‘Living in a multicultural society takes time.’ To what extent is this illustrated by the challenge of multicultural societies in the UK? [40 marks]

The term ‘multicultural’ means that significant numbers of people differ from the majority, in that they have a different first language, celebrate customs outside the calendar of the majority, eat and dress differently, or observe different religious beliefs.

The United Kingdom has not always been a multicultural society. Yes, it has continuously experienced immigration over the centuries, starting with the Roman invasion, arrivals of Anglos and Saxons, Vikings and Normans, and Huguenots escaping Catholic persecution. However, it was only in the 20th century when the presence of many different cultures living together became noticeable.

People have been moving into the UK for many different reasons. In the 19th century, there were many Irish immigrants escaping from poverty in rural Ireland. In the 1930-40s, there were Jewish arrivals from Russia and Poland escaping fascism. After the Second World War, in 1948-1960s thousands of Black Caribbeans arrived after being invited to help rebuild postwar Britain. In fact, for many people that event marks the start of the mass immigration to the UK. It was followed by an influx of Indians and Pakistanis escaping poverty, seeking to work in public services and textile industries.

In 1990s there were Eastern European refugees escaping from political unrest in Romania and former Yugoslavia, and even more of them migrated into the UK from 2004 onwards, when the EU accepted eight new member countries.

The immigrants need time to settle in and mark their presence in the community. They contribute by adding new events to the cultural calendar, opening specialist food shops, and creating the need for new religious buildings. Temporary migrants may decide to stay in the host country and create permanent ethnic minorities. Ethnic groups that are poorly integrated with the rest of the community are called enclaves. They are formed when immigrants encounter some sort of barrier, for example they have not learnt the language of the majority. It is then vital for the local government to identify the problem and try and tackle it. Most British cities now provide special English lessons and bilingual programmes at schools and community centres, for both children and their parents. Some schools have also modified school meals and holiday patterns to reflect the ethnic mix. Then again, all these changes take time.

However, living in a multicultural society means that the majority has to accept the changes, develop tolerance, and get used to the cultural diversity within their own country.

During apartheid in South Africa, the country could hardly be called a ‘multicultural society’ since people were divided by their race and the races were forced to live apart from each other. This form of separation policy has never been introduced in the UK – which does not mean there have never been problems which arose from the ethnic differences.

Taking the Shambo 2007 case as an example – where a seemingly straightforward safety procedure became the focus of an intense political debate and caused uproar not only among the Hindu religious community, but also animal rights activists across the whole world. Shambo was a bull living in a Hindu temple in Wales. A routine skin test indicated that he might have been infected by the bovine tuberculosis bacterium. The Welsh government requested that the animal was slaughtered,