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Murad Qureshi

A labour councillor in Westminster responds to an article by Ken Livingstone about the Government's new index of deprivation

29 August 2000

Ken Livingstone is right to emphasise the adverse impact that the new Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), announced last week by unaccountable Government bureaucrats, will have on London. My own ward, Church Street in Westminster, has gone down from a ranking of 189 under the old Index of Local Deprivation (ILD) 1998, to 838 under the IMD for 2000.

But he has got the wrong end of the stick over English as a second language being an indicator of deprivation. Rather, he should see it as a linguistic asset that we have among the London population, to be built upon, to the benefit of all Londoners, to maintain London's pre-eminence as a world city.

A recent publication from the Corporation of London called *Multilingual Capital* stresses this, reporting that an increasing number of international firms give as a reason for relocating to London the fact that they can recruit staff with a wide range of language skills, many of whom are bilingual.

Even an organisation with a vested interest in the continued supremacy of English such as the British Council, is concerned that in the next 50 years the world situation could change to give prominence to a range of other languages: some predictable (Arabic, Chinese, Spanish), others less so, such as Malay.

The real institutionalised racism is not that mother-tongue languages are demoted as an indication of deprivation, but that they are not regarded as an asset in the first place. They should be nurtured, both to benefit commerce and in the process enhance the self-esteem of the particular linguistic community.

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- 1p 2 ■ Which of the following points does Murad Qureshi make?
Londoners with a first language other than English
1 have a valuable contribution to make to the city's economy.
2 will soon outnumber native English speakers.
3 should not expect to find a job in London.
4 will gain confidence if their native language is appreciated.
- A 1 and 3
 - B 1 and 4
 - C 1, 2 and 4
 - D 2 and 3
 - E 2 and 4
 - F 3 and 4