



# The melting pot generation

*How Britain became  
more relaxed on race*

British  
Future...

---

As the 2011 census results show an ever larger number of Britons from mixed race backgrounds, this new British Future report *The Melting Pot Generation: How Britain became more relaxed about race* examines how these changes might affect the way that we think about race and identity.

When the parents of Olympic champion Jessica Ennis, who are from Jamaica and Derbyshire, met in Sheffield in the 1980s, a majority of the public expressed opposition to mixed race relationships. In 2012, concern has fallen to 15% – and just one in twenty of those aged 18–24. Jessica Ennis is from a generation that worry less about race and mixing than their parents did, and who mostly see mixed Britain as the everyday norm that they grew up with.

### Inside this report ...

- Rob Ford of the University of Manchester traces how the rise of mixed Britain changed attitudes over recent decades;
- Rachael Jolley explores new Britain Thinks polling on what we think about race and relationships today.
- New Oxford University research reports how media coverage of Olympic medal winners Jessica Ennis and Mo Farah balanced their ethnic origins and local identities.
- Binita Mehta selects ten twenty-something stars who reflect the changing face of their generation.
- Andrew Gimson talks to young Britons about how far being mixed race mattered to their experience of growing up.
- Leading thinkers assess the opportunities and pitfalls of changing how we talk about race.
- Sunder Katwala wonders if his children's generation will see racial identity as increasingly a matter of choice.

Please send us your views to [info@britishfuture.org](mailto:info@britishfuture.org)

*Authors: Rob Ford, Rachael Jolley, Sunder Katwala and Binita Mehta.*

---

## Introduction

Jessica Ennis was not just the face of the Olympics this summer; she could stake a fair claim to be “the face of the census” too.

This week’s census results will show that those from mixed race backgrounds are among the fastest growing groups in the population. Over a million Britons will have ticked the census box as mixed race – and that is only half the story of the rapid growth of mixed Britain. Twice as many people have ethnically mixed parentage – but over half of them choose other census categories, such as black or white.

Britain’s Olympic heroine was born in Sheffield in 1986. 23 years earlier, her father had come to Britain from Jamaica as a 12 year old, following his parents who had emigrated two years earlier to look for work. He met her mother, who had grown up in rural Derbyshire. When her parents met in the mid-1980s, the British Social Attitudes surveys showed that 50% of the public were opposed to marriages across ethnic lines, with 40% still saying so in the 1990s. British Future can reveal that discomfort with mixed race marriages has now fallen to 15% in 2012.

Mixed Britain has especially become a lived reality for the under 30s, Britain’s most tolerant generation. One in four of the over 65s still say that they would be uncomfortable about a child or grandchild marrying somebody from a different race, but that falls to one in twenty of those under 25. It ranked last out of ten as a possible source of concern, with even worries about the idea of marrying somebody much richer being slightly stronger among the youngest group.

The Jessica Ennis generation can stake a strong claim to have won the race against prejudice. They are much more likely to be mixed race themselves, with one in ten children growing up with parents from different backgrounds; ever more likely to form mixed race relationships themselves; and much less likely to think there is any big deal about that anyway.

If defined by mixed ethnic parentage, the mixed group is almost certainly Britain’s largest minority group already, though the official census totals will underestimate this, and so will probably place British Indians ahead.

One reason that the figure is lower is that it is Britain, not America, which has the stronger claim to be a “melting pot” on race. “On no other country on earth is my story even possible,” said Barack Obama, a product of Kenya and Kansas, as he burst onto the US political scene in 2004. His is a great story, but he was wrong about that. Mixed marriages are more likely in Britain, where the dynamics of mixing are different too, and accelerate faster in Britain.

That is because most Americans from mixed parentage marry somebody from a minority group, as Obama himself did. By contrast, three-quarters of Britons from mixed parentage marry somebody from the majority white group (it does contain over three-quarters of the population, after all). Jessica Ennis’ marriage next year, to the fiancé she first met at high school in Sheffield, will also tell this typical everyday story of how British integration works.

From generation to generation, this is blurring the boundaries of race in Britain. Fewer than half of Britons recognise Jessica Ennis as mixed race; a



© S.K. Photography / Shutterstock.com

*“From generation to generation, this is blurring the boundaries of race in Britain”*

---

much smaller number recognise Seb Coe's Anglo-Indian heritage, or would know that Ryan Giggs values his black roots.

Our BritainThinks poll also shows that mixing and integration are, overall, more popular among ethnic minority Britons than their white fellow citizens. Across all colours and creeds, the preference is for integration over segregation, but there is more ambivalence about this among white and Asian people, with a fifth of both groups worrying about separate cultures becoming diluted. Those who are black or mixed race, are most likely to see mixing as good in bringing us together.

Whether it is the sporting triumphs of Jessica Ennis and Lewis Hamilton, the pop music of Leona Lewis, or a couple from different races holding hands in the street, mixed Britain is fast becoming the new normal. We are right to worry when integration goes wrong. Maybe we should notice too when we are better at it than we realise.

*Sunder Katwala is director of British Future.*

---

# The rise of melting pot Britain

Predictions suggest that the upcoming census will chart how the mixed race group has become one of the largest and most rapidly growing ethnic groups in Britain, says Rob Ford

In the 2001 census, British residents were for the first time provided with an opportunity to indicate a mixed ethnic heritage. Around 680,000 Britons indicated a mixed heritage – over 1% of the total population, and larger than the black Caribbean, black African and Bangladeshi populations. Estimates from the Office for National Statistics suggest that the mixed race population in the 2011 Census will surpass 1 million, making mixed race Britons one of the largest and most rapidly growing ethnic groups in 21st century Britain.

The dramatic rise of the mixed race population, and of the mixed race partnerships which produced it, is one of the most remarkable, and yet least discussed, social developments in modern Britain. In the 1950s and 1960s, marrying across racial lines was rare, and people in such relationships often met with furious hostility. While some prejudices persist, mixed relationships are now an everyday fact of life in modern Britain, and the rapidly growing mixed heritage population is changing how British people see themselves.

Mixing is becoming more common over time, for all ethnic groups. In part, this represents greater opportunity – as Britain's population has become more diverse the chances of meeting and falling for someone from a different background have risen. However, the rise of mixed relationships also reflects a remarkable transformation in how such relationships are viewed by the white British population in two or three generations, as attitudes data tracked by British Social Attitudes show. Those opposed to mixed marriages outnumbered those comfortable about them by 5:1 among Britons before world war two, who grew up before mass migration from the Commonwealth. Those born in the 1980s offer a mirror image, in which those comfortable about mixed marriages outnumber those opposed by 4:1.

