

Equalities and Human Rights Committee

Inquiry into Race Equality, Employment and Skills

Submission from the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights, June 2020

Whilst CRER welcomes any attention being paid to race equality and employment, if real change is to be achieved some re-focusing of the nature of the Inquiry and of the questions being asked is needed.

In the first of the two evidence sessions that formed the basis of the inquiry, the very first witness that the Committee heard (Ms Kaliani Lyle, the former independent race advisor to the Scottish Government) said:

“The evidence on employment statistics outcomes, for example, shows that black and minority ethnic people are twice as likely to be unemployed, regardless of their having high educational attainment, and that they are four times as likely to live in overcrowded housing. The evidence overwhelmingly shows that very little has been done in the past 20 years that would make you feel that progress has been made.

“The tragedy is that that is not for want of investigating and looking at what the problems are. Many members around the table have been involved in committees or inquiries that have looked at the issues over and over again. Why is it that we have not made the progress that we should have made, despite having done lots of work and agreed that there are problems? What have the blockages been? Rather than reinventing the wheel over and over again and coming up with millions of actions that do not take us anywhere, the starting point should be to ask what the blockages are and why there has not been greater progress than there should have been”.

Later in the same evidence session, Jatin Haria, CRER’s Executive Director added:

“ we have had race equality initiatives for the past 30 years. We are not doing anything new. We have been working on this and, as we started off

saying, the frustration is with how little change there has been. As Kaliani Lyle said earlier, we know what the issues are, so, although community engagement and consultation are important, it is a waste of their time and ours to go and ask communities what the issues are. Let us ask them about implementation mechanisms, if that is what we want to do, or let us ask them [in this context, employers] about things being achieved”.

There is more than ample evidence about the employment inequalities faced by Black minority ethnic people in Scotland. Not only has this Committee itself looked at some of this in the past, its predecessor committee, the Equal Opportunities Committee, spent much of 2015 looking into these issues, and its report, “Removing Barriers: race, ethnicity and employment”, published in January 2016 contained a range of recommendations, almost all of which have never been further discussed, let alone implemented.

Much of the evidence submitted to the previous Inquiry would still be valid today. Links to previous submissions made by CRER to the EOC/EHRiC are provided below, and we would ask that the Committee consider these as part of the current inquiry. There has been little change in terms of race and employment since 2016, and there is a real danger that nothing much will change as a result of this Inquiry either unless a totally different approach is adopted.

A further problem with the framing of the current Inquiry is that the six questions being asked seem to focus on supply-side issues, as opposed to examining demand-side approaches to ethnic disparities in employment. All too often, there is a belief that employability schemes, skills provision, ESOL training, encouraging applications or providing unconscious bias training are the answer to the problem. However, in reality, many BME individuals seeking employment are born and educated in Scotland, and have better educational qualifications than their white counterparts. This is a well-qualified and relatively youthful workforce and we believe that only racial discrimination can explain much of the disparity.

The Inquiry questions that ask about how employers can help people to move into work, how they can encourage more BME people to apply, and how they can support BME people to keep them in the organisation focus on the supply side, framing the deficiency as one that is within minority ethnic communities

themselves. The critical role that institutionalised racial discrimination plays in labour market inequalities is not asked about or examined, and unless and until institutional racial discrimination is named and its role in employment inequalities recognised we will never begin to address the problem.

Thus, many of the recommendations from the 2016 report are as valid today as they were four years ago. These include the recommendations that call for:

- The Scottish Government to undertake work on the extent to which racial discrimination is an issue in recruitment processes in the public sector
- The use of open recruitment, where jobs are advertised and potential candidates are given reasonable access to information on the role and its requirements and the selection process
- The use of diverse interview panels
- The use of equality-related questions in interviews
- The provision of consistent, high quality post-interview feedback for all job applicants
- The promotion of the importance of the collection of equality data
- The Scottish Government to work with public bodies to ensure that policies on careers advice, work experience, work placements and internships are equality assessed and that the Scottish Government considers setting equality targets for such schemes
- The Scottish Government to work with public bodies to undertake their own review of equality and diversity training which is offered to employees.

In our 2015 inquiry evidence submission, CRER gave details on several previous short-term working groups and action plans to address the issue of employment inequality, including the 2006 Scottish Executive Strategic Group on BME Labour Market Participation, the 2006 Equal Opportunities Commission on the 'employment of visible ethnic minority women in Scotland', and the 2008 Scottish Government Race Equality Statement. We noted that these short-term ad hoc interventions had not changed the picture and asked that the EOC examine why these previous efforts have failed and what could be done in the future to ensure the same mistakes were not made. While the final report was clear that 40 years

of efforts had not brought us to labour market equality, it did not fully explore the reasons for past failures or hold the bodies responsible to account.

The final “Removing Barriers: race, ethnicity and employment” report concluded with the statement that “we can only make progress if we refuse to accept defective aspects of current employment and recruitment practices and challenge segregation within employment. Without confronting existing practices, we cannot address any underlying racism and discrimination that the evidence confirms exists.”

We urge this Committee to take this to heart and ensure that the findings of the current inquiry do not become another item on a list of well-intentioned publications that do not tackle the persistent and significant issue of racism in employment.

Jatin Haria
Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights
June 2020

Previous evidence on Race / Employment from CRER:

Removing Barriers: Race, Ethnicity, and Employment – EHRiC Scoping Exercise 2017

https://864a82af-f028-4baf-a09446facc9205ca.filesusr.com/ugd/7ec2e5_2f0a0997626a46e588a7c261ba9a4a46.pdf

CRER Submission to the EOC Inquiry into Race, Ethnicity, and Employment - 2015
Available from www.crer.scot

Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee - Women and Work Inquiry 2013

https://864a82af-f028-4baf-a094-46facc9205ca.filesusr.com/ugd/7ec2e5_71b93036476b4b9ba4303a9f0eecdcd2.pdf

(For convenience) Previous EOC Inquiry Report -

Removing Barriers: Race, Ethnicity, and Employment Inquiry Report - 2016

https://www.parliament.scot/S4_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/Reports/EOS042016R01Rev.pdf