

GATHERED TOGETHER

Cruinn Còmhla



Experiences of
Parental
Involvement
Among Families
From Ethnic
Minorities



Gathered Together would like to thank all the parents who took part in our workshops for sharing your experiences. We hope you learned as much from the experience as we did.

We would also like to thank our colleagues at Bemis Scotland and SPTC for the support and advice in developing the workshops and for lending us your proof-reading skills for this report.

A huge thank you to all the groups who allowed us to come out and deliver the workshops, as well as everyone who helped to set up the workshops. It was a pleasure to work with you all.

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INTRODUCTION

Gathered Together is a pilot project between BEMIS (umbrella body for ethnic minority groups in Scotland) and the Scottish Parent Teacher Council. It was created following a survey conducted by BEMIS and SPTC of Parent Councils in Scotland addressing representation of ethnic minorities on Parent Councils. The survey found that 77% of the parent councils in the survey had no ethnic minority members¹.

There was concern that this meant the views and experiences of ethnic minority parents were not being represented within schools and also that this lack of involvement in the school could impact negatively on ethnic minority children. There are clear links between parental involvement and children's academic success² and positive outcomes in later life. Berla and Henderson found

The most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status but the extent to which that student's family is able to... become involved in their children's education at school and in the community³

Gathered Together has been working to promote greater parental involvement by ethnic minority parents in their school communities—working directly with schools, Parent Councils and ethnic minority parents. Part of our work has been engaging with ethnic minority parents to learn about their experiences of contact with school and identify barriers which they faced in greater engagement. We have been able to use this information in our work with schools, Parents Councils and at a local authority and national level to raise awareness of the issues faced by ethnic minority parents, share good practice and highlight gaps in policy and practice.

This report gathers the information and stories we heard from our work with ethnic minority parents and highlights areas where change is needed.

¹ Ethnic Minority Parental Involvement within Parent Groups (2012) <http://bemis.org.uk/documents/Outline%20Report%20-%20BEMIS%20SPTC.pdf>

² The Role of aspirations, attitudes and behaviour in closing the educational attainment gap, Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2012) <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/education-achievement-poverty-summary.pdf>

³ A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement Henderson & Berla (1994).. Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education

