

# **Report Submitted by the United Kingdom pursuant to Article 25, paragraph 1 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities**

## **Appendix A**

### ***Background information on the United Kingdom***

#### **System of Government**

The United Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy in which Queen Elizabeth II is currently the Head of State. Our system of Government is a parliamentary democracy. Parliament consists of the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

#### **House of Commons**

The House of Commons has 659 members who are elected for a period of up to five years at a time using single member constituencies.

There are currently nine elected Members of Parliament from ‘visible’ ethnic minority groups.

#### **House of Lords**

The House of Lords is composed of hereditary peers and life peers created by sovereign for outstanding public service. The Government intends to remove the right of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords. This will be the first stage in a process of reform to make the House of Lords more representative of the country as a whole. We are currently examining reforms to the system for nominating peers to the House of Lords which retain its expertise and role in challenging and revising legislation.

#### **Devolution**

The intention behind the devolution process has been to bring decision/making as close as possible to the needs and circumstances of the people it most affects. Devolution will help to strengthen the Union by giving the people of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland more say in their affairs, while maintaining the sovereignty of the UK Parliament in those matters which impact on the whole of the UK. Powers in certain clearly defined areas have been devolved from a sovereign UK Parliament to the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales. Powers are to be devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly in due course.

## **Scotland**

A referendum in 1979 showed a majority of those who voted to be in favour of a devolved Scottish Parliament. The Scotland Act, which provided for the establishment of the Parliament, received Royal Assent in November 1978. Elections to the Scottish Parliament were held on 6 May 1999. The parliament has met once, to nominate the First Minister. It assumed powers on July 1, 1999.

The parliament has 129 members, 73 from single member constituencies (elected by the majority voting system) and 56 additional members (selected from party lists drawn up from each of the current European constituencies). Elections to the Parliament will take place every four years. The Parliament has primary legislative powers and full executive powers. It is adopting the Westminster model of Cabinet government - the First Minister will appoint Ministers. The Scottish Executive consists of the First Minister and the team of Scottish Ministers, including Law Officers.

The Scottish Parliament is responsible for health, education and training, local government, social work and housing, economic development and transport, law and home affairs, the environment, agriculture, forestry and fishing and sport and the arts in Scotland.

## **Wales**

Following the general election in May 1997, the people of Wales voted in favour of the proposals set out in the White Paper "A Voice for Wales" to establish a National Assembly for Wales. The Government of Wales Act subsequently received Royal Assent on 31 July 1998 and elections to the Welsh Assembly were held on 6 May 1999.

There are 60 members of the Welsh Assembly – 40 from single member constituencies (elected by the "first past the post" method), and 20 additional members (selected from party lists). Elections to the Assembly will take place every four years. The Assembly has met once, to elect the Assembly First Secretary. The Assembly, which has secondary legislative powers only, assumed its powers on 1 July 1999.

The National Assembly for Wales will take over the responsibilities exercised by the Secretary of State for Wales. These include responsibility for education, health, training, economic development, housing, agriculture, transport, industry, the environment, sport and recreation and the Welsh language.

## **Northern Ireland**

A referendum held in Northern Ireland on 22 May 1998 allowed people to vote on, among other things, proposals to set up a devolved legislative body. Following a vote in favour, elections to the Assembly took place on 1 June 1998.

The Northern Ireland Act received Royal Assent on 19 November 1998. It provides for the devolution package to be implemented when it appears to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that sufficient progress has been made in implementing the Belfast Agreement to do so. This has not yet taken place.

The Northern Ireland Assembly has 108 members (6 from each of the 18 constituencies) elected by single transferable vote. It will have primary legislative powers. The Assembly will have a system of weighted majorities to ensure cross community consent on all major issues. The First Minister, Deputy First Minister and the Executive are elected by the d'Hondt system to ensure a distribution of portfolios between all the major parties.

