

**Scrutiny of the Race Equality Action Plan Year 1 Progress Update:**

**Briefing for the Equalities and Human Rights Committee**

The Scottish Government published the ‘Race Equality Action Plan: Year 1 Progress Update’ [‘Progress Report’] on 28June 2019.[[1]](#footnote-1) This report summarises the work that the Scottish Government and its partners have taken against all actions in the Race Equality Action Plan [‘Action Plan’][[2]](#footnote-2) between December 2017 and December 2018. The Action Plan, which was first published in 2017, ostensibly sat under the Race Equality Framework [‘Framework’]. However, the Action Plan was not directly linked to Framework commitments or properly reflective of the vision and goals of the Framework.

CRER would like to formally thank the Committee for agreeing to scrutinise this publication. As we noted in our 30th July 2019 letter requesting a review, if the Scottish Government is not on track to meet the goals identified in the Action Plan and the Framework, there will be an opportunity for course correction if scrutiny is undertaken now, rather than at a later date.

As an initial note, CRER is pleased to report that the Scottish Government’s Race Equality Unit is leading on efforts to improve the Progress Report in future updates, and has been receptive to our concerns regarding the existing deficiencies. However, we are greatly concerned that other departments, who feed into the reporting of the Progress Report through the Equality Unit, may not be as willing to take the action required to enable this improvement. Given our repeated experiences of witnessing Framework commitments being ignored and civil servants moving from one department to another with no accountability for continuing implementation of race equality initiatives, we are concerned that without the Committee’s intervention, future reporting on the Action Plan will not be improved, and no real change will occur.

To ensure that that the Action Plan plays - as it states in its introduction - a “key part in advancing race equality, tackling racism, and addressing the barriers that prevent people from minority ethnic communities from realising their potential,” consistent monitoring and scrutiny is essential. The Committee has not yet been able to examine the Framework or Action Plan themselves, the Framework was not debated in the Chamber and debate on the Action Plan in 2017 was curtailed as it fell on the same day as a budget debate. It is therefore essential that the Action Plan be considered now to assure minority ethnic communities that it still has potential to achieve what it set out to do.

**Critical Issues with the Progress Report**

CRER has reviewed the Progress Report, and notes significant flaws in the way progress has been reported for the first year, including the following:

* As a whole, the Progress Report has little focus on race (excluding the Gypsy/Traveller related updates, **almost 40% of the remaining 65 updates have no focus on race**). Similarly, few updates had any explanation of how minority ethnic perspectives were being considered in the ongoing work. While some updates listed community groups or race equality organisations as partners, simply listing partners with no context as to their contribution (i.e. a description of that partner’s role and expertise in connection with the listed activity) does not provide any assurance or confirmation that minority ethnic perspectives are being considered.

* Many of the updates lack any sort of description of the impact of ongoing work under the Action Plan, which limits the ability to assess whether the work being prioritised is actually improving the lives of minority ethnic people in Scotland.
* Many of the updates contain inaccurate information, or are so confusingly written that it’s unclear whether or not the updates are accurate. Several reports on actions in which CRER had personal involvement were highly inaccurate.
* Many updates are written in such a way that it is not clear who is accountable for the work that is progressing, which ties into our broader concern that evaluations of the actions themselves are not well conceived in the action plan.
* Whilst the Progress Report provides some updates on the Action Plan, no updates on the commitments in the Race Equality Framework have been provided.

**Recommendations**

We would like to emphasise that we are very happy to be working in partnership with the Equality Unit, but want to ensure that movement is happening on this critical issue. We note there are active efforts to ‘refocus’ or ‘refresh’ the Action Plan, and we hope to be involved in that process. However, any refocus does not necessarily mean that there will be real or useful change as a result.

We also appreciate the recent efforts to improve governance of the Action Plan through the Programme Board. However, the Programme Board has not entirely mitigated against existing problems.

The Programme Board is supposed to meet quarterly, but the most recently published Programme Board minutes are for the March 2019 meeting. At that meeting, the Programme Board discussed proposals for a new Independent Race Equality Adviser, given that Kaliani Lyle is no longer in that post: [[3]](#footnote-3)

“The Board agree[d] that a continued Independent Race Equality Adviser would provide **necessary independent** and **external** **challenge to the work of the REAP**. They would also help keep focus of future work on **impact and need for systematic change**. The role will also help government work to continue to reflect the culture and values of the sector.”

