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**National Discussion on the Future of Education**

**Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights**

**December 2022**

### Originally submitted via an online survey

1. What kind of education will be needed by children and young people in Scotland in the future?

A pro-active, sustainable and effective anti-racist education. This is important not only for Black and minority ethnic learners, but for all learners and for the wider community.

The Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CRER) has been campaigning to address structural racism in Scotland’s education system for two decades. We believe that it is vital for this work to be a core part of mainstream education policy, and so we urge Scottish Government to ensure that the outcomes of the National Discussion incorporate anti-racist action.

Whilst the recent focus through the Race Equality and Anti-Racism in Education Programme is welcome, our review of race equality strategy since devolution (commissioned by Scottish Government) has clearly demonstrated that time-limited actions or projects do not achieve sustainable change. This includes actions within the education sector.

Mechanisms to ensure a continued, sustainably and adequately resourced focus on anti-racism are the only way to tackle the ingrained issues of racism and inequality facing Black and minority ethnic learners in Scotland’s schools.

There are many factors which can support anti-racist education, and these are expanded on throughout our survey answers. There is significant cross-over between the questions, which are not ideal for communicating the change needed to achieve an effective approach to anti-racism in education.

In relation to this particular question, we will set out some views on anti-racism within the curriculum. However, other factors described elsewhere in our response are equally important.

CRER understand the nature of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) as non-prescriptive, providing teachers with a flexible framework for education.

The lived experience of Black and minority ethnic learners demonstrates that this approach has both potential benefits and real drawbacks.

Scotland is not mono-cultural, but the current curriculum can make it appear as though it is. Learning that incorporates perspectives outside of a white Scottish, Western or Eurocentric viewpoint is regarded as an add-on rather than a core part of everyday learning. Where Black History and issues around race and racism are covered, this is sometimes a negative experience for Black and minority ethnic children and young people, because teachers overwhelmingly lack the capacity to create psychologically safe spaces when delivering these topics. Where the ‘celebrating diversity’ agenda is taken forward, it often relies on stereotypes and stresses difference at the expense of commonality.

Black and minority ethnic young people have spoken out on these issues, and have garnered support for their views (including through several petitions). Additionally, in 2017, the young people involved in the Scottish Government’s own [Fairer Future Panel](https://youngscot.net/observatory/fairer-future-race-equality) called for change - that the curriculum and school system should be more inclusive and supportive of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds.

The role of assessment and the delivery of specific modules has been raised as a concern regarding curriculum diversity. Research has found that on transatlantic slavery, for example, approaches can be patchy, and the British history focus of the current module Atlantic Slave Trade, 1770–1807 [can lead to a limited perspective on Scotland’s role](https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/TakingStockRaceEqualityInScotlandJuly2020.pdf).

In England, slavery and abolition have been compulsory themes in secondary schools since 2008. There are acknowledged problems with this – it is a narrow and limited focus which could be counterproductive if not balanced with other diverse themes and perspectives across the range of curriculum areas. Making it compulsory does not guarantee that the themes are taught well, or sensitively. Nevertheless, this is one lever for change which the current structure of Curriculum for Excellence does not support. We would be in favour of any structural reform which increases the chances of curriculum diversity being implemented effectively in Scotland.

Experience so far shows that the current approach is not working. Our research for the Scottish Government’s Race Equality Curriculum Resources Review Group[[1]](#footnote-1) demonstrated that teachers are overwhelmingly not using the resources available, and many of them are of poor quality. Those teachers who do choose to build anti-racist approaches into the curriculum are developing their own resources. However, there is no strong driver for them to do so unless they want to. The generic language on equality and inclusion within Curriculum for Excellence is not sufficient to motivate this. Future curriculum reform must ensure that a curriculum which supports anti-racism is present across the learning environment, not an optional add-on.

Our guide for teachers, [Introduction to Anti-Racist Curriculum Development](https://www.crer.org.uk/anti-racist-curriculum), sets out how an anti-racist curriculum can be achieved in practice.

