned from discriminating but government and public bodies i.e. police, schools and colleges, and so forth. Under the Act 2000 all public bodies were brought under the Race Relations Act, and this is an extremely important change. Extremely important because what the new Act does, it says that 'every public body', 43,000 of them including 24,000 schools, every university except the private one, I think there is only one private one still, every university, every college has to do a number of things. They have a general duty to promote equality of opportunity, not just to let it happen, but to promote it. To avoid discrimination of any kind in the way they offer their services or in the way they operate employment, and they have to prove it. There is a set of specific duties which are on all institutions, each institution has to produce what is called a 'Race Equality Scheme', explaining how they are going to do these things, explaining how they are going to demonstrate that they are doing that, and that involves monitoring and keeping numbers and so

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on and so forth, which is a big change. Now we are a year in and it's beginning to happen, but there are some time limits by which people have to comply and we are now beginning to bear down on people who are being a bit weedy on the compliance.

Now, I think we will get through the specifics. People will produce plans and so forth. The issue will be will they be worth anything? And this is quite important because these are schemes which will tell you something about institutions, a commitment to inclusiveness of all kinds. The reason that I think this issue is important on a wider basis than just 'let's be kind to blacks' is this....My view about race equality is very straightforward. It's not just about being nice to people who are of a different colour. In almost every occasion in my life where I have, as an investigator, journalist and so on, discovered a systematic racial inequality as opposed to, you know you find somebody who is just a died in the wool racist somewhere in the back end of the physics department, or whatever, or the Peckham Police or whatever. Where you find systemic bias and discrimination where you can look at the numbers and it's clear that people from minorities are not getting the same promotions, they are not being admitted and so on and so forth. You will also find some other things. You will find gender discrimination. You will find where there is racial harassment and there is a very big case of a large public body where this is absolutely true, where you find racial harassment you will also find sexual harassment and vice versa. And what you are finding is, institutions which have two characteristics, sloppy poor management and a culture which does not respect either those who work for it, or those it serves. So the important point about race equality is not that it is good in itself, but that it is a litmus test for how well an institution deals with the people who work in it, who serve in it, and who it serves, and that's why the issue of compliance and inclusiveness as defined by the Race Relations Act, is not just a matter about being nice to a particular group of people defined by what they look like.

Now, I've talked a bit about the law, I can go about handing out compliance notices and hauling people into the County Courts and all of the rest of it, but

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as Chris says on *Millionaire* 'I don't want to give you that', what I want to do is never get to that stage. I want to talk to people about how we construct our institutions in such a way that actually it's never an issue. And this is what the part of inclusiveness is about. Now, in the short time I have I just want to as it were cut pretty straight to the chase and deal with what I think some of the issues are in relation to particularly higher education, which is the thing I know a little bit about, and of course this problem, and I don't think...I haven't yet seen numbers because we haven't had them, about admissions and so forth but I think it's pretty clear that when you are thinking about higher education most minorities, though not all, are clearly less likely to enter higher education than the average and there are all sorts of reasons to which people can adduce for that. And in terms of science, it is empirically the case that that is even more so. You know, there are odd sorts of outgrowths which, you know, are perhaps stereotyping but I often think that stereotypes emerge because there is some truth in it, you know which say that, for example, 'the phenomenal success of children of Indian heritage often specifically in the arena of science, is a new feature of British Society', and if you look at the graph of success in the school, what you see now is that children of Indian and Chinese decent are academically outperforming the average, by quite a long way. And the gap between them and everybody else is getting bigger and bigger, whilst children of Pakistani heritage, Bangladeshi heritage and Afro-Caribbean heritage is falling further and further behind the average. And this is actually an extremely important aspect about where you start if you are thinking about inclusivity.

Academic achievement and attainment I think actually, you know...this is not just about niceness, this is about what can people do if you want to include them, particularly in the arena of science you have to be able to do maths. There's no point saying it would be great if everybody were part of it, if they can't do the business. So I think the first question we've got to ask ourselves is 'how do you prepare people to be included?', and our difficulty at the moment I think, the thing we really have to address and we are doing some work with the government, which I will come to in a moment, is for example, take the

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position of Afro-Caribbean boys, people like myself, who typically will enter school at, well, let's think about key stage 2, 7 years old, they are typically round about 20 points on average ahead of average in reading scores. By key stage IV, 14 years old or thereabouts, they are typically 21 points behind. Something happens in their encounter with school which takes them out of the path that leads to academic attainment. And to new figures which have come out in the last 6 months, recording pupil learning standards, demonstrate, and this is a really, to me, alarming and pointed statistic, is that between key stage II and IV most children, their performance, their attainment, relative to average, rises, most groups, and some are flat ...Pakistani heritage children, flat. Afro-Caribbean boys' performance however plummets. For every year they are in school they perform worse. Actually, it would be better if they didn't go to school on that basis. There's something very fundamental happening here, that we need to address, and it needs specific remedies. I go on about this, because I think this is a lesson that actually applies right through the piece. There is a belief that actually if you want to deal with the problem of excluded groups what you need to do is to kind of create universal plans that will widen involvement of everybody and therefore as that happens everybody will be lifted up. Well, I'm not against that, but I think all of the evidence demonstrates that it's not enough. There's no point just filling the pool in the hope that all the boats will rise, even if some are a bit lower than others. Actually what happens as we are seeing now, is that some communities, some groups remain securely anchored to the bottom of the pool, and in fact one of the most interesting things is that there are signs now that children who are coming in, the new wave of migration from the East, from Eastern Europe and so forth, those children are bypassing what you might call the stuck groups...Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Afro-Caribbean. They are coming in with no English, at key stage III, IV, and they are ending up ahead of everybody else, of those groups. So we need to find some specific remedies and I will briefly run through two or three, as I only have half a minute or so.

