

**Cross Party Group on Tackling Islamophobia
in Scotland
26 August 2019**

1. The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Public Inquiry into Islamophobia in Scotland.
2. The NASUWT is the fastest growing teachers' union in Scotland, representing teachers and school leaders in all sectors of education.

GENERAL COMMENTS

3. Islamophobia has intensified in recent years. In certain quarters, an unfounded association has been made between terrorist networks, human rights violations and Muslim communities. This has inflamed racial and religious tensions in some towns and cities, and may have contributed to the resurgence of extreme far-right political parties.
4. All of these developments have resulted in an increased level of anxiety within both Muslim communities and other communities. Schools and colleges are not immune to these tensions, and preventing and tackling Islamophobia should be a priority for every school and college.
5. The NASUWT notes that Islamophobia may include a range of behaviours and practices such as:

- direct verbal or physical attacks against individuals and groups;
 - discrimination in relation to access to jobs, goods and services and other civic rights and entitlements; and
 - cultural or religious insensitivity, which may create barriers to Muslim people becoming involved in society and result in them feeling marginalised or excluded.
6. Amongst students in schools and colleges, such prejudice and racism may take the form of: name-calling; offensive ‘jokes’; verbal assault; graffiti; intimidation; exclusion from friendship groups; and physical assault.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

NASUWT MEMBER FEEDBACK

7. The NASUWT actively opposes all forms of harassment, prejudice and unfair discrimination. It is committed to challenging discrimination, inequality and intolerance, and recognises that schools and colleges play an essential role in this work. The NASUWT has a diverse membership of women, men, disabled, black and minority ethnic (BME), old and young, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) teachers, and teachers with different religions/beliefs. The Union is committed to promoting equality for all of its members in order to achieve equal and fair treatment at work.
8. Equality is therefore, at the heart of everything that the Union does and it may be of use to the inquiry to receive feedback from our members over the last year on their experience of discrimination in Scottish schools.
9. The NASUWT has a programme of training courses and events specifically tailored for under-represented groups. The annual BME Teachers’ Consultation Conferences have proved to be a highly successful part of the NASUWT’s annual programme of Consultation Conferences, aimed specifically at members from under-represented groups. This Consultation Conference enables BME members

to discuss the key professional issues and challenges they face, share experiences, and meet other members in a safe and inclusive environment. At the 2018 conference, 60% of BME teachers did not believe that the treatment of BME teachers has improved in the last decade.

10. At the recent Scotland Equality Conference in June 2019, comments from members included:

“A pupil referred to me as the ‘curry lady’ in their notebook. When I approached my line manager, they did not deal with it. A lot of the time, racism is ignored: it is easier to pretend it hasn’t happened”

“Colleagues do not challenge racism when exhibited by other teachers”

The 2019 Conference Declaration calls for urgent action to secure equality for all teachers in schools and colleges, including action to:

- challenge bullying, harassment and discrimination in schools and colleges;
- secure compulsory equality training for all staff in schools and colleges; and
- campaign for and promote the embedding of equalities within the curriculum.

11. Our member concerns are further reflected in recent motions to Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) Black Workers 2018:

Combating Discrimination through Systemic Change

“Conference is appalled with the wealth of research showing that BME teachers and other workers with protected characteristics face greater barriers and discrimination in gaining promotion and pay progression than the generality of workers, and that both overt and covert instances of racism are a daily reality in workplaces.

Conference considers that systemic, organisational change is required in the education service to challenge these injustices.

Conference therefore calls on the STUC to work with affiliates to:

- i. promote mandatory race equality and cultural diversity awareness training across the education service;*
- ii. develop and promote a model policy on religious observance; and*
- iii. create discrimination toolkits to assist workplace representatives in identifying and combatting racist activity in the workplace.*

Diversity and the Curriculum

Conference is appalled that racial discrimination is deep-rooted, endemic and institutionalised in the education system and is blighting the lives and careers of BME teachers and damaging the futures of children and young people.

Conference is concerned that Government strategies for improving attainment and achievement of children and young people have focused solely on the challenges facing those from our most deprived areas, and that the experience of pupils who have a protected characteristic under the Equality Act have been overshadowed by a reliance on poverty as the sole factor affecting education participation and attainment.