KEY FINDINGS

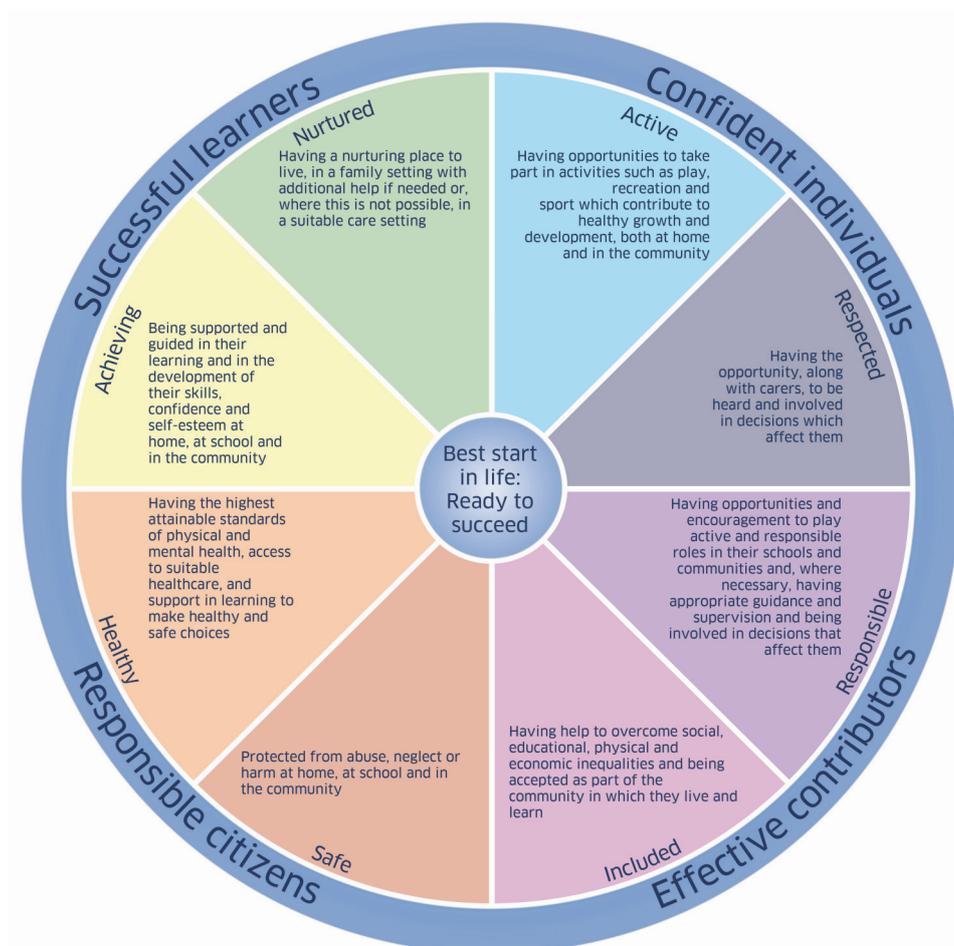
- Parents' main contact with school is through attending parents' evenings and in dropping off and picking up their children.
 - In primary school parents had diverse opportunities for coming into school including attending fairs, assemblies, concerts.
 - In secondary school parents had very limited contact with school and their main contact is through parents' evenings.
- Parents place a great deal of importance on homework, however many parents expressed concern that they were not able to support their children with homework—often due to lower levels of English or understanding of the way their children are being taught
- Language is a significant barrier for many parents and also impacts on their ability to communicate with school, speak to teachers about issues with their children and on their confidence to go into school
- Differences in education systems and culture were also frequently mentioned by parents as a barrier—parents were not aware how the Scottish education system worked, including who to approach, and their right to have their voice heard within the school
 - Parents of secondary school children expressed concerns about the new exam system and were unsure about the best way to support their children and options for their future. They often felt there was a lack of information or the information was not easily accessible
- In common with all parents time, child care and work were barriers to becoming more involved—this was particularly a barrier for parents who did not have close family and friends to help with childcare and were not able to access nursery
- The parents had low levels of awareness of Parent Councils and what their role was—where parents had heard of the Parent Council they often felt it was “not for them”
- Where parents were involved in the school to celebrate their culture, including bilingual story-telling, being invited to speak about their religion or share their food, parents were very positive and felt respected and this helped to create a sense that they and their family were a part of the school community

BACKGROUND

In the 2011 census over 8% of the population were identified as coming from ethnic minorities. In many areas this has resulted in a significant change to the school population with increased numbers of students from ethnic minorities—in Glasgow approximately 20% of pupils have English as an Additional Language.

In 2006 the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act was introduced to actively support parental participation in their children’s school and learnings. It outlines the role of the Parent Council as a voluntary body made up of parents from the school to represent the views of parents, supporting the work of the school and promoting contact between the school, parents, pupils and the local community. Parent Councils have a significant role within the school and are able to be involved in the recruitment of the senior management team.

The Scottish Government introduced the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) in 2012⁴, this aims at providing all students with the attributes, knowledge and skills they will need for life, learning and work. Children are supported to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.



<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0043/00438640.jpg>

⁴ <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/>

Both the Parental Involvement Act and the CfE recognise the role of parents working in partnership with the school to achieve these aims and the importance of parental involvement to build confidence in children.

The Curriculum also links closely with the new Children and Young People's Act and the "Getting it Right for Every Child" policy. These policies highlight the importance that children are achieving, safe, healthy, active, nurtured, respected, responsible and included and that work around children's wellbeing looks at the whole child. In relation to the work of Gathered Together, parental involvement can be key in helping children feel included (from our work with children from ethnic minorities we are aware children often feel excluded and there have been incidents of racism from both other pupils and teachers). Parental involvement also helps demonstrate the importance of being involved to their children so they recognise and value participation. It also helps build links between home and school so that parents are able to raise any issues around the young person and have them addressed in a timely manner.

All the recent legislation and policy work has been focused on ensuring Scotland is the best place in the world for children to grow up—where all children can feel safe and included and are able to achieve their potential. It is within this legislative framework that the Gathered Together project has been working and we feel parental involvement is key for children from ethnic minorities to become successful learners, responsible citizens, effective contributors and confident individuals.