I think one of the real big problems is.....I know, it's a way of disciplining myself....one of the big problems is of course that most kids at some point have

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a wobble and sometimes they just go off. One of the things that has most affected me since I have become Chair of the CRE is meeting a mother in South Manchester who said that 'The head teacher said would I come in on a Thursday morning ' or whatever it is 'and talk to him with my son, because my son is just at that point where things can go wrong. I couldn't do it. I had to take a half day off work and I just couldn't do it. I had to pay the rent', result....head teacher thinks 'mother not quite committed to son's education', mother, filled with guilt towards her son, resentment towards the school. Worst of all, son thinks 'my mother either cannot or will not put my educational prospects ahead of her work'. You can see where the trajectory of this is going, and it's a disaster. I think we can do some things to help people like that. I think we can do some things to support supplementary schools, which an experiment in North London is showing Saturday morning education for kids ahead of GCSE can lift, whatever their background, can lift their grade one grade per GCSE subject over a year. And I think there's some things that we could do in terms of language. The school I used to go to myself, White Hart Lane, in Wood Green, discovered that Turkish kids just couldn't make it in science, they started to teach them physics in Turkish and suddenly physics went up like that, and by the way, so did English actually.

So one of the things we've got to think about in schools is 'can we fit the service to the people we are dealing with?', that's inclusivity.

Let me just deal very briefly in a minute with the universities issue. I think there is a very simple point here. When I was at London Weekend Television in the 80's, one of the problems we had was in a city a quarter black, brown, they hardly had anybody in the company that was from a minority, me, a couple of other people. What changed it was what we did on the screen. We started to make programmes which were aimed at that communities, suddenly clever people wanted to work for us, from those ethnic minorities. And why was that? Because prior to that, we looked like a television station that was not interested in those communities. The minute people saw what was on the screen they thought 'oh, maybe they are interested in us' and they applied to

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us, actually in preference to the places where they had been before. Law, lawyers, doctors, the city, academia, they came to television, because suddenly they thought 'they are interested in us'.

My feeling about science and so forth is that the image of science in so far as it's attractive at the moment, is about nerdy white boys and white guys in coats in laboratories. And part of the problem with that, it's not a race thing, it's about the reification of science, it's the idea that actually it's a very, very strange closed-off little world, that only a certain kind of person can exist in. Why would you ever want to go there? Why would you ever want to be there, unless you were actually that person? Why would you ever want to be there? And it seems to me that one of the things we've got to do is to think about what the world of science looks like. And that means, amongst other things, that scientists need to be a little bit less precious about their purity, and the unsullied of method, and slightly less pompous about how precious their separation from the world is. Scientists are not monks, they are workers in laboratories, or by pen, by brain. They are not trappist monks, so I think one of the things we've got to think about is how we break down the barrier that exists because of the kind of, what my friend Mr. Charles Clarke, calls 'The medievalist concept of the university', that would be one of the big things that we do.

There are some other things which I would have liked to say, but let me just end by saying this, that there are ways in which you can do it. I mean the Americans actually created...started to create a slightly different idea. by...If you watch any of the American action series, it's very interesting. The 'techi'...there's always a 'techi' in the team, in Mission Impossible it's Greg...whatever he was called. Charlie's Angels it's Lucy Liu, and they started to create an interesting identity. The 'techi' is now the ethnic person. And that's because you can't have the romantic lead generally speaking, being the ethnic person, because that just takes us into ugly territory which you know, nobody wants to envisage...okay not a big problem....I mean it is a big problem, but not one I want to deal with today. But actually they created a place. They have

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created a place where people from an ethnic minority background can be. It's a new narrative, and maybe we need to think about 'is there a place?', okay it's artificially constructed but is there a place where the person in the ethnic minority can be? and accidentally perhaps, with the stereotype I referred to, clever, Asian, boy, computers, that's beginning, but let's start to spread that. And I know this sounds kind of ugly, and artificial and spinning and all the rest of it, but the issue is do we want to make change in order to make ourselves feel pure and good and all the rest of it? Or, do we want to make change that actually works? And sometimes you have to use whatever methods are at hand. And that's where I would like to leave the discussion. Thank you.