*Conference notes that the indicators in **How Good is Our School?** set out that the curriculum should provide children and young people with well-planned and progressive opportunities to explore diversity and multi-faith issues and to challenge racism and religious intolerance, but considers much more needs to be undertaken for education on racism and diversity to be imbedded effectively in the curriculum.*

Conference therefore calls on the STUC to:

- i. promote education on diversity and challenging racism and religious intolerance as an essential vehicle to combat institutionalised racism;*

- ii. *raise awareness about the prevalence of racism and Islamophobia, in support of the aims of the Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Tackling Islamophobia;*
- iii. *highlight the need for a national conversation about racism in the education system, with all key stakeholders, including Government, taking ownership of the agenda; and*
- iv. *highlight the over-use of the word 'equity' and the under-use of 'equality', 'racism' and 'discrimination' in Government policy".*

12. The NASUWT Big Question Survey, carried out in February and March each year, is the only annual national survey of teachers and headteachers tracking trends in teachers' and school leaders' opinions. In demonstrating the developing views of teachers and school leaders and the issues that impact their work, the survey is a unique opportunity to highlight the changing opinions of teachers and school leaders over several years. In the 2019 Big Question Survey, 39% of BME teachers said they had been subject to discriminatory language or abuse by a pupil and 16% had been subject to discriminatory language or abuse by a parent or carer. Furthermore, 87% of BME teachers in the survey believed that the job had impacted negatively on their wellbeing in the last 12 months.

13. The NASUWT was actively engaged in the recent career pathway review for teachers and took the lead by arranging for a roundtable of NASUWT BME members to input directly into the work of the panel. Feedback from members who participated in the roundtable event included:

"Unfortunately, Scottish schools are not welcoming for people of BME backgrounds as we are not doing enough to recognise their achievements nor celebrating the diversity we have in Scottish schools unfortunately. I feel that in the same way we are trying to build an acceptance and tolerance about other issues in society, there isn't enough being done to stamp out racism and Islamophobia it's not seen as a priority even though it is a very real issue. I know of many Muslim women who have left teaching altogether due to suffering

Islamophobic bullying, and of others who have left to work abroad due to better conditions and opportunities too.

I would add that some have experienced Islamophobia within the workplace - religious holidays have to be put into yearly planners so that the stigma and the feeling like a leper is removed. If you have fasted for 28 days, then a holiday to celebrate the end of it should be acknowledged in a diverse workforce”.

14. The following key points were raised at the roundtable event and forwarded to the full panel for consideration as part of the review:

- There must be recognition that racism and prejudice exists within the system and that it is a barrier to BME teachers progressing. Without this recognition, the career pathway review looks like a 'whitewash'.
- It was agreed that we needed a set of open and transparent principles, but much more needed to be done. Even with good principles, if a headteacher has a veto at an interview, this can skew the system.
- Positive/affirmative action is needed to boost BME candidates (for example, having a BME person on the interview panel or by introducing quotas).
- There is an urgent need for equality training across the board, including interview processes and at inspection level. It is not just about training however, there needs to be action thereafter to continue to support BME teachers (for example, local authorities could use anonymous surveys).
- Questions were raised as to whether any of the career panel were BME. They felt that this creates an unnecessary barrier to engagement. When BME teachers feel that they are not heard, they stop engaging. They felt that the process was merely paying lip service to BME issues at best. The lack of recognition within the system has created a culture of disenfranchisement where staff are unwilling or afraid to speak up. Teaching is not a career which would be recommended to BME family/friends.

- When asked whether specific action was required to address BME concerns in addition to everyone else, the answer was 'yes' and the starting point was training for all. Additionally, acknowledgement and recognition is needed that it is more difficult for ethnic minority staff in teaching to climb the career pathway.
- When asked whether the structure was satisfactory but the way it was being applied was the problem, it was stressed that you could not disassociate the two and the current structure should be considered inherently discriminatory. The panel reinforced the issue of institutional racism as defined in the MacPherson report (it is a collective failure of BME workers). The career pathways need to acknowledge the existence of 'White Privilege' in Scottish education, as revealed by Critical Race Theory and Kalwant Bhopal's 'White Privilege: The Myth of a Post-Racial Society', and act accordingly.

CONCLUSIONS:

15. While there is no specific national policy for schools and colleges on preventing and tackling Islamophobia, it remains an issue for all schools and colleges, regardless of the number of Muslim students or staff within the establishment.