METHODS

Gathered Together has run 35 workshops for ethnic minority parents across all six of the pilot areas the project has been working in—Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Falkirk, Fife, Glasgow and Stirling and Clackmannanshire. These areas were identified as providing a mix of urban and rural and to reflect the diversity of experiences EM parents can face. A total of 358 parents attended these workshops.

In order to engage with as diverse a range of parents as possible, we worked in partnership with an organisation that already had existing relations with ethnic minority communities including language schools, ESOL providers, faith groups and community groups like Home Start. While we have tried to engage with as wide a variety of parents as possible we have met with disproportionately more mothers than fathers (82% of participants were mothers), this reflects the traditional low participation of fathers in school across all backgrounds and lower levels of male participation in many services⁵. (For a complete breakdown of participants see Appendix 1)

Our sessions were informal and used visual images to be as accessible as possible, in some sessions we were able to provide an interpreter and participants were often able to support each other when language was an issue. The workshop was divided into two

⁵ INVISIBLE MEN: engaging more men in social projects (2012) http://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/INVISIBLE_MEN_-_FINAL.pdf

separate areas—gathering the experience of parents on activities they do with their children in and out of with school and the barriers they face in engaging with school. This is followed by discussion exploring these experiences and highlights issues, including parents not being aware they can request interpreters for parents’ evenings.

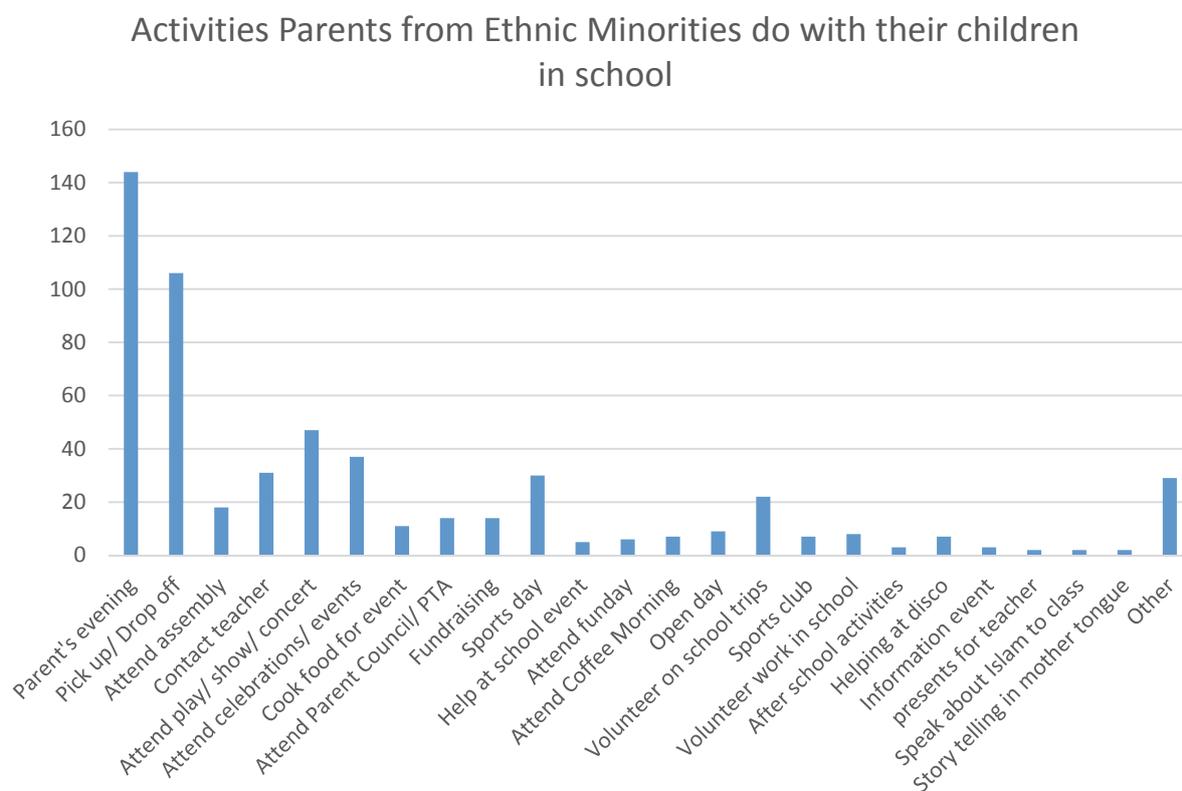
The second section was a true/false exercise that provided parents with some basic information about the role of the Parent Councils and their rights as parents to become involved in the life of the school. This section was developed in partnership with SPTC and used their knowledge of the role of Parent Councils and adapted the activity from their training sessions. From this activity we have been able to gain a picture of the levels of awareness among EM parents of the role of the Parent Council and their rights as parents to become involved in their children’s school community.



