

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

As you will note from the Director's Report, GREC has made huge progress in pursuit of our aims during 2005-06. This progress has, to a large extent, been due to four factors: the first has been the commitment of the staff at GREC (both full-time, part-time, and volunteers); the second has been the Board who have worked particularly hard to support GREC staff and ensure GREC's future viability and sustainability; the third are our local public bodies, without whose support and generosity GREC would most likely have closed its doors to the many people who call on GREC's services - often in desperation; the fourth is GREC members and friends who, in many different ways, have contributed to ensuring that the doors of GREC remain open and that the work for which this small organisation was set up to do goes on in spite of the challenges. On my and the Board's behalf, I would like to convey a huge ASANTE (thank you!) to you all.

That is the positive side. Allow me now to highlight some key issues and challenges facing us over the coming year(s) and suggest how I think we should approach them.

Let me begin by underlining that the progress and achievements you will have noted in the different GREC reports have been realised at a cost - especially on our staff, some of whom have continued to generate earned income in order to keep GREC going. Thus whilst the extra financial

support extended to GREC by our local public bodies will undoubtedly help address this problem, the current level of such support, relative to the challenges we face, is such that more needs to be done if our medium/long-term aim of sustainability and effectiveness is to be achieved.

Background

As you already know, the roots of much of our crisis lies in the exit of central government (CRE) from core funding of RECs. One has no doubt that there were justifiable reasons as to why core funding of some RECs may not have been justified, perhaps for management or governance reasons. However, as we have argued all along, the CRE's strategic shift from "core funding" of all RECs to "project funding" of some RECs - and other selected organisations - is problematic, not least since "race equality work" as envisaged in the Race Relations Act, was never intended to be seen, or undertaken, in "projects" terms, but rather as an ongoing, long-term relationship-building, invariably painful, and sometimes traumatic, work, with very few "easy wins".

It is therefore my considered opinion that if race equality work on the ground is to be effective, ie. done in a non-adversarial, divisive, way - especially in the advent of CEHR, which will bring together all equalities legislation under one roof - and if RECs have to play a leading role under CEHR, they, must face three challenges:

Strategy

The first challenge is a strategic one: RECs must demonstrate their adherence to the fundamental principles of the RRA, and in particular, their commitment to ensuring "no less favourable treatment". The reason for this is because over the last forty years, the impression has been given, and largely accepted, that the aim of the RRA was to protect the rights of particular ethnic minority individuals/groups (principally from the former Commonwealth countries) from the (racist) indigenous majority population. However, whilst the experience of many immigrants from the Commonwealth testifies to the truth of this assumption, a closer look at the RRA and the nature & extent of discrimination and racism in post colonial Britain today reveals the dangers of seeing discrimination and racism in "black" and "white" terms rather than in cross-cultural human terms, ie. where minorities need protection from majorities, but also where individuals and groups within both need protection from one another! It is in this context that the CRE and RECs were set up to pursue their advocacy and promotional work on behalf of all victims and potential victims, regardless of their racial or cultural background, and to do so without fear or favour. RECs, and all those concerned with equality in central government, public bodies and the voluntary sector, must move away from traditions of colonial bi-polar world views (with their tendency to stereotype, stigmatise and marginalize people) and