## **Legislation**

There are four sources of law administered by the courts in England and Wales: Statute Law, which is written law and consists mainly of Acts of Parliament; Common Law, which originated in ancient usage and has not been formerly enacted; Equity, which is a system evolved by the Lord Chancellor's Court to mitigate the strictness of some of the Common Law rules; and international law.

Since Scotland has retained its own legal system, Scottish common law and statute law differ in some respects from that current in the rest of the UK.

Legislation can be initiated by either House, but usually originates in the House of Commons. Each legislative bill will be debated in the House of Commons before it is passed to the House of Lords who may return it with amendments. The House of Lords may delay but cannot prevent a bill from becoming law once it has been passed by the House of Commons.

## **Judicial System**

The UK has two main systems of court dealing with criminal and civil law. Judges in these courts sit summarily or with a jury of at least twelve citizens who will hear the facts of the case and reach agreement (by majority, if necessary) on a verdict.

## **Economic Affairs**

In 1996, according to estimates by the World Bank, the UK's gross national product (GNP) was equivalent to US\$19,600 per head. During 1990-1996 it was estimated that GNP increased per head in real terms at an average annual rate of 1.5%. Over the same period, the population increased by an average of 0.3%. The UK's gross domestic product (GDP) declined in real terms by an annual average of 1.3% in 1990-1992, but increased by 2.2% in 1993, 4.4% in 1994, 2.9% in 1995 and by 2.6% in 1996.

## ***Ethnic Minority Population***

### **History**

As the first major industrialised nation and a whole centre of trade and commerce, the UK has a long experience of immigration. However, it was only after the Second World War that substantial numbers of immigrants from the former colonies of the Commonwealth began to respond to the post-war demand on labour. In 1948, the first immigrants from the West Indies arrived in Britain in response to the call for labour and ten years later, their numbers had increased to around 125,000. From the early 1950s, our ethnic minority communities began to arrive from the Indian sub-continent and by the end of 1958 they numbered around 55,000. All these immigrants were granted British citizenship under the 1948 Nationality Act.

Since 1962, a series of legislative measures has tightened immigration control. The number of people permitted to settle in the UK has risen in recent years and reached a figure of around 66,000 in 1998. These communities come mainly from Asia, Africa and the Americas.

### **Demographic Make-up**

The total resident population of Great Britain, based on the 1991 Census, was 54,900,000, of which just 3 million (or 5.5%) were from ethnic minority groups. The ethnic minority population is less dispersed geographically than the white population: people of ethnic minority origin are much more likely to live in the metropolitan areas. For example, over 60% live in the London area. Ethnic minorities make up 1.3% of Scotland's population (63,000) with around half of them living in Glasgow or Edinburgh. And in Wales, over 40% of its ethnic minority population (41,155) live in Cardiff. In Northern Ireland ethnic minorities make up about 1% of the population but the demographic make-up will not be known until after the 2001 Census. There are approximately 240 Traveller families resident in Northern Ireland totalling just over 1100 people. There is also a sizeable Chinese community (estimated at between 2808-4808 people) and smaller Indian (approximately 1021 people) and Pakistani (approximately 611 people).

Nearly half of all ethnic minorities living in the UK were born here. Recent surveys indicate that there are a growing number of people of mixed ethnic origin and we are now witnessing the birth of a third generation of ethnic minority communities. Within different communities we are already seeing differences of educational achievements, disadvantage and socio-economic profiles.

We are undertaking research to gain a clearer understanding of the position of young people in multi-ethnic Britain. The Runnymede trust has established a Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain which will compliment our research and help us to develop our thinking in the future.

## **Policy on Minority Issues**

The Home Office is responsible for policy on ethnic minority issues. The race Equality Unit is taking forward work to promote race equality and is the Government department for overall responsibility for race issues. It sponsors the Commission for Racial Equality and helps with the reception and resettlement of refugees.

The Scottish Office, Welsh Office and Northern Ireland Office are responsible for affairs in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.