Islamic Learning Centre (Falkirk)

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL

The first question asked in the workshop was what activities parents did in school. Below is a summary of the main answers



The vast majority of the parents we spoke to attended parents' evenings—on discussing this further we found that while the parents were generally positive about the meeting and liked the opportunity to meet their child's teacher they did not get all the information they wanted. Several parents commented on the cultural differences between their country and Scotland—in Scotland there is a focus on the positives of the child and parents wanted further information about where their children were not doing so well and how they could help them. Some parents also reported being told “everything was fine” with their child and not knowing what questions they could ask to get further information. For many of the parents we met parents' evening was the only contact they had with the school, particularly for parents of secondary school children.

We also heard anecdotal evidence of parents being unaware of their right to request an interpreter for parents' meetings (in Falkirk) and having to cope without a translator. In one session with EM parents from the deaf community we heard no translator had been booked and the parents were requested to write down their questions instead. Parents attending ESOL classes also reported being told they could no longer have an interpreter as they were attending college-level English classes. Some parents said their sister or partner acted as interpreter and they preferred this as it was someone they trusted.

Most parents with younger children would take their children to school and pick them up, this provided them with the opportunity to see their child's teacher and meet other

parents. Some parents reported finding it difficult as they were the only parent from an ethnic minority, this was particularly relevant in more rural areas where many parents will know each other since they were children and it can be difficult for people coming into this community.

A lot of parents attended events at the school including concerts, assemblies, plays and fairs. These were popular with parents and they spoke about how much their children liked them to come. Parents appreciated the opportunity to see the school and their children perform. Several parents mentioned their school uses texts to remind parents of school events and that this was a better way of getting information out to them than letters. Parents with children in secondary school said they did not have the same level of involvement as the school does not hold events like these and there was also a perception that children did not want parents to come into school.

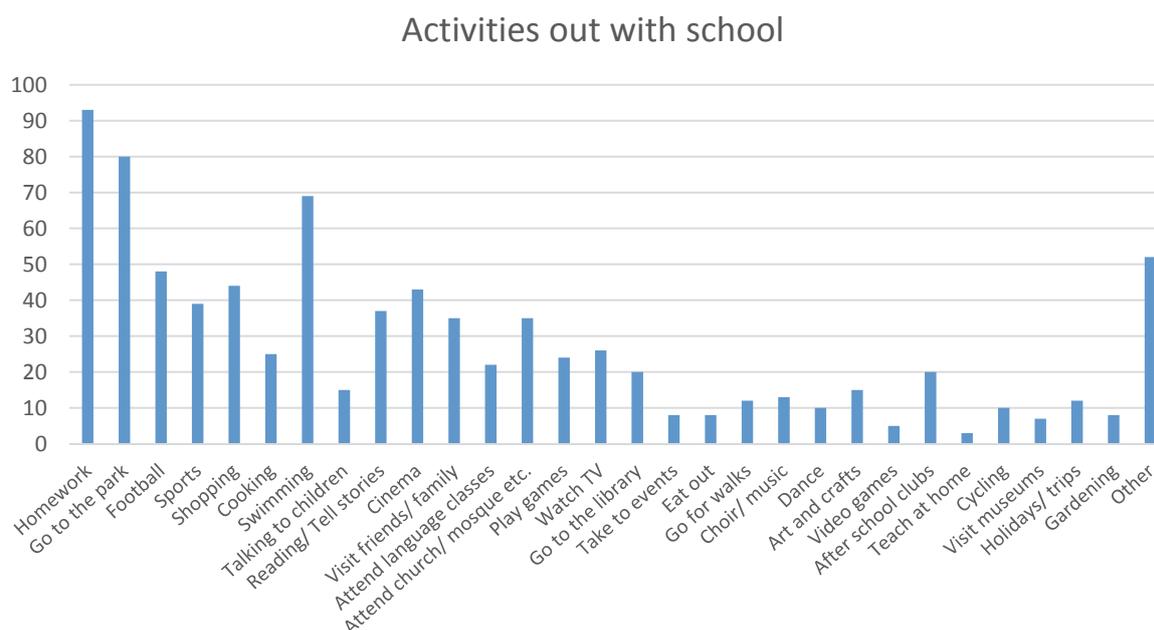
My children always want me to come on the school trips—sometimes my daughter tells the school I will help before they tell me! (Mother, Central Scotland Islamic Centre)