So white British twenty and thirtysomethings forming relationships today are much more likely to meet potential partners from a different ethnic background at university, in the workplace or out at bars and nightclubs and they are much less likely to see race as a barrier to relationships when they do. This is a tremendously positive development, as it provides one of the clearest demonstrations that race really doesn't matter to many British people today. While people may lie about their racial attitudes in order to give the answers they think others want to hear, they are unlikely to form relationships or marry just to prove their tolerant liberal credentials.

While all groups show the same rising trend, there are large differences in mixing rates between minorities. Black Caribbean Britons are most likely to form mixed partnerships – analysis of 2001 Census data by David Voas suggested around a third of black Caribbean men and a quarter of black Caribbean women had a partner from a different ethnic group. More than 20% of black African and Chinese Britons were also in mixed relationships. South Asian groups show lower mixing rates: around 9% of Indian heritage



---

Britons, 7% of Pakistani Britons and 5% of Bangladeshis have partners from a different group.

One of the striking features of this overall pattern is that social integration, gauged by inter-marriage rates, and economic integration – in terms of education or employment – have not gone together. Some groups, like Indians, combine educational success and social mobility with low levels of intermarriage. Others, such as Afro-Caribbeans, show high levels of inter-marriage despite persistent economic disadvantage. Others still, such as Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, still show low rates of both. It seems cultural barriers – differences in religion, culture and language – may matter more for intermarriage than economic barriers.

Declining cultural barriers would also explain why mixed marriage rates are much higher among British born ethnic minorities than immigrants who have settled here after growing up in another country – research by sociologists Anthony Heath and Raya Muttarak suggests intermarriage rates for British born minority men are five times higher than for those born abroad; for women they are three times higher. Although rates rise rapidly for all groups, the differences between groups also persist. Nearly 40% of British born black Caribbean people are in mixed relationships, but less than 10% of British born Pakistanis in relationships have partners from another group.

The highest rates of mixed partnership formation of all are found among those who are themselves of mixed heritage. Majorities of mixed heritage Britons do this, in contrast to the United States. 75% of those with mixed white-black Caribbean heritage form mixed unions, 65% of those with mixed white-Asian heritage and 50% of those with mixed white-black African heritage. This does not necessarily reflect any particular preference for white partners; given that the overall population in Britain is still more than 85% white, we would expect the majority of marriages to feature a white partner if race was not a factor. In this respect, Britain's minorities – in particular those like black Caribbeans who are culturally quite close to the majority population – seem to be following a similar path of integration trodden by many immigrant groups – the Irish, the Polish and the Italians – in America: gradually merging with the majority group until ethnic differences are no longer noticed or relevant.

This is a very different pattern to that seen, for example, by black immigrants to America. Although mixed marriages, and mixed racial identities, are also rising rapidly in the United States, they are still infrequent by British standards: around 10% of African Americans are in mixed marriages, compared to “over 25%” for black Caribbean Britons and “over 40%” for British born black Caribbeans. Traditionally, American racial identity has been defined by the “one drop” rule: those with any black heritage are seen by others – and come to see themselves – as black. Some of America's most prominent black figures fit this pattern: both Barack Obama and Colin Powell are children of mixed relationships between a black immigrant husband and a white American wife. Both have defined themselves as black, and married black partners. This may be changing – self-identification as mixed is rising in the United States, whose Census bureau also now officially acknowledges it – but contrary to popular perceptions America lags behind Britain in rates of mixing and, arguably, in acknowledging and discussing mixed identity.

Mixed race relationships, once a rarity, are now a normal and largely unremarked part of British life, and are becoming more common all the time. All of the evidence suggests mixing is likely to continue rising fast

*“Britain's population has become more diverse the chances of meeting and falling for someone from a different background have risen”*

---

– younger whites are much more accepting of it, and much more likely to engage in it. The same is true of British born minorities, and even more true of those with mixed heritage themselves. As mixing becomes ever more common, the boundaries between ethnic groups will become ever more complex and blurred, as groups which once lived, worked, prayed and married separately grow ever more tightly bound together. This will lead to new, more complex ethnic identities and, perhaps, a broader, more inclusive “melting pot” British identity.

As well as putting hard numbers on these remarkable trends, the new census data will enable us to dig deeper into the patterns of marriage across ethnic and faith boundaries. Alongside this, continued research into evolving public attitudes will throw light on the persistent differences between groups, and the low rates of inter-marriage in some communities, such as British Asians. Do these low rates reflect lower social contact with white British communities, or resistance to mixing in the minority community itself? But research on attitudes would be needed to determine what the causes of this are (such as the importance of ethnicity or faith). With reduced majority resistance to mixed relationships, if low levels of inter-marriage of some groups, such as British Asians, were to persist for the next generation, this might reflect opposition from the minority group itself, such as: parental resistance to mixing, influencing marriage choices across either faith or ethnic boundaries; or more limited contact between some minority groups and others. While significant cultural differences and prejudices are likely to remain in majority and minority groups alike, the sharp increase in mixing and mixed heritage should be celebrated as evidence of an emerging Britain where minorities are integrating into the mainstream, and where the majority is open to diversity.

*Rob Ford is a lecturer in politics at Manchester University.*

---

## Coupledness for Britain's new generation is a relaxed affair

A few decades ago, a couple from different ethnic backgrounds would have caused reaction on the streets of Britain, in 2012 few seem to raise an eyebrow, says Rachael Jolley

In 2012 Britain we see a lot more couples getting together from different ethnic backgrounds, and it has become so normal that many of us just don't notice something that a few decades ago would have sparked shock or outrage. Often, these days, we are so comfortable with the idea of mixing we just don't think about it. Unlike in some other countries, noticing a "mixed" couple who come from different ethnic backgrounds, such as Jessica Ennis and her boyfriend Andy Hill, is far less likely than it used to be, with 59% of the public saying they just don't notice a "mixed" couple in the street, compared with 28% who say it is noticeable. It turns out the majority of the public is so unbothered by the idea of a couple coming from different races that they just don't even think about it. And the younger age groups, the Jessica Generation (aged 18–30), are even less likely to bother about "mixed" relationships. According to research into public attitudes carried out for British Future by pollsters BritainThinks, only 17% of 18–24s say they "notice" a mixed couple walking in the street, compared to 32% of their grandparents' generation (65 plus), while 72% of mixed race people think the public don't notice a mixed couple in the street. The situation is pretty similar across the country: while the national average was 59%, in Scotland 63% said they didn't notice, in the north-east and north-west it was slightly lower at 56%, and in London 52%.

Around 66% of black and minority ethnic respondents think the growth of mixed race couples is a good thing, and 12% a bad thing, while overall 21% of the public think the growth of mixed couples is a bad thing, and 47% think it is a good thing. Of Generation Jessica (18–34s) 48% think growth of mixed couples is a good thing and it shows that people can mix across ethnic groups, which could help Britain become more integrated, and 46% of the 55 plus age group think this.