However, CRER has subsequently been informed that the Programme Board is **not** pursuing the appointment of any replacement adviser.

We disagree with this approach. **We strongly believe that external scrutiny is critical to ensuring that fundamental initiatives are not being left by the wayside** as we move into Years 2 and 3 of the Action Plan (and the rest of the Framework’s 15-year life). CRER recommends that an advisory group, rather than one adviser, be appointed to provide independent scrutiny of both future Progress Reports and the overall Programme Board. An external advisory group (comprised of those with the relevant expertise) is even more essential now that there is no longer an independent external adviser working with the Programme Board. We believe that a group, rather than an individual, will be able to provide higher quality oversight. We also believe that regular scrutiny by this Committee will help ensure the commitments, vision and goals of the Framework and Action Plan are not dropped in the future. As part of this work, **we strongly believe that the previously listed critical issues regarding the Progress Report should be corrected in future reports.**

Finally, **our objections to the minimal focus on racism in the Progress Report mirror broader concerns reflected in a recent open letter on race and racism in Scotland**, first published on 11 October 2019 (attached as Annex A to this briefing). This letter was endorsed by 88 signatories working across academia, the public sector, voluntary sector, the trades union movement and beyond, including our organisation. Key concerns raised in this letter include recent attempts to silence voices discussing race, whiteness and colour-based racism, and the need to adopt evidence based policy approaches that take into account the history of racialisation and current experience of discrimination which creates worse outcomes for people from specific ethnic backgrounds. We are pleased that the Convenor of this Committee raised this letter with the First Minister at the Convenors’ Committee last week. We hope the Committee will continue to take the concerns reflected in this letter on board in its scrutiny of the Progress Report. Unless civil servants and Scottish Government understand the relationship between the structures of white privilege and racism, race equality efforts will ultimately fail in Scotland.

**Summary of Ministerial Questions**

We suggest that the Committee may wish to raise at least the following questions with the Minister for Older People and Equalities as part of its scrutiny into the Progress Report:

* Is the Minister’s aware of the deficiencies present in many of the accounts of progress set out in the Progress Report?
* What was the Programme Board’s process in ensuring the updates referenced in the Progress Report were accurate, effective and in line with the goals of the Action Plan?
* Does the Programme Board feel its composition and resourcing provide the time, capability and expertise to effectively monitor progress on the Action Plan and the Framework?
* How will the Scottish Government ensure work on the Framework moves forward?
* How will the Minister ensure the proposed refocus of the Action Plan is effective?

In conclusion, we’d like to thank the Committee again for its continued attention to the many issues faced by minority ethnic communities in Scotland, and we look forward to further sessions that will be held on future commitments on the Action Plan and Framework.

**Jatin Haria**

**CRER**

**November 2019**

**Annexe A**

**An open letter on race and racism in Scotland**

We, the signatories of this letter, represent a broad cross-section of Scotland’s society. We are activists, community workers, academics and educators. Between us, we have many decades of experience in researching, teaching, studying and advocating for racial equality. We have differing experiences and, in some ways, differing views on race and racism.

However, following the negative and irresponsible media coverage of the Resisting whiteness conference held at Edinburgh University on 28th September 2019, we join together to express our shared concern that understandings of race and racism in Scotland are rolling backwards.

This incident is part of a broader trend that seeks to silence the voices of people in Scotland who face colour based racism.

Press articles on the Resisting whiteness conference included claims that the format of the event was ‘blatantly racist’. The basis for this lies in an untrue assertion that white people would ‘not be allowed to ask questions’. In fact, the organisers had made provision for white attendees to ask questions following the main question session. White attendees were informed of this in advance and the reasons were explained with balance, tact and sensitivity. This format was necessary to ensure that the discussion could be led by the voices of people affected by colour based racism.

The assertion that this was somehow racist directly undermines those voices, and appears potentially intended to drive division between people with an interest in anti-racism and the wider public.

The current climate of resentment towards frank discussion of race and racism threatens to undo progress on race equality in Scotland. This expands beyond attempts to police legitimate work to challenge racial inequality, into the policy making arena.