The most common way for parents to volunteer with the school was through helping with school trips, this was valued by both the parents and their children and helped them get to know the teachers better. Parents also spoke about making food for school events including international days where they were able to share the food from their culture. 14 parents were involved in the Parent Council or Parent Teacher Association and took an active role in the school including campaigning, recruiting the head teacher and organising fund raising activities. Several other parents spoke about attending Parent Councils meetings but said they had not gone back as they felt worried about taking on too much.

Two parents spoke of going into school to do story-telling in their mother tongue as part of World Book Day. One mother said she would tell the story in Tamil and her daughter would say the same sentence in English. This made her daughter become more confident and proud of her ability to speak two languages. Two other parents spoke about going into school to speak about Islam and explain what they believed, why they wear a veil etc. Both parents had been asked to do this by the school and felt their culture was recognised and respected by the school—it also had a positive impact on their children, supporting them to feel more comfortable about their religion.

EM FAMILIES' ABILITY TO ACCESS ACTIVITIES

We then asked the parents what activities they did with their children out with school.



The most common activity parents mentioned was supporting their children with homework. On further discussion this was often simply parents encouraging and reminding their children to do homework. All the parents placed a high value on homework but expressed concerns about the cultural differences between Scotland and their own experiences. Many parents from Asian and Eastern European countries reported they had been given much more homework in their schools at home and that it was normal for children to need to do over an hour's homework every day.

When I was a child my father used to say he would buy me a donkey to carry all my school books. Now my son never has any books and little homework (Mother, Kingsway Women's group)

There was concern that they were not able to support their children with this and poor communication with school as to how to help. Some parents spoke about homework events or learning clubs where they were shown how to support their children's learning and understand how their children were being taught. This was welcomed by parents and helped to develop trusting relations with schools, however we only heard a few cases of this happening.

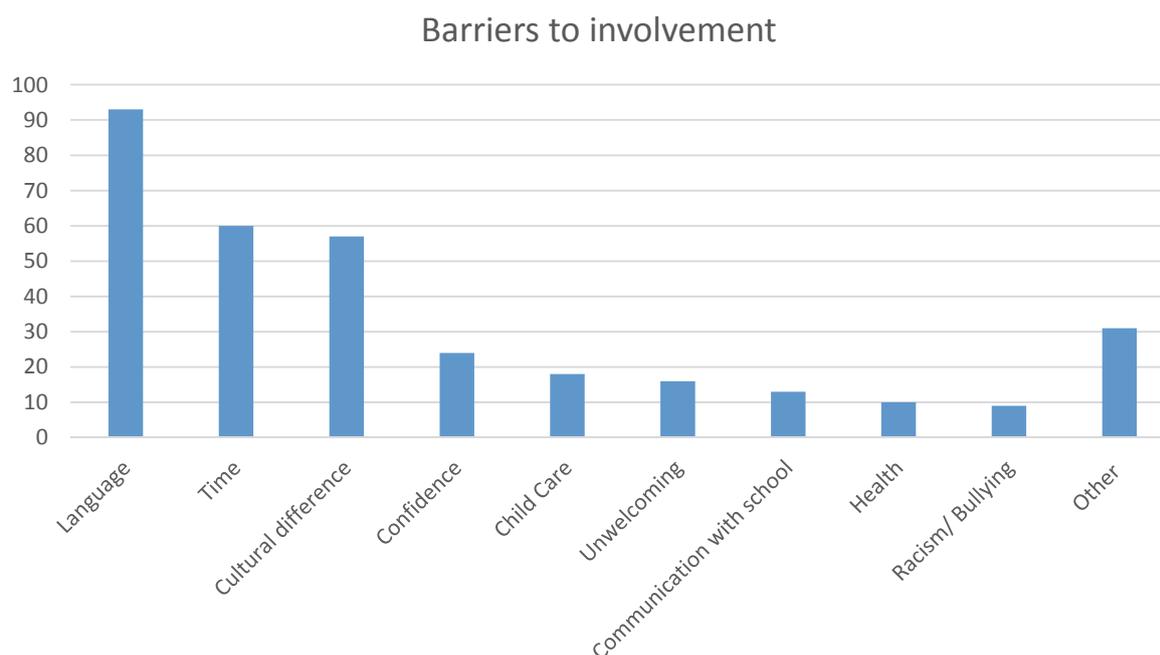
Maintaining a sense of cultural identity was also important. Parents spoke about reading stories in their mother tongue, taking their children to language classes and to church or Mosque. This was given particular value by parents from Muslim backgrounds where there is a duty for children to learn to read the Koran in Arabic. Parents valued this as giving their children a greater sense of their heritage and traditional values, however this limited the amount of time that their children could access other activities in the community and meant that parents were often "taxi drivers" taking their children to the Mosque straight