2. How do we make that a reality?

In regard to creating a pro-active, sustainable and effective anti-racist education for all, action is required on a number of fronts. Many of these align with the workstreams of the Race Equality and Anti-Racism in Education Programme:

* Curriculum Reform
* Diversity in the Teaching Profession and Education Workforce
* Racism and Racist Incidents
* Education Leadership and Professional Learning

Additional areas which are important to note include an anti-racist focus in reform of assessment and measures of attainment, inspection, wider anti-bullying policy (not included within the Racism and Racist Incidents workstream), exclusions and behaviour/discipline, parental involvement, pupil voice, additional support for learning, pedagogy, co-production and collaborative learning, educational psychology and wellbeing support, careers guidance and vocational learning. As well as the much-discussed whole school approach to anti-racism, a whole system approach is needed – anti-racism as a key focus across policy and practice at national, local authority and school level.

The following excerpt from our recent review of anti-racist policy making, undertaken on behalf of Scottish Government, sets out some key principles which education policy makers at all levels need to reflect:

“Anti-racist approaches to policy making would reflect principles such as:

* Redressing power hierarchies inherent in current approaches to policy development, including the impact of lack of representation of minority ethnic people in positions of influence and decision making roles
* Correcting economic, political and social imbalances created by white privilege and entrenched racial inequalities through positive action and other forms of targeted action
* Implementing structural and systemic solutions to racial inequalities – changing policy and practice, as opposed to ‘sticking plaster’ approaches which treat the effects of structural racism rather than its origins
* Avoiding the deficit model which downplays structural racism in favour of explanations related to personal capacity, culturally specific attitudes and behaviours or individual choices (often replicating racist stereotypes and/or minimising the role of racism in creating and maintaining inequalities)
* Rights based approaches which recognise that inaction on racism and racial inequalities breaches the rights of minority ethnic people; other potential imperatives for action which may be more palatable and avoid disrupting the racial contract, such as ‘the business case’ for equality, are counterproductive
* Intersectional approaches particularly recognising the specific inequalities facing minority ethnic women[[2]](#footnote-2)
* Overcoming discomfort or reticence that policy makers may have around frank discussion of race and racism, and other manifestations of white fragility which could impact policy making
* Policy making based on robust evidence about the nature and prevalence of racial inequalities and racism, as well as ‘what works’ to create change
* Effective, meaningful involvement of minority ethnic people and organisations with tangible impacts on policy development
* Building capacity on race equality and anti-racism, with recognition that it is not the responsibility of minority ethnic people to ‘educate’ policy makers
* Creating interest convergence by providing strong imperatives for policy makers to come together with race equality stakeholders and identify solutions
* Prioritising effective, measurable action to secure race equality over and above the optics of ethos and rhetoric on race equality

The final point is particularly important. Although there is no universally agreed definition of anti-racism, the main point of common understanding is that it requires action against personal, social and institutional racism. Inaction is, in itself, a policy making decision. Policy makers wield power not just through what they do, but through what they choose not to do.”

3. How can every child and young person’s individual needs be supported and addressed in the future?

Our answer to this question focuses on creating an anti-racist school environment.

Black and minority ethnic learners often face a school environment that lacks racial literacy, intercultural competence and community cohesion. This disrupts their sense of belonging and creates risks that they will face overt and covert racism, stereotyping and other forms of excluding, othering behaviours from peers, teachers and within the wider school community.

To address this, the following would be required:

