



# Ethnic Minority Parental Involvement within Parent Groups

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# Executive Summary

## Organisational Context

BEMIS Scotland works closely with key stakeholders to build strong organisations and public services to have policy and procedural infrastructures which promote and actively encourage inclusion of under-represented groups across Scotland. BEMIS Scotland undertakes research, focus groups, evaluation, events and stakeholder seminars to test accessibility to all and support interested parties to increase participation where under-representation exists. Their belief is that a Scotland which encourages full, active citizenship will ensure Scottish success economically and as a diverse society.

The Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC) works closely with parents and parent groups to encourage and support active partnership between home and school. SPTC works co-operatively with organisations across the education and third sectors, ensuring the parental perspective is high on the agenda in debate around policy making. A national charity, SPTC provides information, advice and training to encourage and support strong Parent Councils across Scotland, enabling parents to become active citizens within the education community. SPTC strongly believes that parental involvement within their child(s) education improves the child(s) life chances and outcomes for their future.

## Project Context

SPTC approached BEMIS Scotland to explore potential strategies to address the challenge of ensuring wide participation within Parent Councils of families from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Following further scrutiny it was recognised that despite the high volume of ECM pupils within certain schools<sup>1</sup> there is low participation of ECM parents within Parent Councils (PCs). BEMIS Scotland and SPTC investigated this further to gain understanding of this pattern, which resulted in the co-design of a survey to gauge activity undertaken by PCs to engage with ethnic and cultural minority parents, to ensure their views and concerns were being heard and considered within their child(s) school community.

## Evidence

BEMIS Scotland and SPTC formed a partnership to capture, research and produce this report to provide greater understanding of the level of civic participation of ethnic minority<sup>2</sup> communities within parent groups across Scotland, such as PTAs and Parent Councils.

Parental involvement is a key driver to improving outcomes for Scotland's children against a policy backdrop in which active citizenship has come to prominence, part of a national strategy to ensure citizens and services combine and play their part in shaping children's education.

The information gathered will be utilised to provide meaningful support to underrepresented ethnic minority parents and to parent groups, improving connectivity, confidence and sustainability of PCs.

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<sup>1</sup> (The 2011 Scottish Annual School Census shows the proportions of ethnic minority and 'white other' pupils across Scotland). For the purposes of this research the term "ethnic minority" is mainly used in relation to people who are in the minority within a population on the grounds of "race", colour, culture, language, religion or nationality. The term is used to capture all who have arrived to live and/or work in Scotland including, for example, migrant workers, Gypsy Travelers, refugee and asylum seekers. This would include both EU and non EU citizens now living in Scotland, including English, Welsh and Irish people.

The following report is based on the findings and deemed to be:

- **Rational:** This review has been commissioned to measure the extent of participation levels within Parent Councils of ethnic and cultural communities; however, it is worth noting that the findings could equally apply to individuals with disabilities.
- **Representative:** With a high volume of responses it is felt that this survey demonstrates an adequate representation of the position, feelings and thoughts of current Parent Councils.

SPTC recognise that parental involvement within their children's learning is likely to be beneficial to parent, child and school community by:

- enhancing children's self-esteem
- improving children's academic attainment
- improving parent-child relationships
- helping parents develop positive attitudes towards school
- enhancing co-operation between home and school
- raising understanding of schooling and educational options

This demonstrates the importance of enhancing participation to improve long-term outcomes for families from ethnic minority communities. The research has a whole-Scotland focus with a mixture of City, urban and rural target groups providing a broader understanding.

## Recommendations

### Parent Council Recommendation

1. Through direct and indirect communication raise awareness of benefits of diverse participation within non active parents of ECM communities.
2. Through training raise understanding across PCs of barriers to participation from ECM communities
3. Design and deliver interventions which increase PCs ability to attract, secure and retain members of the ethnic and cultural communities within PCs.
4. Generate action!
5. Raise engagement with local authorities to support equalities-focused work in school communities in relation to PCs.

### Ethnic & Cultural Minority Communities

1. Through direct and indirect communication raise awareness of benefits of parental involvement within children's education.
2. Gain understanding directly from the ECM communities of the barriers excluding them from participating within their Parent Councils.
3. Support and courage action!

## Section 1 – Introduction and Process

### Background

BEMIS Scotland in partnership with SPTC undertook a research study to identify why despite high levels? of ethnic and cultural minority children within school communities across Scotland, there is an unusually low participation of these children's parents within Parent Councils.

BEMIS Scotland and SPTC commissioned this research to gain insight of this prevailing trend among the ethnic and cultural minority communities of non-participation within their children's education.