One signal that Britain is more comfortable with its melting pot culture is this general lack of concern about marriage between people of different races. When the research asked people to imagine a child or grandchildren getting married to someone from a different race, only 15% said they were uncomfortable with that scenario, compared to 50% feeling uncomfortable if the marriage partner was long-term unemployed, 56% if he or she had a criminal record, 29% uncomfortable if the partner was someone from another country entailing a move abroad, and 31% uncomfortable about it being someone of the same sex. Among Britons, who may have been brought up learning about the idea of America as the world's melting pot, there are some signs they now see their own nation very much in those terms too, with 42% saying there is a similar likelihood in Britain and the United States for ethnic minority citizens to be more likely to marry people of different ethnic backgrounds to themselves, and only 19% saying this was more likely to happen in the United States.

*“There are signs that Britain has taken over from America as the melting pot”*



---

Leading academics say there are some signs that Britain is the real melting pot these days, with people from ethnic minorities far more likely to marry someone from the white majority than in the US, and Britons far more comfortable calling themselves mixed-race than they would be in the United States.

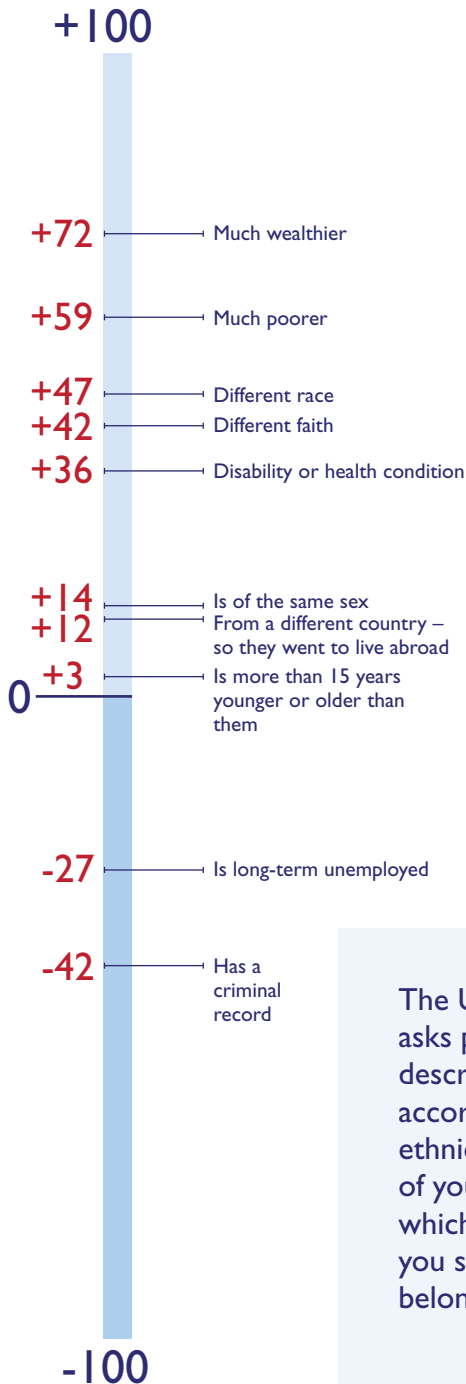
As a leading academic in this field, Manchester University's Professor Rob Ford, writes elsewhere in this report: "Groups which once lived, worked, prayed and married separately grow ever more tightly bound together. This will lead to new, more complex ethnic identities and, perhaps, a broader, more inclusive "melting pot" British identity."

*Rachael Jolley*

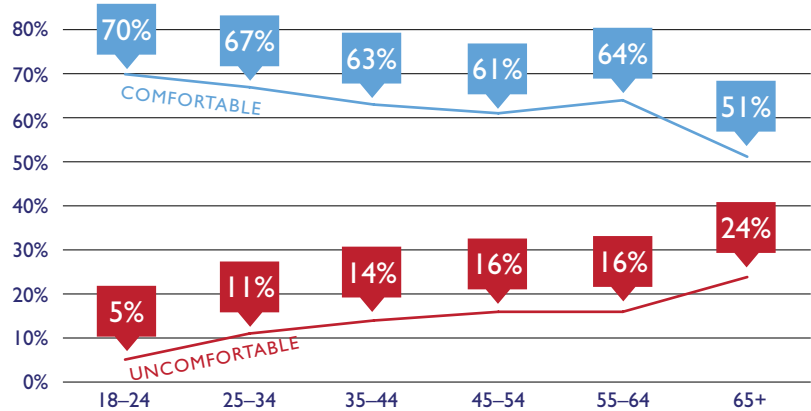
# Melting Pot Generation: the figures

Would you be comfortable or uncomfortable if your children married somebody who ...

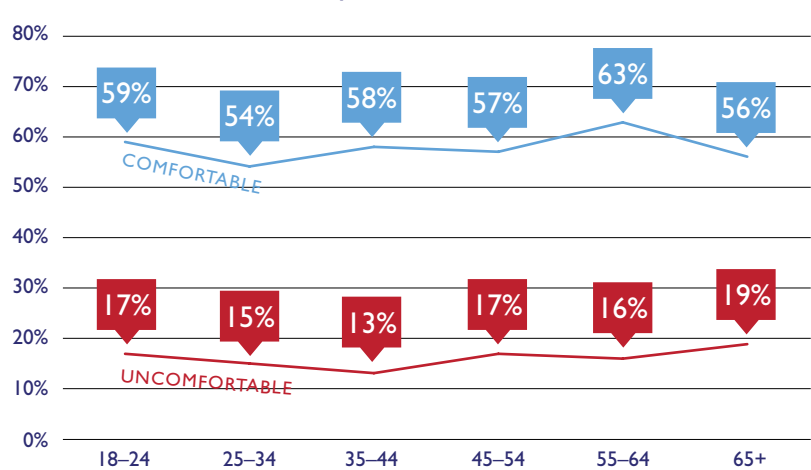
(Net Comfortable)



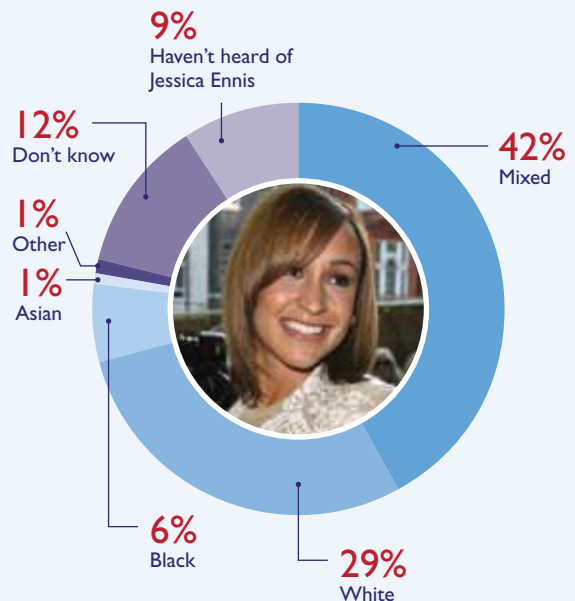
Comfort with relationships across different races ...