after school. One parent spoke about the pressure within her local community to send her children to the Mosque every day and that she had been criticised for allowing her daughter to attend swimming classes one day a week.

All parents we met spoke about taking children to local parks and simple activities like swimming and playing football. A lot of the children were involved in local clubs including after school clubs, dance groups and cubs and brownies. There were differences between communities as to the level of services they accessed and the types. Anecdotally there appears to be a link between higher levels in English and ability to access services. Some parents were not aware of the services at local libraries and that their children could access free swimming. Finance was also an issue for some families with parents talking about the expense of the cinema and clubs or the cost of travel into areas where the activities were based.

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL

We completed this section of the workshop asking parents what the barriers were to them getting more involved in their children’s school and education. This often had been touched on earlier when talking about their involvement in the school.



Unsurprisingly the most common barrier for EM parents was language, this covered a wide spectrum from parents who had good English but did not have confidence in speaking or struggled to understand the local accent to parents with no English who required an interpreter. Parents with low levels of English, or low confidence in their ability to speak English often found contact with school stressful and are concerned they are not able to support their children with their learning because of this. This also impacted on communication with school—parents struggled to read long letters from school and often missed important information including permission letters for school trips or notice of special events such as non-uniform day.

Many of the parents had children who spoke better English than them. This had a significant impact on the parent–child relationship, with parents becoming dependent on their children for help understanding letters. At one family ESOL workshop one of the children said his mother was “stupid” and never helped him at school. Parents with limited English spoke about the growing distance between themselves and their children. In one interview we carried out a daughter spoke about not wanting her mother to come into school and throwing away letters about school events. She said she felt anxious when her mother came into the school as she was dressed in a sharma kameez and was still learning English and the daughter was worried what the teachers would think of her.

Language and confidence were often closely related, parents often spoke about feeling too shy or being afraid to speak to teachers. As mentioned before all the parents we met place a high value on the education and several spoke about their guilt about not being able to support their children with homework.

Case study 1

I'm not confident in my English – can't talk in front of people

Meriem is currently learning English, she is very anxious about making mistakes and will ask her daughter to check what she has written in the “communication jotter” with the school to make sure her spelling is correct. Meriem has been to meetings at the school but doesn't say much as she is worried about saying the “wrong” thing

Parents' experience of school also had an impact on their involvement, parental involvement is not the norm in many cultures and parents do not always see a need to become involved in the school when their children are happy and settled.

Why should my parents come to the school? I was a good child (Mother, Glasgow Life ESOL class)

Cultural differences and differences between education systems made it confusing for parents. For example in many countries children will start school at six or seven. The differences in the way children are taught in Scotland was frequently discussed and parents were concerned there was too much playing and not enough “learning”. In Scotland with the Curriculum for Excellence teachers are trying to make learning into a more interactive experience with children taking responsibility for their own learning. This is in contrast to many other cultures where children will have weekly exams to study for and there is greater emphasis on memorising information.

Some cultural differences were relatively small—we met one Polish parent who refused to send her daughter to school in a “onesie” for a fund raising event as she felt this was like going to school in pyjamas. Terms that are used are not always easy to understand for

people from another culture; a mother from Lithuania did not understand what a “coffee morning” was or the point of it—she could have coffee at home.