### Process

The following process was adopted to gain insight to real and perceived barriers to participation:

1. Several commissioning meetings were held with BEMIS Scotland Director and SPTC to agree methodology, expectation of evaluation, agree survey dimensions, agree timescale and organise key stakeholder engagement.
2. Survey Monkey was chosen as the tool to gain survey responses and to allow analysis of data.
3. Questionnaire was designed and tested to ensure clarity of readability.
4. Distributed through SPTC's member network and also the Scottish Parental Involvement Officers Network to support widest possible participation
5. Each parent group asked to submit one response
6. Analysis of data and one to one discussions with key individuals to test understanding.
7. Scripting of report
8. Agreement of Report and final dissemination of findings
9. Work plan produced to reduce the under-representation of minorities within Parent Councils across Scotland.

## Section 2 – National Context

The partnership recognises that significant institutional barriers continue to limit ethnic minority children's opportunities, particularly when their communities are marginalised and invisible in terms of culture, faith and customs within the school community (Arshad et al., 2005; Arshad, 2001; Netto et al., 2001).

Joseph Rowntree Foundation commissioned research into 'The Role of Aspirations, Attitudes and Behavior in closing the Educational Attainment Gap' the conclusions demonstrated that active parental participation can raise the attainment of children when:

1. "The immediate focus should be on rolling-out and monitoring the implementation of interventions where there is already good evidence, particularly in the area of **parental involvement**. Interventions in this area should have a clear focus on providing information, support and advice to parents."
2. "Effective and on-going dissemination of the up-to-date evidence base happens and involves policy-makers, practitioners and the educational research community".

Demonstrating the importance of parental involvement, the Parent Council findings suggest their approach to this is an 'Open Door Policy' exists throughout Parent Councils, however, It would appear from previous research that 'open door' policy is not sufficient as evidenced by researchers Reary, 2005; and Crozier, 2000 who found that, in relation to school boards (England) and Parent Councils (Scotland), the white middle-class mothers are most involved and most visible.

A recent BEMIS and Scottish Government consultation raised concerns from ECM stakeholders that participation of ECM within their child's education was extremely limited (May 2012). Lack of engagement within ECM communities lead to confusion between school, community and parents (Gypsy Travellers 2011, BEMIS)

Disadvantaged parents are less involved in children's education (OECD Equity & Equality, 2012) it further states parental involvement in ECM groups represents key direction for building positive attitudes and attainment (Closing the gap for Immigrant Students policies, practices and performance, 2010)

SG's National Parenting Strategy highlights that Scotland's family portrait is growing more culturally diverse, with greater numbers of families from ECM backgrounds who may have different cultural norms around parenting.

### Scottish Wide Priorities

'The Guidance on the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006' should be seen within the broad context of legislation and policy which supports children and families. In particular, it reflects the vision of Scottish Ministers' that Scotland's children and young people will become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors by being safe, nurtured, active, healthy, achieving, included, respected and responsible.

The Act requires education authorities to promote the involvement of parents in their children's school education. School education includes the provision of facilities for social, cultural and recreation activities.

This Act replace the School Boards with Parent Councils, designed to be less formal and to encourage more and different parents to get involved in the life of their school. This then became part of the backdrop for Parental Representation.

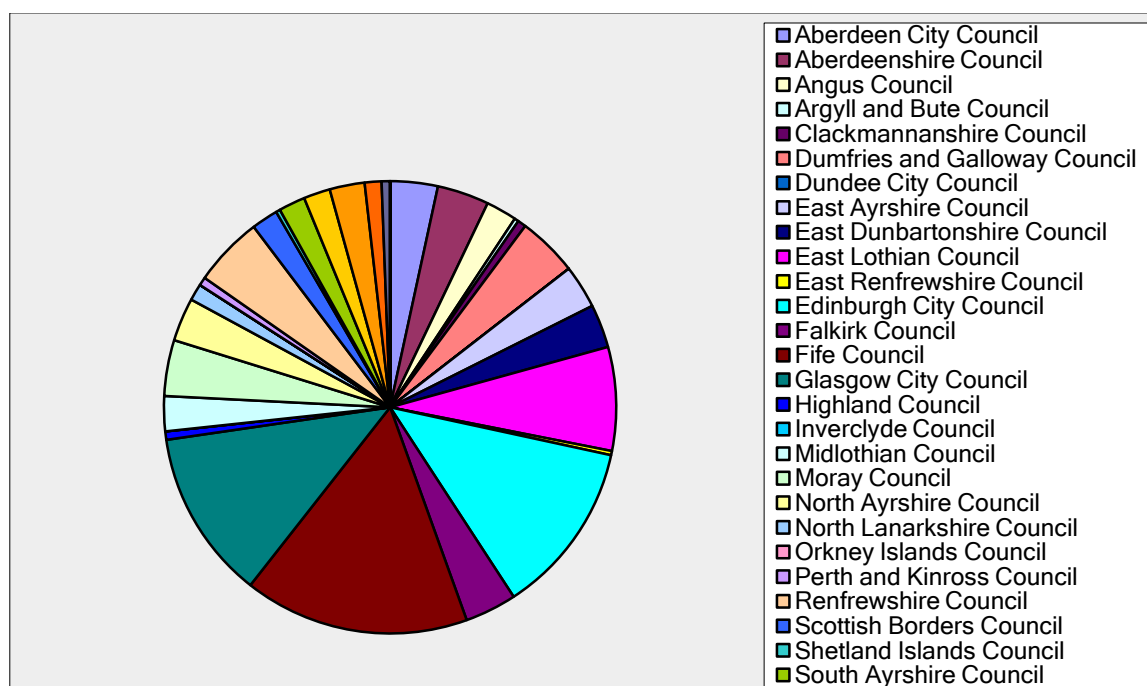
The role of the Parent Council is to:

- support the school in its work with pupils
- represent the views of all parents
- encourage links between the school, parents, pupils, pre-school groups and the wider community
- report back to all the parents in the school (called the Parent Forum)
- play a role in the appointment of head teachers and depute head teachers
- Support the school and pupils during school inspections.

### Local Authority Relevance

The Act requires education authorities to prepare a strategy to promote parental involvement in school education. This strategy must have due regard by education authorities to how their parental involvement in school policies for promoting education will also promote equal opportunities.

The focus on "equal opportunities" builds on the 2000 Act which requires education authorities to prepare an annual statement of education improvement objectives which includes an account of the ways in which they encourage equal opportunities in the school education provided by them. The Act makes provision for Parent Councils to promote contact between the school, parents and the local community. The survey covered the following Local Authority areas:



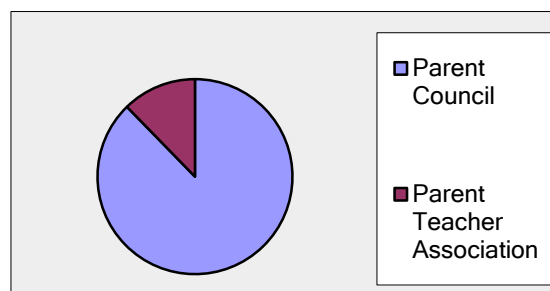
## Section 3 – Performance Data

The data was electronically stored in both numerical and text detail which was then collated using the toolkit of 'Survey Monkey'.

### Participant Geographical Profiles

The participation survey was sent to parent organisations across Scotland<sup>3</sup>, of which:

- 328 responses were returned
- 290 (87.7%) from PTCs
- 38 (12.3%) from PTAs.

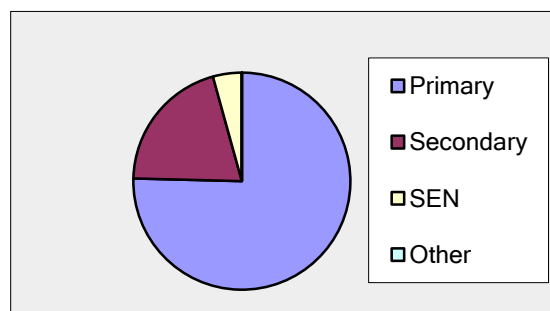


### School Community Profiles

The survey was distributed across Primary, Secondary and Special Educational Needs School to capture a broad picture of parental involvement.

The participatory parental group as follows:

- 75.4% (175) Primary
- 20.3% (47) Secondary
- 4.3% (16) Special Educational Needs Schools.



### Breadth of Study

The purpose of this study was to review the level of activities, communication and success of Parent Council's across Scotland to:

- Engage, secure and sustain a representative group of their schools community.
- Raise awareness of the under-representation within current Parent Councils

However, it is clear from the findings that under-representation is not only from ethnic and cultural minorities but can equally be seen within those with disability.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 1 – Full Geographical Table



## Section 5 – Key Findings

### Targeting, Access and Promotion

One survey question enquired of the PC's respondents to assess if they felt that "parent groups should be representative of the school community'. Of the 226 responses:

- 46% strongly agreed with the statement
- 42% agreed; 4% were unsure
- 2% did not agree
- 6% strongly disagreed with the statement.

More interesting were some of the qualitative statements which demonstrated some very strong views in relation to ethnic and cultural minority communities and their access to participation, as follows.

- Many highlighted language barriers as a common barrier for low ECM participation
- Strong feeling that it was difficult to gain support from 'mainstream' parents
- Most groups felt that as they welcomed all parents this was a sufficient in being open to 'all'.

One respondent felt strongly that *"You do not have to be part of any ethnic group or indeed class to represent other parents effectively. Of far greater importance is the willingness to consider and listen to all parents and carers."*

A common theme was the aspiration to involve a more representative membership within their parent group, however, due to the membership being on a voluntary basis most groups found great difficulty in attracting and sustaining members from the ethnic minority community.