Comfort with relationships across different faiths ...



The UK census asks people to describe themselves according to their ethnicity. To the best of your knowledge, which category would you say Jessica Ennis belongs to ...



---

# The Gen Ennis Ten

## *Changing the face of modern Britain*

My generation don't think as much about race as our parents' generation did, maybe it's because we are more likely to have a mixed group of friends, or because celebrities on television and in sports these days are much more likely to reflect modern Britain, says twenty-something Binita Mehta, who selects her top ten Generation Jessica Ennis stars.



**Lewis Hamilton**, the Formula One racing driver and 2008 Formula One World Champion, was born in Stevenage on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 1985. His father is British Grenadian and his mother White English.

**Leona Lewis**, the singer who won The X Factor in 2006, was born in Islington on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 1985 to parents Aural Josiah "Joe" Lewis of Afro-Guyanese descent, and Maria Lewis of Welsh, Irish, and Italian descent. She has revealed how her striking mixed-race looks made her a target for bullying classmates at school.

**Adam Deacon**, the rapper, writer, director and film actor named BAFTA's Orange Wednesdays Rising Star for 2012, was born in Hackney on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 1983 to an Egyptian dad and White English mum. He has said, "The younger generation doesn't look at race so much; we're an interconnected melting pot."

**Alexa Chung**, the television presenter, model and contributing editor at *British Vogue*, was born in Privett, Hampshire to part Chinese Philip Chung and White English Gillian Chung on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 1983. *The New York Times* has declared her the Kate Moss of the next generation. She has described herself on twitter, where her biography reads "Chunglish", as "3/8 Chinese, 5/8 [White] English".

**Theo Walcott** was born in Stanmore on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 1989 to a Black Jamaican father and a White English mother. He became England's youngest ever senior football player aged 17. Fear of racist attacks during Euro 2012 in Poland and Ukraine led to Walcott's family not attending. He has said, "I'm part of a generation that doesn't think as much about race."

**Gemma Cairney** is a television and radio presenter, born in Birmingham on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 1985 to a Jamaican mother and Scottish father. She presents the weekend breakfast programme on BBC Radio 1. She has said it has been advantageous for her to be mixed race because "I get the best of both worlds".

**Jameela Jamil**, the model, television and radio presenter who will become the first female solo presenter of the Radio 1 Chart Show from January, was

---

born in Hampstead on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 1986. She has a mix of Pakistani and Indian heritage. Jameela has been subjected to what she termed “vile racism” on twitter, to which she has responded there is “no excuse [for writing] such ugly and racist abuse”.

**Emeli Sandé**, the singer who performed at both the opening and closing ceremonies of London 2012, was born in Sunderland on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 1987 to Joel, a Zambian who was a teacher at her secondary school, and Diane, who is White English. She found it difficult growing up in the only mixed-race family in a small village in Aberdeen. “As an inter-racial couple [her mum and dad] had it hard. They had to really battle just to be together back then, so I just thought I wasn’t going to complain. I kind of got on with it because I knew it could have been a lot worse.”

**Heather Watson** is currently the British Number 1 women’s tennis player. She was born in Guernsey on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 1992 to Papua New Guinean mum Michelle and Manchester-born Englishman Ian. She is ranked in the top 50 in the world.

**Zayn Malik**, a member of boyband One Direction, was born in Bradford on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 1993 to British Pakistani father Yaser, and an English mother, Tricia. Malik claims he didn’t fit in at his first two schools due to his mixed heritage, but after moving schools at the age of twelve, he started taking pride in his appearance. He has quit twitter as a result of racist abuse.

*Binita Mehta, 22, works at British Future.*

## Melting Pot Generation: Adam Jogee

Adam Jogee looks at home in the Palace of Westminster. He has mastered the geography of the place, and strides about with the assurance of a member of the ruling class. “Shall we go to the Pugin Room?” he suggests.



Adam will be 21 on December 15, and is studying history at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. He wears a navy blue suit with a Jamaican lapel badge, a white shirt with cufflinks bearing three lions (symbol of the English cricket team), a silk tie and bright red socks. He tells me that on one of his other suits he has a Zimbabwean lapel badge.

As Adam himself says, “I am a child of the British Empire.” His paternal grandfather, who was also called Adam Jogee, was a well-known Zimbabwean Muslim, who in 1953 distinguished himself by baking the cake for the Queen Mother’s visit to Rhodesia (as it was then known). This older Adam was born to an Indian merchant trader father and an African mother, and when he died in 2010, 2000 people came to his funeral.

The younger Adam’s father, Haroon, fled Zimbabwe in 1979 after being conscripted into the army and forced to fight for the white regime. He arrived in London as a refugee, and in due course married Michele Owen. Her father had arrived in Liverpool from Jamaica in 1941, to help with the war effort, and married a white girl from Birkenhead: an inter-racial match that outraged both families.

Adam, the eldest of their three children, was born in London in 1991 and loves living there: “I wouldn’t live in any other European city. Paris I love to bits, Rome is very beautiful, Madrid is fantastic too. But none of them touch London in my view and it is a damn sight easier to be a young ethnic man here than

in any other European city.” He explains that he can compare these cities because he spent four years in the UK Youth Parliament, with frequent travel round Europe, and also because his parents were “open-minded and always travelled”.

Yet Adam, who is a Muslim, admits that prejudice still exists. He says “the rise of Islamophobia has led to the idea that you’re either a terrorist, or you’ve turned your back on Islam”, whereas most Muslims are actually “very proud to be British – proud of who they are and where they’re from”.

And he remembers how he was told “by this charming young lady that ‘you’re not really black’. I remember being absolutely outraged. The inference here is that you can’t be well-groomed, well-spoken, intelligent, and dare I say it be politically active, and be black at the same time.”

We held this conversation at Westminster because Adam works part-time for a Labour MP, Diane Abbott, who in 1987 became one of Britain’s first black MPs. He has been closely involved in Labour politics since childhood, his parents becoming great friends with Barbara Roche, their local MP in north London. Taking an enthusiastic part in politics has helped to integrate him.