Within public sector work on race equality, we see a worrying trend towards limiting understanding of race to its basic legal definition. Everyone in Scotland is protected by law from racial discrimination on the grounds of their colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins, as is fair and just. However, it is blatantly unfair to suggest that the risk of inequality and discrimination on the grounds of race is equally applicable to everyone in Scotland.

Unfortunately, as with the false assertions aimed at the Resisting whiteness organisers, these views are sometimes put forward by people claiming to have anti-racist agendas. There is nothing anti-racist about minimising the link between colour based racism and racial inequality.

Evidence based policy approaches must take into account the history of racialisation and current experience of discrimination which creates worse outcomes for people from specific ethnic backgrounds in specific areas of life.

The solutions to these issues cannot be reached without open, honest discussion of how racism operates as a social and institutional structure, fuelled by the protections and advantages that people perceived as white have received over time and in the present day.

White people in Scotland have a vital role to play in creating the culture change needed to eradicate racism. However, just as there is a time for speaking out and challenging racism, there must be time for listening, learning and reflecting on the experiences of those who face racism. These discussions may be uncomfortable, but they are necessary.

These discussions need to recognise that whilst discrimination and xenophobia faced by white migrant groups must be tackled, for most of these groups, this will reduce over generations. The perception of whiteness will eventually confer an advantage; at the very least, the advantage of freedom from the impact of skin colour based stereotypes, prejudice and hatred.

Scotland has developed many national strategies, policies and initiatives looking at the disadvantage faced by those who experience racism and racial inequality. However, the lack of progress on race equality in practical terms shows that this is not enough.

Routine attempts to silence voices seeking to discuss race, and particularly to discuss whiteness, are holding us back.

We ask that those with influence – journalists, policy makers, politicians, educators and employers – seek to understand race and racism beyond simplistic legal definitions. We ask that this discussion makes space for listening, learning and reflecting on the realities of race and racism.

Only then can we claim to be a nation dedicated to tackling racial inequality.

Signed,

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Adebusola Debora Ramsay

Adrian Lui

Andrea Baker Mezzo, Soprano, creator of Sing Sistah Sing!

Dr Andy Hancock, Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh

Anita Shelton

The Anti-Racist Educator

Benjamin Brown

Carol Young, Senior Policy Officer, CRER

Dr Chisomo Kalinga, University of Edinburgh

Dr Christine Whyte, Lecturer in Global History, University of Glasgow

Dr Claire Duncanson, School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh

The Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights

Colin Clark, Professor of Sociology and Social Policy, University of the West of Scotland

Colin Lee, CEMVO Scotland

Davidson Chademana, Trade Union Equality Activist, UCU

Professor Diana Paton, University of Edinburgh

Eleanor McKnight, Learning & Development Manager, Elite

Dr Emma Hill, Sociology, University of Edinburgh

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Franklin Jacob, Black Students’ Representative, NUS Scotland

Sir Geoff Palmer

Gillian Neish, Neish Training

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Julia Davidson, Scotland Against Criminalising Communities

Julie Cupples, Professor of Human Geography and Cultural Studies, University of Edinburgh

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Dr Kanchana N Ruwanpura, Institute of Geography, University of Edinburgh

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Dr Rebecca Marsland, Senior Lecturer, Social Anthropology, University of Edinburgh

Resisting whiteness

Richard Haley, Scotland Against Criminalising Communities

Rohini Sharma Joshi

Rosa Murray, University of Edinburgh

Prof. Rowena Arshad, Chair in Multicultural and Anti-Racist Education, University of Edinburgh

Safia Ali, AMINA - Muslim Women's Resource Centre

Samuel Oludare Yerokun

Sanjay Lago, Performance Artist

Sekai Machache, Visual Artist

Shaben Begum, Director, SIAA

Shahzad Humayun, Chair, SCOREscotland

Show Racism the Red Card Scotland

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Tony Adams, Lecturer, City of Glasgow College

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1. Scottish Government (2019). [Race equality action plan: year 1 progress update](https://www.gov.scot/publications/race-equality-action-plan-year-1-progress-update/). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Scottish Government (2017). [A fairer Scotland for all: race equality action plan and highlight report 2017-2021](https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-race-equality-action-plan-2017-2021-highlight-report/). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Scottish Government (2019). [Race Equality Action Plan programme board minutes: March 2019](https://www.gov.scot/publications/race-equality-action-plan-programme-board-minutes-march-2019/). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)