### Participants Perspectives

- Questions raised some concerns around the parenting groups understanding of potential barriers to ECM participation with many unconcerned with directly targeting ECM Groups as an 'open door' policy was thought to be sufficient.
- A clear under representation of ethnic minority parents within PCs (77% of respondents indicated that they have no ECM parents on their councils)
- confusion over definition of ethnic minority (although definition had been given)
- Sense of no direct impact - "difficulty in engaging with parents from all groups never mind ethnic minorities"
- Low understanding of the barriers to participation faced from ECM parents in particular - "Is this (translation) necessary? We live in an English speaking country!"
- Poor understandings of equality and benefits to child experiencing diversity.
- Training requirements - "at the last parent council it was raised that there was a lack of representation from our ethnic minority parents and they are seeking help with this".

## Section 6 – Recommendations

As discussed in the findings many parent groups expressed the frustration of trying to involve parents and getting little response. *“People need to volunteer to be part and they would definitely, as there are spaces available, be accepted. There is quite a low number of parents who help the school.”*

For others they felt that their open door policy should ensure that no one is prohibited stating that ethnicity is not really a consideration as being active was the important thing. This point is further demonstrated by this quote from one parent member *‘I THINK IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAT PARENTS CHOOSE TO TAKE PART RATHER THAN BEING CO-OPTED BECAUSE OF THEIR ETHNIC BACKGROUND<sup>4</sup>’*.

SPTC recognise that although there are many advantages to participation there are often barriers to parental involvement, for example time, energy, fear of authority, lack of access to childcare and work commitments.

However, the research demonstrates that despite the perception of no barriers to become a member of PC’s there is still a presence of underrepresentation of ethnic and cultural minority parents within the groups.

Key themes have emerged as discussed previously within this report which has led to the following considerations:

- Low awareness of benefits of participation within non active parents of ECM communities.
- Low understanding across PCs of barriers to participation from ECM communities
- Poor engagement with local authorities to support equalities-focused work in school communities in relation to PC’s.

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<sup>4</sup> Uses of Capitals are true to the respondents’ response.

## Section 7 – Way Forward

The evidence presented from both partners raises two key challenges.

1. Raising Awareness among ECM communities with regard to their involvement within their child's education,
  - a. Utilising BEMIS member networks to identify and reduce barriers to participation.
  - b. Assisting BEMIS grassroots member network to carry out direct social marketing of PC's opportunity.
  - c. Mentoring interested individuals to in a positive action approach to raise active citizenship amongst ethnic minority parents.
2. Building Capacity within PC's to enable them to attract and retain ECM members to their Parent Council's.
  - a. Develop a range of practical support, training and activities to improve understanding of ethnic minority communities.
  - b. Agree a formal strategy between SPTC and BEMIS to reduce the underrepresentation.
  - c. Test solutions within a pilot area with view to roll out across Scotland.

It is concluded that further work must be done within this research piece to widen the breadth of the study to:

1. Widen the sample participants to capture understanding directly from ethnic and cultural minority parents.
2. Test interventions, such as, building both Parent Council and ECM Parents knowledge, understanding and confidence to encourage participation.
3. Re-run post intervention to measure (if any) impact of change in the number of ECM parents engaged, sustained and active within Parent Councils across Scotland.

## Appendix 1 – Geographical Profiles

	Percentage	Number of Responses
Aberdeen City Council	3.4%	11
Aberdeenshire Council	3.7%	12
Angus Council	2.2%	7
Argyll & Bute Council	0.3%	1
Clackmannanshire Council	4.3%	2
Dumfries & Galloway Council	4.3%	14
East Ayrshire Council	3.1%	10
East Dunbartonshire Council	3.1%	10
East Lothian Council	7.4%	24
East Renfrewshire Council	0.3%	1
Edinburgh City Council	12.4%	40
Falkirk Council	3.7%	12
Fife Council	16.1%	52
Glasgow City Council	12.1%	39
Highland Council	0.6%	2
Midlothian Council	2.5%	8
Moray Council	4.0%	13
North Ayrshire Council	3.1%	10
North Lanarkshire Council	1.2%	4
Perth & Kinross Council	0.6%	2
Renfrewshire Council	5.0%	16
Scottish Borders Council	1.9%	6
Shetland Islands Council	0.3%	1
South Ayrshire Council	1.9%	6
South Lanarkshire Council	1.9%	6
Stirling Council	2.5%	8
West Dunbartonshire Council	1.2%	4
West Lothian Council	0.6%	2

## Appendix 2 – Acknowledgements

With special thanks to all the Parent Councils who were courageous in their frankness throughout this study and their commitment to ensuring Parent Councils are representative of the community they serve.