As he shows me out, Adam drops his bag beneath a peg that is for the use of the Archbishop of York.

*Andrew Gimson*

## Melting Pot Generation: Chandani Amin

Chandani Amin, 21, says that being of mixed race, Indian on her father's side and White British on her mother's, is not of much importance.



“Because I've lived in England all my life, I've never felt like it's been a huge cultural part of my life. I've always felt very English. I don't think that being mixed race defines who I am. Living in Britain, I've always had good opportunities, good education, good friends, and was able to do the things I wanted to do.” These included going to Manchester University, where she is now in her second year studying politics and modern history.

Chandani's father arrived in Britain in the early 1970s at the age of 15 as one of the Asians expelled from Kenya: “When they moved to London there were three families living in a one-bedroom flat, or something ridiculous like that. My father now calls them all his brothers and sisters.”

But Chandani and her older brother did not learn Gujarati: “My Dad didn't decide it was going to be an aim of his to teach us Gujarati. That was a real shame. If I did speak Gujarati I think that would have made a real impact on the idea of being mixed race. I only speak English, which over the years has created a kind of barrier with regard to really getting to grips with my Indian roots. Also, all my cousins could all speak Gujarati, so I was never part of all the conversations at big family gatherings.” At the age of 12 or 13, Chandani attempted to learn Gujarati, but found it too difficult. She would like to visit the village in Gujarat which her family come from.

Her father's mother is “a very strict Hindu”, but did not pass the religion on to her children, and Chandani has no religion: “Only more recently did I learn all these signs of respect and submission you

can show to your elders. When you first greet your grandmother or someone a sign of respect is to touch their feet and then they bless you.”

Like many students, she wants to do more travelling: “I really enjoyed growing up in Britain, I'm grateful for what I've had, but I don't feel this is what I want to do for the rest of my life. I've been round Europe for three months InterRailing, and I really enjoyed parts of Spain like Barcelona, where attitudes and lifestyles seem much more relaxed than in Britain – plus the climate's better! I've been to Barcelona three times now and I've really fallen in love with it. Living in London, I hardly go out – it's way too expensive, and I think in a year or two's time it'd be really nice to live somewhere where the gap between rich and poor isn't so much. I've really felt generally that the atmosphere in London can be very isolating and unfriendly.”

Asked if she finds Manchester different, she says: “When I first got here I thought it was quite a bit friendlier, but I haven't to be honest met so many northerners. There's loads of Londoners up here.”

When she leaves university, Chandani thinks she might go into teaching, but it is evident that she first wants to slake her thirst for travel, though she adds that “my family are here, so I don't think I could live in Africa or India or Latin America, but I would very much like to travel more in all of these places.”

*Andrew Gimson*



---

The 2011 Census will show that those of mixed ethnicity are among the fastest-growing groups in the population. We asked some leading thinkers how could or should this change the way we think and talk about race?

*“We should be cautious in assuming that this growth means that race or racism are less pressing concerns. In many ways, ‘mixed race’ people are not a single group at all. Does a Jewish-Indian really share an identity with a Pakistani-Somali? And the social outcomes for different kinds of mixed race people are decidedly variant.”*

Omar Khan, Head of Policy Research, Runnymede Trust

---

*“The census results will confirm trends that are making us more ‘multi’. We should celebrate the growth in mixedness but must not take this to be the sole paradigm of our multi-cultural society, which must equally make space for those of mixed unions and those for whom their membership of their faith community is central to who they are.”*

Professor Tariq Modood, founding Director of the University Research Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship, University of Bristol

---

*“Britain is becoming a melting pot. The census should show that in the under 16 age group the mixed race group is the biggest minority group. As our children grow up, we can expect them to be more mixed, and the increasing rates of intermarriage and of children from these marriages will blur fixed categories of minority and majority. One in six of our children is from a minority ethnic group, and the census may well show that has increased to one in five.”*

Professor Lucinda Platt, Director Millennium Cohort Study, Centre for Longitudinal Studies, Institute of Education

---

*“As a social development it is clearly to be welcomed. But when we talk of Britain as ‘multicultural’ we often perceive of it as a society composed of different cultures all dancing around each other. All too often we put individuals, especially from minority communities, into particular ethnic, cultural or faith boxes and define them according to the box in which they have been put. All this echoes the ways in which people used to understand racial differences and identities. Ironically, even ‘mixed race’ is coming to be seen as an identity in this fashion.”*

Kenan Malik, writer and broadcaster

---

To read their full comments online see: [www.britishfuture.org](http://www.britishfuture.org)

---

## Sheffield's Ennis is more Yorkshire than anything else

New research finds the poster girl of the Olympics 46 times more likely to be linked with “Sheffield” than “mixed race”

Jessica Ennis has been the face of Britain in 2012. She had to travel past 20-foot posters of herself on the way to compete at her home Olympics, but responded with such a strong performance as to turn the final event of the heptathlon, the 800 metres, into a double lap of honour. With gold assured, she provided one of the indelible images of our Olympic summer, making sure to sprint first to the line, arms outstretched, breaking through the imaginary finishing tape, arms outstretched, in true Chariots of Fire style.

As Ennis says in her biography, *Unbelievable*: ‘I was unaware at that point that what people would call the greatest night in British athletics – some would even say British sport – was unfolding. I won at 9.04pm. Greg [Rutherford] won the long jump at 9.26pm, by which time Mo [Farah] was a few laps into the 10,000 metres final. When he won in the most dramatic fashion, we had three gold medals in less than 45 minutes. Given that we had only won one Gold medal in Beijing, it was an incredible gold rush.’

It was Team GB’s finest hour, halfway through that Olympic fortnight. Britain’s best-selling tabloid, *The Sun*, was most vocal in suggesting no casting director could have picked a better trio:

“It was 46 golden Olympic minutes when three young Britons showed the watching world just who we are. A ginger bloke from Milton Keynes, a mixed-race beauty from Sheffield, an ethnic Somali given shelter on these shores from his war-ravaged homeland. This is what Britain looks like today ... The long-term social ramifications of these Games remain to be seen. Yet the sight of these three Olympians wrapped in the Union Flag will surely do more to inspire than any political words.”

Mo Farah was central to this idea of a ‘new Britishness’. The idea that, in 2012, the flag still needed “reclaiming” from the far right was rather puzzling. “There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack” was a 70s and 80s street slogan of the National Front, long ago decisively rejected by a broad majority. There had been no debate, nor novelty, about Linford Christie and Kris Akabusi’s claim to the flag at the Barcelona Games, twenty years earlier, following 1980s stars Daley Thompson and Tessa Sanderson. But Farah also represented three of the forms of otherness – being Somali-born, a Muslim and having a refugee-like trajectory – most often vilified in the anxious decade after 9/11.