16. Schools and colleges need to take steps to ensure that:

- the school/college promotes a climate of respect for diverse beliefs and customs;
- every student, member of staff, and parent/carer within the school or college community feels valued and secure;
- the curriculum reflects and represents accurately the racial, cultural and religious diversity of Scotland and the world, and addresses issues of difference and diversity in ways that counter prejudiced assumptions about ethnic, cultural and faith groups;
- false assumptions and stereotypes are challenged with sound factual information;

- they are vigilant for any signs of name-calling, abuse or bullying involving any member of the school/college community;
- all incidents of name-calling, abuse and bullying are reported, recorded and dealt with promptly and sensitively;
- the views and needs of staff and students from all religious and ethnic backgrounds are identified, including through consultation, and used in policy planning and decision-making;
- policy proposals and decisions are assessed and monitored to establish their impact on ethnic, cultural and religious grounds;
- arrangements for appointing, promoting and developing staff are open, fair, transparent and non-discriminatory;
- all staff are given appropriate training and support to enable them to tackle discrimination, bullying and harassment, promote equality of opportunity and tackle issues of racial, cultural and religious diversity;
- appropriate systems for monitoring by ethnicity and religious group are in place, and monitoring includes pupil attainment and progress, school admissions, sanctions (including exclusion), staff recruitment and selection, promotions (including the award of responsibility points) and professional development; and
- where monitoring identifies differences/gaps between groups of students/staff, measures, including positive action strategies, are put in place to address inequalities and improve outcomes.

17. In light of the points listed above, school and college leaders have a critical role to play in ensuring that issues related to Islamophobia are identified and addressed appropriately and effectively. They need to ensure that:

- equality matters are identified and addressed through strategic planning and decision-making;
- all staff and students know about equality policy and procedures, and that they are being implemented consistently and coherently across the establishment;

- responsibility for tackling Islamophobia and promoting good practice is a collective one; and
- all staff are appropriately trained and supported so that they can fulfil their roles and responsibilities.

18. Furthermore, school and college leaders should ensure that individual staff are not isolated or placed in a vulnerable position because they challenge Islamophobia and racism, or promote equality and diversity through their teaching. School leaders should be aware that some staff, notably Muslim staff and staff from minority ethnic backgrounds, may be particularly vulnerable if the school does not adopt a collective approach to tackling these issues.

19. It is also vital that schools and colleges identify and challenge prejudice and discrimination related to dress code. Establishing a dress code policy that is sensitive to the needs of Muslims will help to raise staff and students' awareness of discrimination and prejudice. Furthermore, it will help schools and colleges to avoid discrimination and promote social and community cohesion.

20. It is good practice to provide facilities to enable students and staff to pray or engage in personal reflection. Schools and colleges need to ensure that facilities provided for prayer and personal reflection meet the needs of those who use or might use the facility. Schools and colleges should consult staff and students about their needs and engage them in discussions and decisions about prayer and quiet-room facilities. They should also monitor the use of facilities and seek feedback to identify and address any issues or concerns.

21. Finally, it is disappointing that local authorities and schools are not always cognisant of their duties and responsibilities under not only the Equality Act, but also the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). Under the PSED, your school management and the local authority are required to have 'due regard' when making decisions and developing policies to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited under the Equality Act 2010;

- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- foster good relations across all protected characteristics between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

22. The PSED means that:

- a school must assess whether any decision it makes, or action it takes, may have implications for people with particular protected characteristics;
- such equality implications should not be an afterthought They should be considered before and at the time a policy is developed or a decision is taken;
- each strand of the duty should be considered consciously and separately (eliminating discrimination is different to advancing equality);
- the risk and extent of any adverse impact that might result from a policy or decision should be assessed and consideration given to the ways in which that risk may be eliminated before the adoption of a proposed policy;
- this is not just a box-ticking exercise. The equality duty should be integrated into all of the work of the school – to comply with the duty, the school should conduct the necessary analysis robustly and with an open mind; and
- schools and local authorities must carry out this duty themselves. It cannot be delegated to an outside agency. They must also record all the steps they have taken to meet the duty.

23. In order to better support the implementation of the PSED, the NASUWT has been campaigning for mandatory race equality and cultural diversity awareness training across the whole education service. In order to secure the best outcomes we must ensure that the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and Convention of Local Authorities (COSLA) develop and implement an appropriate programme of race equality training for the school workforce, ensure that access to appropriate professional learning, including equality training, is a contractual right of all teachers and headteachers; and require all employees with line management responsibilities in schools are trained and understand fully their

equalities' duties and responsibilities. The time for action is now. The NASUWT believes that mandatory ongoing equality training for all schools and in all Initial Teacher Training Institutions should comply with the PSED, as it is essential in order to recognise and tackle Islamophobia within Scottish schools.

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