

Pre-draft consultation: Strathclyde Police – Race Equality Scheme 2005-2008 Response of the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

We welcome the opportunity for early input into the Strathclyde Police Race Equality Scheme 2005-2008 and support the view that 'it can only achieve validity if it has the consent of our communities'.

Religious Equality

Limited definitions are not always helpful, and we are concerned that, although religious equality and race equality are equally important, the former generally receives far less recognition than the latter and that fewer resources are made available to support it. In addition, where reference is made to religious equality, this is almost always in the area of sectarianism, which is strictly an intra-Christian phenomenon, whilst anti-semitism and Islamophobia are rarely mentioned.

Recognising Minorities

We are very concerned at the apparent invisibility of some religious and ethnic minorities. The words 'white' and 'black' are frequently and inaccurately used as if they were synonymous with 'majority' and 'minority'. When 'black' is used as if it were synonymous with 'minority community', many communities are excluded because they are not in any sense black. When 'white' is used as if it were synonymous with 'the majority community' these same communities are excluded once again because they are not part of the majority community. This double exclusion is particularly divisive and alienating.

The use of colour as an indicator of belonging to an ethnic minority is particularly problematic. The categories currently used to compile population statistics result in white minorities being unrecognised, and as a result their experiences of discrimination are frequently not addressed as effectively as are those of other, more visible minorities. In addition, the use of 'black' as an identifying category has been widely censured on a number of grounds. Not only do Africans object strongly to having to identify themselves by colour, when Asians, for example do not, but there are a great number of non-'black' minority communities in Scotland (eg. Polish, Kurdish, Italian, Gypsy Traveller), and there are also many Asians, particularly Chinese, who do not identify with this term at all, or who use it only as convenient political shorthand.

These problems are now widely acknowledged (see for example, 'Ethnic identity and the Census', Scottish Executive 2005, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/54357/0013572.pdf>) and it is widely expected that the wording of the ethnicity questions in the 2011 census will have been changed as a result of these concerns. We strongly recommend that the Strathclyde Police Race Equality Strategy should employ language that includes rather than excludes minority communities, and in particular that it should **not** use the term BME (Black and Minority Ethnic).

Equality

We would emphasise that equality does not mean ignoring relevant differences between groups but, on the contrary, demands considering and reflecting differences. For example, requiring everyone to work on Saturday would treat everyone equally but would discriminate against Jewish people; and similarly, holding compulsory informal team meetings in the pub would treat everyone equally but would discriminate against Muslim people. (It should be noted that were the Race Relations Act to extend to religion both of these situations would constitute 'indirect discrimination'.)

Education

We believe that education is an important tool for developing an organisation underpinned by race and religious equality and that race and religious equality must figure in training for people in all fields and at all levels, from senior management to new recruit.

It is, however, essential that all teaching materials are accurate and appropriate for the people for whom they are intended. We would emphasise that all teaching materials must be referred to the relevant community for checking. When this does not take place errors may frequently be incorporated and these may result in a negative impression of the community concerned.

Mainstreaming Race and Religious Equality

We are concerned to emphasise that race and religious equality are not issues to be considered in isolation and they should be regarded as 'everybody's business' not as the preserve of the diversity or equality officer. It is not enough for one department to audit policy and practice throughout Strathclyde Police, responsibility for race and religious equality must be borne in mind by all departments at all times. As long as race and religious equality are considered the preserve of a particular department or of a particular member of staff it is not realistic to expect significant changes in attitude to minority communities and to equality issues.

Monitoring progress

We would wish to highlight the importance of effective monitoring in order to assess whether policies and practices are effective. If it is to be of value, the way in which this monitoring is carried out must, however, be such as to provide accurate and useful information.

Success will depend both on getting the questions right and providing a culture in which those questioned will feel safe in responding to the questions honestly and without restraint.

In this context we would like to reiterate one area of concern, namely the choice of categories for monitoring ethnicity. In particular we would urge that, where possible, respondents should be encouraged to describe themselves in terms of ethnicity and

religion, and be permitted multiple responses (e.g. Jewish, Irish **and** African) rather than being required to fit into one of a number of pre-determined categories.

In conclusion

We strongly support the intention of Strathclyde Police to obtain the opinions and advice of communities affected by its Race Equality Scheme and its concern to 'ensure that equality exists in [its] treatment of both staff and the public', and we look forward to being able to comment on the document at draft stage.

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland comprising Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee as well as the more loosely linked groups of the Jewish Network of Argyll and the Highlands, and of students studying in Scottish Universities and Colleges.

In preparing this submission we have consulted widely among members of the Scottish Jewish community, and the views expressed are particularly supported by the Glasgow synagogues.