

ETHNIC MINORITIES ENCOURAGED TO STUDY KOL

A new project launched by the Mayor Ken Livingstone and the London Development Agency aims to “address some of the barriers experienced by people from under-represented groups to work towards greater diversity in the taxi trade to reflect London’s diverse population.” The Mayor said: “The black cab is one of London’s most instantly recognisable trademarks and is an incredibly important part of London’s transport network. This project will help address the barriers to employment that currently exist for women and people from Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities to participate in this important part of our city’s life.” The London Cab Drivers Club held a protest demonstration at the LDA on 10th October to make their views known about the new programme.

Applicants will need to meet the Public Carriage Office’s eligibility criteria; they will be over 21, have a full driving licence, have leave to take up full-time employment in the UK and successfully complete a Criminal Records Bureau check, before then being interviewed by the providers to ensure that they are aware of what the Knowledge programme consists of, the likely time it will take to complete and to sign up to a learning plan that will require them to achieve agreed milestones within an agreed timeframe in order to remain on the programme. Manny Lewis, Chief Executive of the London Development Agency, said: “London is one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world. This programme for women and people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities will help them do the Knowledge course, and ultimately achieve greater diversity in the taxi trade to ensure that it is more representative of London’s population.” But many in the taxi trade feel this is an unnecessary project as the Knowledge has always been open to anyone who wants to study it. Vivienne Hayes, Director of the Women’s Resource Centre,

said: “The Women’s Resource Centre welcomes the Mayor’s initiative to promote women’s employment in this predominantly male arena. Women in London will no doubt be pleased to see an increase in female taxi drivers.”

STATEMENT FROM LCDC

“The demonstration brings to the attention of the media and the public at large the disquiet felt within the taxi trade regarding the London Development Agency’s (LDA) programme to exclude white male candidates from the scheme which provides assistance to prospective Knowledge of London (KOL) Students. Taxi drivers both black and white feel that this is an attempt at social engineering where the result will be to create division amongst Black, Asian and White people where none exists within the taxi trade at this time.

“The Mayor is on record as saying that he believed that the London Taxi trade is tantamount to being a “whites only club”. The implication of this statement is that there exists a kind of covert racism within the taxi trade which also extended to the examiners at the Public Carriage Office who had the power to pass or fail Black candidates from becoming taxi drivers. It is our contention that this is far from the truth. The truth is that there is no bar to Black or Asian people becoming taxi drivers and although there may be economic constraints as outlined within the LDA’s statement on equality and diversity, this extends also to White people as well.

“The argument of the taxi trade is that if the LDA acting on behalf of the Mayor wishes to encourage the development of the taxi trade which will encompass ethnically diverse groups then this should be directed to all candidates irrespective of race or colour. What you have failed to do is consult with all interested parties which includes the London Cab Driver’s Club, which has Afro-Caribbean, Asian, Turkish, Moroccan, Israeli, French, Arabs, African, Jews, Moslems, Sikhs, Christians and Atheists amongst its membership. Many ethnically Black taxi drivers were present at today’s demonstration to show solidarity with their white colleagues, many of whom feel that the actions of the LDA and the exclusion of White male drivers impugns their own integrity.

“Under these circumstances taxi drivers, both Black and White feel compelled to make this protest. Do not create a problem where none exists; instead extend benefits to all regardless of racial background to ensure that the London taxi trade prospers and is able to offer all London’s citizens and visitors the premier service that has been deservedly praised for. Creating an ethnic divide is not the way forward.”



Alan Fleming