* A racially literate teaching workforce, with in depth opportunities for anti-racist learning from ITE onwards and a requirement to evidence racial literacy for those in senior roles (this should be a requirement for entry to Into Headship or similar programmes in future)
* A diverse teaching workforce, where barriers to entry and career progression are removed and teaching diversity targets met (which, at last count, would require an additional 200 entrants per year on top of current figures)
* Authentic, meaningful diversity within the curriculum and wider learning environment, including decolonial approaches and reflection of diversity within Scotland as well as in a global context
* Learning which creates community cohesion and solidarity, builds racial literacy and intercultural competence, disrupts in-group/out-group behaviours and achieves an environment where Black and minority ethnic learners equally belong in the school community, and are regarded as belonging equally by all
* Learning which supports the critical thinking and multi-perspectivity which young people need to resist myths and stereotypes, including the far right extremist propaganda which is actively being used to recruit young people in Scotland into far right organisations
* Learning environments where Black and minority ethnic learners and their parents/carers have a voice, a meaningful influence and are empowered to assert their rights, undertake activism and take up personal development and leadership opportunities
* Safer, braver spaces to talk about race and racism, and to take action to address and prevent racism within schools
* Effective, rapid and sustainable approaches to tackling racist incidents and racially motivated bullying where these arise in schools
* Support for wellbeing, including advocacy and advice available for learners and their parents/carers who may be at risk of experiencing racism (as well as for Black and minority ethnic teachers, who can be equally at risk of this)
* Standardised, mandatory, nationally collated recording and monitoring of racist incidents and racially motivated bullying which informs policy and practice
* Whole school approaches to anti-racism at local level, supported by strong policy at Local Authority and national level
* Consequences for failing to create supportive environments for Black and minority ethnic learners through racially literate quality improvement and inspection

4. What is one thing that needs to stay and why?

For many years, CRER would have described the national education policy environment as institutionally racist. Whilst challenges of this nature undoubtedly still exist, recent work undertaken through the Race Equality and Anti-Racism in Education Programme represents a significant improvement in policy making practice, and particularly in involving those with experience and expertise in policy making.

Beyond the work currently in development, however, it is unclear whether Scottish Government’s commitment to anti-racism in education is sustainable. Prioritisation, resourcing and action to address the ingrained issues that the programme aims to tackle must stay, and should be enhanced in future to ensure that the work creates genuine, lasting change.

5. What are the most important priorities for a future Scottish education system?

Whilst the wide reaching engagement being undertaken through the National Discussion is welcome, prioritisation must have an evidence based and rights based focus. The resulting ‘call to action’ cannot be based on the loudest voices. It must be clearly targeted at addressing the most severe weaknesses and the most ingrained inequalities within the system.

Learners are not equally affected by these weaknesses and inequalities, so generic approaches will fail those who need the future of education to improve most. It is essential that the outcome of the National Discussion includes targeted approaches, including a clear focus on anti-racism to address the issues facing Black and minority ethnic learners, teachers, parents and carers and those in the wider school community.

6. How can we ensure that everyone involved in education in Scotland has a say in future decisions and actions?

Within our field of work, opportunities to be involved in decisions and actions within education policy have been lacking until recently. Despite our significant experience in research and campaigning on education, and particularly racially motivated bullying, our organisation was excluded from the involvement which took place around the last refresh of national anti-bullying policy. After a significant period of lobbying against this, we were finally permitted to comment on an almost-final version of the strategy, but these comments had a very limited impact and did not result in any of our most profound concerns being addressed. No organisation representing the interests of Black and minority ethnic learners was involved beyond this, despite racially motivated bullying being the most commonly witnessed form of prejudice-based bullying identified by teachers. At our request, the Equality and Human Rights Committee (now the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee) requested that the policy making process be paused in order to ensure issues around prejudice-based bullying could be adequately explored, but this period of pause did not make a difference. This was perhaps the worst case of institutional racism in policy making that we have encountered.

Despite positive experiences in the current period, we remain wary that the priorities we put forward could be diluted or excluded from future education policy initiatives. Where we have been involved previously in education policy work, our input has had limited impact, often only preventing a worsening of current policy rather than creating any improvements. If this has been the experience of CRER, an organisation with significant reach and influence across policy areas in Scotland, then radical, transformational action will be required if the ambition within this question is to be achieved.

Our previous experiences stand in sharp contrast to the current work of the Race Equality and Anti-Racism in Education Programme. There may be lessons to be learned from this programme for wider policy making in the education sector.

Whilst the process has not always been smooth and the outcomes are yet to be established, this was the first time that such a wide range of race equality stakeholders (importantly, including MYSPs and representatives of young people’s organisations) had been brought together to develop policy directly alongside civil servants and staff from across education sector institutions and organisations.

This approach has, so far, ensured that a fuller range of perspectives from professional, expert and lived experience could inform the process.

