

Scottish Social Services Council Draft Equality Action Plan 2010 - 2011

Response from the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

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The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft Equality Action Plan.

Terminology: "BME"

Partly as a result of the 2001 census classifications, "Black" and "White" have come to be used as if they were synonymous with "minority" and "majority" communities. This has had the effect that some minority communities are excluded both from the majority and from the officially recognised minority, a particularly significant failing at a time when the largest communities of new immigrants are from Eastern Europe.

When "black" is used as if it were synonymous with "minority community", non-black communities such as the Jewish community 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.

It is evident that there is no single, clearly understood meaning of "black". In fact, the term is so ambiguous as not to be useful for identifying which group or groups are intended, and recent publications have used it variously to refer to:

- i) all minority communities regardless of skin colour
- ii) all visible minority communities (based solely on skin colour)
- iii) visible minority communities excluding Asians
- iv) minority communities that are neither "white", "Asian" nor "Hispanic".

It does not matter which, if any, of these uses¹ is correct. All that matters is that the term "black" is clearly multiply ambiguous, and that is sufficient to vitiate its use, and that of terms such as "BME" in categorising ethnicity. We are concerned that the use of "BME" in the draft Action Plan will militate against the first and second Strategic Objectives:

¹ For example:

- i) Ethnic Minority Achievement Programme newsletter (Department for Children, Schools, and Families) refers separately to "Black pupils" and to "Gypsy, Roma and Traveller ...Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Somali and Turkish heritage pupils"
<http://www.nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/downloader/cf56560ac89f0cd96ac7c0595e617df9.pdf>
- ii) Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Women in Political and Public Life in the United Kingdom (Government Equalities Office). "Black" is a separate category from "Asian" and "Minority Ethnic".
<http://www.equalities.gov.uk/pdf/8134-tso-bame-factsheet.pdf>
- iii) The Black Community Development Project defines "black" as referring to people from "diverse groups and communities who are targeted and discriminated against, and who suffer inequality because of their race, colour, nationality, culture, religion or status. It therefore refers to people of African, Afro-Caribbean, Asian, Chinese, South American origins, and any other person who is treated less favourably due to the above reasons. <http://www.bcdp.org.uk/node/11>

- “To ensure the accessibility and effectiveness of all communication between the SSSC and other parties including hard to reach and underrepresented groups”,
- and
- “To maximise access ... by eliminating any barriers ...”
- since minority groups that do not regard themselves as “black” will discount information that includes the term as not being relevant to them.

Monitoring

We would highlight the importance the third Specific Equality Key Performance Indicator to “*Monitor the number of those from BME Communities applying to work for the SSSC*”, but also emphasise that the format of the monitoring questionnaire must be such as will elicit intelligible and useful data.

Although the work and recommendations of the Commission on Integration & Cohesion² relate only to England and Wales, similar initiatives are currently being undertaken in Scotland to improve community relations, and the Commission’s recommendations about the collection of data relating to migration are, therefore, also relevant in Scotland. We particularly note the Commission’s view that progress will only be made “*once national data is updated and trusted*” and we do not believe it will be trusted until all ethnic and faith communities believe that monitoring is designed to include rather than exclude.

The underlying principle is that there is no single factor identifiable as “ethnicity”, but rather a variety of factors that contribute to an individual’s sense of “identity”, including the respondent’s nationality, descent, race, religion, culture, and language, among others. All of these must be taken into consideration if the data are to provide useful information in this complex and often sensitive area.

The 2001 census question, which offered an irrational mix of colour, nationality and geography as answers to a question about “cultural background”, while demanding a single answer, resulted in classifications that were ‘*confusing, inconsistent and inaccurate*’³ both as regards the question itself and the range and structure of the possible responses.

The Commission states that “*increasingly, people are moving away from single identities to multiple identities not just based on race or ethnicity, but differences in values, differences in life-style, consumption, social class, differences across generations, gender etc. People now have multiple identities and adjust these to the situation they are in – and this seems particularly true for the children or grandchildren of migrants ...*”

Furthermore, the Commission’s report goes on to report that recognising individuals’ multiple identities can have a beneficial effect on community relations: “*... multiple identification can be positive in that it can prevent any one part of a person’s identity becoming prioritised as a source of conflict.*”

² “Our Shared Future”: final report of the Commission on Integration & Cohesion
http://collections.europarchive.org/tna/20080726153624/http://www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk/~/media/assets/www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk/our_shared_future%20pdf.ashx

³ Ethnic Identity and the Census’ (Scottish Executive, 2005)
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/54357/0013571.pdf>

This view is supported by the findings of Government report⁴ that many people said that ticking more than one box “*would enable them to describe their ethnicity more accurately*”. Even more significantly “*the point was reinforced by the results of the 2006 census test, because, although they were instructed to tick only one box, about 7% ticked more than one.*”

Training

We strongly support the staff participation in equality and diversity training referred to in the fourth Specific Equality Key Performance Indicator. Education about communities other than one’s own is of immense value in demystifying the unfamiliar, and promoting the development of good relations between communities. However, it is essential that all information is accurate and appropriate, and we would therefore 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 which may result in an inaccurate, and possibly even a negative, impression of the community concerned.

Responsibility for Equality

We are pleased that the Action Plan clearly identifies the lead responsibility in each area, but there is a danger that this may result in some employees disowning responsibility for equality issues on the grounds that it is not their remit. We would, therefore, recommend that the Action Plan should include an explicit statement that ‘equality is everyone’s business’ and must be mainstreamed throughout all departments of the Council at every level.

Summary

We very much welcome the draft Action Plan, and believe that it will assist the SSSC to become more inclusive in terms both of employment and service provision, but urge that it should be amended in light of our comments to ensure that it is fully inclusive, and that its terminology is not the cause of any community being, or feeling, excluded.

Note: The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) 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. SCoJeC is Scottish Charity SC029438, and its aims are to advance public understanding about the Jewish religion, culture and community. It works with others to promote good relations and understanding among community groups and to promote equality, and represents the Jewish community in Scotland to government and other statutory and official bodies on matters affecting the Jewish community.

In preparing this response we have consulted widely among members of the Scottish Jewish community.

⁴ "Scotland's New Ethnicity Classification for Scottish Official Statistics and Recommended for Scotland's 2011 Census" (Scottish Government, July 2008)
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/233640/0063967.pdf>