The coincidental timing of their gold medals saw Ennis and Rutherford co-star in this modern British triptych. *The Sun* also celebrated how immigration had made Jessica Ennis possible: “Immigrants like heptathlon queen Jessica Ennis’s dad Vinnie who arrived in this country from Jamaica at the age of 13. Vinnie grafted as a painter and decorator and met Alison Powell, a social worker. Their daughter Jess, 26, was born in the steel city of Sheffield.”

That was an unusual way to write about Jessica Ennis. New research by the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, analysing two



*“Newspaper coverage and public attitudes suggest Jessica Ennis is the first British first post-racial superstar”*

---

million words of national newspaper coverage mentioning Ennis and Farah for British Future, capture how she is much more often associated with her Yorkshire roots than her ethnicity. Articles involving Ennis saw 46 times as many mentions of “Sheffield” as there were of “mixed race” (though her ethnicity was referenced a little more often when articles featured Farah too). Articles involving Farah saw Somalia mentioned 26 times more frequently than Hounslow in west London where he grew up.

The research findings support the intuitive hypothesis that Ennis is discussed much more as a young woman from Sheffield than the daughter of a Jamaican immigrant. They illuminate too why Farah still had to respond after his race to the question of whether he would have been prouder still to have won for Somalia, saying: “Not at all, mate! This is my country.” Both are celebrated as equally British, but via different routes. Mo Farah became of us, but we don’t think of Ennis, the British-born daughter of an immigrant, as having had a journey to belonging too.

That media discourse would seem to fairly accurately reflect Ennis’ subjective sense of identity too. She explains her lack of attention to race in her biography when retailing a solitary incident of racism, contrasting that to the experiences of her father a generation earlier:

“The one time my Dad did intervene was when a girl at school said something racist about me to my friend Charlotte. She told me, I told my parents, and Dad went round to the girl’s house and shouted at her on the doorstep. It probably unearthed old wounds for him, but it is the only time I have ever encountered anything like that. I never consider the colour of my parents and I was amazed when I saw on twitter that someone had posted a message: ‘Jessica Ennis’s dad is black – I can’t believe it’. What couldn’t they believe?”

Ennis does write about being bullied at school: “I was small and scraggy and that is where the bullying started.” The book blurb mentions the “body image” theme – from being nicknamed “tadpole” by a rival athlete to a “fatgate” media furore. The only jacket reference to colour is that the author “lives in Sheffield with Andy and their chocolate labrador, Myla”. She does write of how her “Dad’s Jamaican roots” had their strongest influence in the family kitchen, where he loves to cook ackee and saltfish, “the national dish”. (As it happens, Greg Rutherford has said more in public about facing overt prejudice than Ennis, telling newspapers that “being ginger is the bane of my life. The stick you get is unbelievable. I’ve endured years of it.”)

Ennis’ gold medal was the only one of London 2012 presented by Sebastian Coe. “It had a particular resonance for me because of Sheffield, of course,” writes Coe. He doesn’t mention that they are both mixed race, though he gives family heritage more space in his biography than Ennis does in hers. Coe’s grandmother was persuaded by her parents, before her 21st birthday, to call off an engagement to Ravi Shankar’s older brother, Uday; but, aged 22, she married a Punjabi law student in St Pancras Registry Office in 1927. Coe’s Anglo-Indian mother lived mainly in India until the age of eight. “I hoped to find out more about my Indian heritage,” he writes, but the lack of Punjabi public records defeated even the BBC’s Who Do You Think You Are? research team.

Few people know that Coe is mixed race. Many would be surprised by how strongly Ryan Giggs talks about identifying with the black heritage of his Welsh-Sierra Leonean father: “It’s your roots. It’s what you are,” he has said.

It is fascinating that the British public fell in love with Jessica Ennis this Olympic year without ever quite sorting out what her ethnic identity

*“Where integration works, it just becomes part of the furniture of our lived experience”*

---

is. People chose her, from the strongest imaginable field, as the Olympic athlete who made us proudest to be British, pipping Farah into second place ahead of Bradley Wiggins and Chris Hoy. Yet most people remain unable to recognise the ethnic identity of the “face of the Games”. 42% of people do recognise her as mixed race, in the BritainThinks poll for British Future, while 6% think of her as black, and five times as many believe she is white.

That may make Jessica Ennis Britain’s first post-racial superstar sportswoman. A broadly post-racial identity is not, of course, the only route to integration, nor probably the most common one, but it is not any less ‘authentic’ than other approaches to race and personal identity either.

A good test of integration is when difference doesn’t always have to be the plot point anymore. The first gay character to feature in a mainstream soap opera was bound to have an HIV/Aids storyline. When an Asian family moves in, the daughter will begin to argue with her authoritarian father over his plans for her arranged marriage.

Inclusion, at first, comes with visibility drawn to the difference but, eventually, Asian and gay people pop up in Eastenders simply because you might expect to find them in east London.

The integration we don’t notice anymore might be one of the best tests of whether it has truly become “integral”.

But that might skew our perceptions of how our society is doing. Where integration fails, it sticks out like a sore thumb. Where integration works, it just becomes part of the furniture of our lived experience.

Pioneer achievements are celebrated, especially while they are unusual, but cease to be so as they become the new normal. The mere fact of a black Italian centre-forward generates headlines in a way that is now unthinkable in England.

So agonised debates about why ‘they’ don’t want to become ‘us’ may continue, yet fail to notice that some of the new ‘us’ did, because those who are ‘us’ don’t feel like they were ever ‘them’ anymore.

Perhaps, just occasionally, we should stop to notice what we take for granted, even if we should not want to notice it too much.

Jessica Ennis never asked to be the poster girl of the Olympic Games, nor the face of the Britain we have become either. But our sportswoman of the year tells an important census story of our changing society too.

Jessica Ennis is what integration looks like.

Perhaps that is worth noticing after all.

*“Jessica Ennis is what integration looks like”*

*Sunder Katwala*

---

## Conclusion

Sunder Katwala argues that it is up to the individual to decide on their identity, and it will be up to his kids too.

“Mixed race? What’s all this mixed race nonsense? If you’re not white, you’re black.” That old point was jovially roared at me with some emphasis by one of this country’s leading public raconteurs on race and racism, shortly after we had been discussing a small storm in a tea cup, which the 24 hour news cycle had turned into a “race row”.

The conversation continued:

“But I’ve never thought I was black. Shouldn’t it be up to me to decide?”

“What are you then?”

“British. And English. My parents are from India and Ireland, so I am half-Asian and mixed race as well.”

“British? Why don’t you call yourself Indian? Are you ashamed of your father, boy?”

That seemed odd. I am not ashamed of my mother either, but I don’t see how it makes me Irish.