However, it has been a challenge to involve Black and minority ethnic learners themselves in this work. There appears to be a lack of infrastructure and capacity to support learner involvement in national policy and decision making. This could be usefully addressed through the outcome of the National Discussion.

It has been a challenge for civil servants to work productively with stakeholders who, until now, have not had policy making experience. It has also been a challenge for stakeholders with significant experience in anti-racism to work productively with civil servants and education sector colleagues who often began the process without an understanding of anti-racism. It’s therefore essential that preparation for engagement includes work to ensure that capacity, understanding and power hierarchies are equalised in as far as possible before the work begins.

In many cases, especially where engagement may involve subjects which are sensitive, contentious or carry a risk of being distressing for stakeholders, it is important that opportunities for involvement are facilitated by people who have the right training and experience to support this. Civil servants are frequently being asked to undertake engagement as part of their everyday work without any capacity building or professional development on facilitating effective involvement, which is unfair for all parties.

Finally, engagement must lead to meaningful change which reflects what participants want to see and is communicated back to them clearly. Involvement for involvement’s sake is still too common within policy making. This damages relationships between stakeholders and Government, leading to poor policy decisions and consultation fatigue.

7. How can children and young people be cared for and supported in the future? (i.e. physical and mental wellbeing)

Our answer to this question relies on, and to a degree replicates, the content of our recent report Racially Motivated Bullying: Policies and Recording in Scotland’s Schools (available here: <https://bit.ly/3UkLqSI>).

For the past twenty years, CRER has campaigned for better practice on racially motivated bullying in schools. This is a key area of our work and will remain so, in light of the severe and lasting impact of racism in the school environment on generations of minority ethnic people growing up in Scotland.

Racially motivated bullying is only one of many manifestations of racism in education. A 2018 survey by the Educational Institute of Scotland uncovered a wide variety of issues identified by teachers, from unhelpful curriculum content to barriers to career progression. However, racist attitudes and behaviours amongst learners (and to a lesser extent, colleagues) were the most prevalent issues raised. A summary of the survey can be found in the appendices to Scottish Government (2018). [Teaching in a Diverse Scotland](https://www.gov.scot/publications/teaching-diverse-scotland-increasing-retaining-minority-ethnic-teachers-scotlands-schools/pages/16/).

The impact of racism on young people’s mental health, wellbeing and sense of belonging and identity cannot be underestimated. There is increasing evidence to demonstrate lifelong effects on physical health; the chronic or repeated stress induced by racism impacts hormonal and neurotransmitter activity with a knock on effect on blood pressure, cholesterol and other physical markers, creating health and mortality inequalities. This pattern was thrown into sharp focus through the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on minority ethnic communities.

Racism experienced by learners in Scotland’s schools today has the potential to actively damage their adult health. It is vital that Scotland’s education sector recognises and addresses this.

Our recently published report explores racially motivated bullying policy and recording practice across Scotland’s 32 Local Authorities. The analysis within this report demonstrates a clear need for reform of anti-bullying policy, including recording and monitoring mechanisms. The findings indicate that action is urgently needed at national level, at local level and within schools.

Some highlights within the findings include:

* Weaknesses in national anti-bullying policy have filtered through to local level, with a decrease in content on racism and race equality over the past ten years
* Only six areas still provide a way to record racist incidents which don’t constitute bullying, but that system is rarely used; there is no way to track racist graffiti, sharing of far right extremist materials and other signs that racism is a problem within school populations
* Data gathered through our Freedom of Information Request shows that 1,198 racially motivated bullying incidents were recorded in 2020/21, the highest level yet, but under-reporting and failures in the recording system mean that the true number is liable to be far higher
* Scottish Government’s attempt to implement a voluntary approach to recording and monitoring (revised and relaunched in 2018) has failed, with 61% of schools failing to use the SEEMiS Bullying and Equalities module altogether and 83% failing to record racially motivated bullying

In putting forward solutions, we are mindful of the need to avoid pre-empting the outcome of the Race Equality and Anti-Racism in Education Programme (REAREP). It is hoped that meaningful change in national level policy will emerge from this, as well as measures to support better practice locally and in schools. However, with actions still to be finalised and resourced for the short term, it is essential that the National Discussion takes a stance on these issues as long term priorities.