I do think of myself as “mixed race” – though perhaps more as a descriptive census term than as a particularly strong source of identification.

So I was one of a million people who did tick the “mixed” box on the census, as about half of those with ethnically mixed parentage do. But the fact of “mixed” heritage doesn’t in itself seem as contentful as having some Indian and Irish family links. I am much more likely to mention the connection to somebody from Gujarat or County Cork, where my parents came from, than to look for the shared sense of “mixedness” with somebody with, say, French and Jamaican parents.

Maybe having a mixed background was always likely to predispose me to being sceptical about “community of communities” forms of



*A get together for  
Katwala senior and  
Katwala junior*



---

multiculturalism, which always seemed to me to offer identity boxes too narrow for many people to fit into. Though there seem to be more census options every time, the boxes never quite seem to work. This time, I could tick “Asian/white” – but with no chance to acknowledge my Irish roots at all, which is an option for those who choose the “white” box first, and so write out the Indian part of the story.

More happily, I never did find community leaders claiming to speak out in my name for the Anglo-Irish-Indian community, but I never missed them. There has long been a growing revolt against that form of “gatekeeper” politics, often particularly strongly voiced by second and third generation Brits under thirty. Of course, a society that divides itself along tribal lines won’t appeal to those who wouldn’t have a tribe if it happened, but it isn’t something most people want anyway.

This latest census will see the rise of mixed Britain celebrated, as it was in George Alagiah’s often moving BBC documentary series – the story of how one generation’s social problem became the next generation’s proud family history. The fear of difference was trumped by lived experience, of life, and love, and loss – because the social “problem” of mixing, and the alleged clash of identities, was always agonised over more by those who were not mixed race. Surely everybody’s usual self is an unusual self, as Rita Tushingham’s character declared in *A Taste of Honey*.

If the fact of mixing is the good news about integration, the term “mixed race” feels pretty tired. It is not as ugly as “half caste” – still widely used as a descriptive term a generation ago – but it shares its roots in the fear of miscegenation.

A so-called mixed marriage was a controversial issue when my parents got married. Neither of their families turned up to bless the union. My grandfather had been trying to persuade my dad to return to India, offering to arrange a marriage for him. But he wanted to make his own choices.

But nobody batted an eyelid when Stacy and I got married in Essex in 2001. She doesn’t see her own Irish-English parentage as being an ethnic “mix”. And the idea that I am in a “mixed race relationship” seems a pretty trivial truth. After all, if it would be true of any possible relationship that I could form with anybody white, black, Asian or indeed mixed too – even if I had married somebody else with Indian-Irish parentage, wouldn’t it still be the case? – then it is perhaps a meaningless statement.

Are our children “mixed race”? They certainly could be, if they want to be. I guess we had to tick census boxes for them too. Maybe I should have left the space blank. I feel that I should wait, and ask Zarina and Jay, Sonny and Indira, all under seven right now, what they think, when they are fifteen years old, before I pronounce on their identity or ethnicity for them. Their family history enables them to stake their claim to be mixed race – in pretty much the same way that Sebastian Coe could. They too have one Indian and one white English grandfather, though they can also call on two Irish grandmothers, one on each side of the family.

I want to respect the choices they decide to make. If I were to try to influence them at all, I hope it may just be by showing them that there are a million – probably two million now – different ways to be mixed race in Britain, sometimes claiming the label and sometimes not, and more than five million ways to be non-white, because there are sixty million ways to be British. There are, as it happens, tens of millions of ways to be white, to be English, and many more ways to be “white working-class” too than the media caricatures admit.



---

So being mixed race matters a lot to Ryan Giggs – “it’s your roots. It’s who you are, it’s what you are” – while it seems more of a simple matter of fact to Jessica Ennis. Others, like Daley Thompson, actively reject the labels which others ascribe to them, while Giggs must choose to declare if he wants it to be known.

My fourteen year old self used to have various sarcastic lines for those ignorant of the difference between India and Pakistan, though it’s twenty years now since anybody called me a “paki” in my earshot. But it didn’t feel to me, growing up in the 1980s, that racial identity could be as much a question of choice as a matter of fact.

So it is fascinating that, by 2020, that may well be how it seems to my children.

That is only a threat to those whose views of race depends on telling everybody else how to think about who they are.

So I will raise two cheers for the rise of mixed Britain. I guess I’m proud to be a mongrel Brit, but the motley tribe that I want to be part of is the one that everybody can share.

*Sunder Katwala*

## Polling in detail

BritainThinks interviewed a representative sample of 2,149 adults aged 18 plus across Great Britain. Interviews were conducted online on the 24th and 25th of November 2012. Data is weighted to match the profile of the population. The total number of BME respondents was boosted to a total of 250, representing 12% of this sample versus on average 9% of a nationally representative sample.

Q.1 Some people feel uncomfortable with the choices that their children or grandchildren might make about their relationships. How about you, regardless of whether you have children at the moment, how would you feel if your child or grandchild were to have a serious relationship or marriage with any of the following... ?

	SOMEONE WHO IS FROM A MUCH WEALTHIER BACKGROUND	SOMEONE WHO IS FROM A MUCH POORER BACKGROUND	SOMEONE WHO IS LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED	SOMEONE WITH A DISABILITY OR LONG-TERM HEALTH CONDITION	SOMEONE WITH A CRIMINAL RECORD
	%				
Comfortable	77	68	23	51	14
Uncomfortable	5	9	50	15	56

	SOMEONE OF A DIFFERENT RACE OR ETHNICITY TO THEIR OWN	SOMEONE OF THE SAME SEX	SOMEONE IN ANOTHER COUNTRY WHICH INVOLVED GOING TO LIVE ABROAD	SOMEONE WHO PRACTICES A DIFFERENT FAITH	SOMEONE WHO IS MORE THAN 15 YEARS YOUNGER OR OLDER THAN THEM
	%				
Comfortable	62	45	41	58	35
Uncomfortable	15	31	29	16	32

Q.2 When they are released, the 2011 Census figures will show an increase in the number of children born to parents of different ethnic backgrounds. Which of the following comes closest to your view?