The following recommendations arising from our research represent the direction of travel that we advocate for through our engagement in REAREP and would want to see embedded in work to implement the National Discussion’s planned ‘call to action’:

* Ensure that sufficient, sustainable resources are invested into the activity emerging from REAREP and future anti-racist work, particularly in relation to capacity building for educators
* Embed anti-racism into mainstream anti-bullying policy in addition to a targeted focus on racist incidents, ensuring a strong approach to addressing both in policy and practice
* Introduce a mandatory reporting and recording system, with data collated and analysed at both local and national level (addressing both prejudice-based bullying and non-bullying prejudice-based incidents)
* Invest in advice and advocacy services for both young people affected by racism in school and their parents/carers
* Address the current gap in resolution processes by ensuring that the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is able to address the role of racism or other forms of discrimination in its investigations of Local Authority complaints failings
* Develop a programme of research into the experiences of Black and minority ethnic learners which can be repeated over time in order to track the impact of changing policy and practice

8. How can the right of every child and young person to have opportunities to develop their full potential be achieved in future?

For Black and minority ethnic young people, the impact of structural racism limits life opportunities across a wide range of areas that go beyond education. However, many of these areas are intrinsically linked to education, as for all children and young people, their experience at school sets the scene for later life in many ways.

It must be recognised that high attainment within school level education for Black and minority ethnic young people does not translate into labour market advantage. Knowledge of this is, in many ways, a motivating factor for high attainment. It cannot be assumed that, because attainment levels are good in most (not all) minority ethnic groups, barriers to opportunity are reduced.

With regard to opportunities available within the school environment, living with the realities of racism on institutional, social and personal levels can mean that such opportunities feel out of reach for Black and minority ethnic learners.

The following factors, many of which are replicated or expanded on elsewhere in this response, need to be in place to address those barriers within the school environment:

* The supportive environment created by a racially literate and diverse teaching workforce
* A curriculum and wider learning environment in which they can see themselves reflected, see a wider range of perspectives reflected and which actively works against the ideologies of white supremacy – for example racial stereotyping, hierarchies of power and belonging, assimilation, othering, over-scrutiny and undervaluing of Black and minority ethnic people – which can stunt confidence and limit access to opportunities
* A strong sense of belonging within the school community for all, with protection from the experience of overt or covert racism, and mechanisms to deal with racism that have the full confidence of those at risk of experiencing racism
* Careers guidance and vocational learning which breaks stereotypes and tackles barriers in order to reduce future occupational segregation, including engaging families in discussions about subject choice and transitions to positive destinations
* Opportunities proactively created for Black and minority ethnic learners and their parents/carers to have a voice, a meaningful influence and to be empowered to assert their rights (including being able to openly discuss and plan action to address racism)

9. How can children and young people be helped to learn about our changing world, so they feel able to positively contribute?

Much of the information given at our response to question 1 will be of relevance to this question. A strong focus on social justice, as is reflected currently in education policy but perhaps less well implemented in practice, would assist in encouraging young people to feel they can positively contribute.

As well as ensuring that what young people learn achieves the ambition within this question, how they learn and the environment they learn in is also key. Many of the core messages within UNESCO’s [Futures of Education](https://en.unesco.org/futuresofeducation/) report provide solutions to this, highlighting the need for transformation of education to address the needs of societies in the current and future global context.

10. Do you have any other comments that you would like to provide about a vision for the future of Scottish Education?

We have attached a document setting out key priorities discussed in a joint meeting between CRER and colleagues in the youth sector.

Email the files direct to nationaldiscussiononeducation@gov.scot (please include the unique ID provided at the end of the consultation in the subject line)

1. Report can be provided on request [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This term is widely misused; although it can be useful in talking about some other combinations of protected characteristic, it is not the same thing as multiple discrimination. It was developed because Black women face a unique set of stereotypes and discriminations that do not apply to either Black men or white women. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)