THE GROWTH OF MIXED RACE RELATIONSHIPS IS A GOOD THING. IT SHOWS THAT PEOPLE CAN AND DO MIX ACROSS ETHNIC GROUPS, WHICH COULD HELP BRITAIN BECOME MORE INTEGRATED	THE GROWTH OF MIXED RACE RELATIONSHIPS IS A BAD THING. IT MAY LEAD TO THE DILUTION OF THE IDENTITY AND CULTURE OF DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS IN OUR SOCIETY, INCLUDING WHITE AND ETHNIC MINORITY CULTURES AND IDENTITIES	NEITHER OF THESE
%		
47	21	22

Q. 3 Which of the following comes closest to your view?

CHILDREN WHOSE PARENTS ARE FROM DIFFERENT RACIAL OR ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS FROM EACH OTHER CAN FIND IT CONFUSING OR DIFFICULT TO HAVE A STRONG, SECURE ETHNIC OR RACIAL IDENTITY	CHILDREN WHOSE PARENTS ARE FROM DIFFERENT RACIAL OR ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS FROM EACH OTHER CAN FIND IT LIBERATING AS THEY ARE ABLE TO CHOOSE THEIR OWN IDENTITY FOR THEMSELVES	NEITHER OF THESE
%		
24	38	21

Q. 4 Which of the following comes closest to your view?

THESE DAYS, PEOPLE DON'T REALLY NOTICE WHEN THEY SEE A MIXED RACE COUPLE IN PUBLIC	NO MATTER WHAT PEOPLE SAY, IT IS NOTICEABLE WHEN YOU SEE A MIXED RACE COUPLE IN PUBLIC	NEITHER OF THESE
%		
59	28	7

Q. 5 Which of the following comes closest to your view?

IN ORDER TO IDENTIFY WHERE DISCRIMINATION IS HAPPENING, IT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE COUNTRY TO KEEP TRACK OF THE ETHNIC OR RACIAL BACKGROUNDS OF BRITISH PEOPLE	BY CATEGORIZING BRITISH PEOPLE BY THEIR ETHNIC OR RACIAL BACKGROUND, WE ARE SIMPLY EMPHASIZING DIFFERENCES THAT SHOULDN'T MATTER AT ALL	NEITHER OF THESE
%		
31	39	17

Q. 6 Given what you know about Britain and the United States of America, in which country would you expect ethnic minority citizens to be more likely to marry people of different ethnic backgrounds to themselves?

I THINK THIS IS MORE LIKELY TO HAPPEN IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	I THINK THERE IS A SIMILAR LIKELIHOOD IN BOTH COUNTRIES	I THINK THIS IS MORE LIKELY TO HAPPEN IN BRITAIN
%		
19	42	27

Q. 7 In the UK, the census asks people to categorise themselves according to their ethnicity. Below is a list of famous sportspeople. Please say, to the best of your knowledge, which of the categories each belongs to...

	JESSICA ENNIS	MO FARAH	TOM DALEY	SEBASTIAN COE	DALEY THOMPSON	LEWIS HAMILTON	DAME KELLY HOLMES
%							
White	29	2	75	75	7	7	11
Black	6	67	2	2	44	27	29
Asian	1	9	2	1	1	3	2
Mixed ethnicity	42	4	2	4	24	49	37
Other ethnicity	1	3	1	2	2	1	1
Don't know	12	9	9	8	12	10	12
Never heard of that person	9	7	8	8	9	3	8

# Additional research

Table I. Word frequencies in articles mentioning Mo Farah, Jessica Ennis, or both

	FARAH ONLY	% OF WORDS	ENNIS ONLY	% OF WORDS	FARAH AND ENNIS	% OF WORDS
<i>General Terms</i>						
British <sup>1</sup>	1110	0.172%	1095	0.178%	1770	0.247%
Britishness	23	0.004%	6	0.001%	17	0.002%
English <sup>2</sup>	129	0.020%	58	0.010%	93	0.013%
<i>Origin Terms – Farah</i>						
Somali	305	0.047%	3		136	0.019%
Hounslow <sup>3</sup>	14	0.002%	2		12	0.001%
Teddington	11	0.002%	0		10	0.001%
Islington	2		0		2	
<i>Origin Terms – Ennis</i>						
Sheffield <sup>4</sup>	16	0.002%	281	0.046%	128	0.018%
Caribbean	11	0.002%	2		16	0.002%
Jamaica <sup>5</sup>	1		14	0.002%	10	0.001%
<i>Race &amp; Religion Terms</i>						
Black	5	0.001%	0		3	
Mixed <sup>6</sup>	1		6	0.001%	29	0.004%
Muslim	41	0.006%	0		18	0.003%
<b>TOTAL WORDS</b>	<b>643,618</b>		<b>613,741</b>		<b>715,612</b>	

1: Includes all instances of BRITISH, not just those which refer to FARAH or ENNIS

2: Excludes instances where ENGLISH refers to the language of publication

3: Excludes references to RICHARD HOUNSLOW, a canoeist for Great Britain

4: Includes instances of SHEFFIELD UNITED where referring to ENNIS

5: Excludes references to USAIN BOLT or other JAMAICAN athletes

6: Includes only uses of MIXED as 'MIXED RACE' or 'ETHNICALLY MIXED'

Notes: Percentages below 0.001% appear as blank.

Source: Migration Observatory at Oxford University

## Staff

**Sunder Katwala**, director  
sunder@britishfuture.org

**Helena Stroud**, office manager/  
executive assistant  
helena@britishfuture.org

**Matthew Rhodes**, director of strategy  
and relationships  
matthew@britishfuture.org

**Rachael Jolley**, editorial director and director  
of communications  
rachael@britishfuture.org

**Binita Mehta**, intern  
binita@britishfuture.org

## Trustees

**Wilf Weeks** (chair), former director, European  
Public Affairs, Weber Shandwick and former  
private secretary to Sir Edward Heath; trustee,  
Trust for London.

**Howard Jackson** (treasurer), managing director  
and head of charities, FD Solutions.

**Samira Ahmed**, journalist, visiting professor  
at Kingston University and former Channel 4  
presenter.

**Elizabeth Berridge**, Conservative peer  
and barrister.

**Ian Birrell**, freelance journalist; former deputy  
editor of *The Independent*; election speechwriter  
to David Cameron.

**David Isaac**, partner, Pinsent Masons; chair,  
Stonewall; trustee, Diana Princess of Wales  
Memorial Fund.

**Alasdair Murray**, senior adviser, Quiller  
Consultants; former director of CentreForum.

**Shamit Saggat**, professor of political science at  
the University of Sussex since 2004; chairman of  
the Legal Complaints Service of the Law Society  
2005–11.

**Ayesha Saran**, migration & Europe programme  
manager, Barrow Cadbury Trust.

**Enver Solomon**, director of policy and public  
affairs, The Children's Society; chair; board of  
trustees, Asylum Aid.

# British Future...

*British Future is an independent,  
non-partisan thinktank*

British Future  
Kean House  
6 Kean Street  
London, WC2B 4AS  
Tel: 020 7632 9069  
Fax: 020 7632 9061  
[www.britishfuture.org](http://www.britishfuture.org)  
[info@britishfuture.org](mailto:info@britishfuture.org)