Parents frequently spoke about a lack of information from school, this could be because the parents we met were more linguistically isolated and did not have the same opportunity to gossip and share information with other parents at the school gates. In our sessions we were often asked about help with child care, accessing free school meals and after school activities. We were able to help sign-post parents on to services, however in matters like free school meals it would have been better for the school to provide the information.

The lack of information caused particular concern for parents with children in secondary. Parents did not feel able to support their children with their school work and were very anxious about the new exams. One mother expressed concern her daughter was a “guinea pig” with the exams. Parents also reported feeling they did not have enough information about their children’s choices after school, including what subjects to take, how to access college and apprenticeships. Parents coming from another culture they often struggled to understand the variety of options and that if their children did not do as well as hoped they would be able to re-sit exams in school or college. Parents often expressed high expectations for their children but did not know about the practicalities involved including student fees (this is a complex area for non-EU students as they could be expected to pay international student fees) or the realities of the UK job market.

Case Study 2

I don't understand the Scottish system

Munir arrived in Scotland with his family two years ago. It has been hardest for his eldest child, learning English was more difficult for him and he started in school in fifth year. Taking exams in a language you are struggling to learn is really difficult and Munir and his wife weren't sure how best to support him.

Munir said he attended an information event on the Curriculum for Excellence but found it hard to understand—it was in quite complicated language and he wasn't very confident in his English

Communication with school was also often mentioned—this ranged from teachers being unfriendly to not understanding the “language of education”. Parents also struggled with letters from school—these were often long with a lot of information which was more difficult for parents to take in. Schools in Falkirk and other local authorities are beginning to use text and twitter to get information out to parents and for many this is easier (as well as making sure it reaches them in a timely fashion rather than being left in a school bag).

There were a few stories of racist bullying, although for the most part parents felt the school was a safe and inclusive place for their children. One parent spoke of her frustration that the school refused to treat the bullying as racist. In most of the cases of racism and bullying we heard of the child was removed from school and started another. In these cases the parents felt the school had not been able to address the issue and felt it had not been taken seriously. This feeling was compounded by the school being unable to say how they had dealt with the child accused of bullying.

As with most parents time was a barrier—parents were busy working, caring for younger siblings or taking their children to after school activities. As the parents from Ethnic Minorities were less likely to have networks of friends and families to help with child care this was often a bigger barrier than for most parents.

Case study 3

I don't have time – I am a single parent with a baby and many school activities are in the evening

Maria has a 10 month old baby and doesn't have any family or close friends who are able to help with child care. Her school has regular activities including “pamper evenings” for parents, Parent Council meetings etc. but Maria is unable to attend as she has a young family to take care of.



Russian School, Glasgow

AWARENESS OF PARENT COUNCILS

Parent Councils

In the second part of our workshop we had a true or false exercise with information about Parent Councils and the work they do. This was designed to raise parents' awareness of Parent Councils and their rights as a parent at the school to become more involved in their children's school. (To see all the questions and a breakdown of the answers the parents gave see Appendix 4). We found there was generally a low level of awareness of Parent Councils among many of the parents. Those who knew about Parent Councils often felt it was not for them

Parent Councils are only for parents with a confident voice (Mother, Central Scotland Regional Equality Council)

“The Parent Forum”

The Parent Forum is the official term for all parents (including carers) of children at the school. It is this body that the Parent Council is meant to represent and the school should consult with. While 65% of the parents said they were members of the Parent Forum this was generally a guess and they were not familiar with the term. This is likely to be similar to many parents who are native to Scotland as it is not a word that is regularly used.

Involvement in the Parent Council

There was a perception, particularly among parents who were newer to Scotland or had limited English, that they were not eligible for the Parent Council.

I thought that only Scottish parents could join (Mother, International Women's Group)

22% of the parents thought Parent Council meetings were only open to members. While some schools have good practice in sending out texts before the meeting to let parents know that they can come, the majority of parents were not aware of when the Parent Council met. We also met several parents who had been curious about the Parent Council and attended a meeting—they reported feeling pressured to join and one said the head teacher had tried to nominate her as chair. The mother said she did not feel she had the time and this pressure had made her reluctant to go back.

The role of the Parent Council

The Parental Involvement Act outlines various areas that Parent Councils can become involved in:

- Supporting the school in its work with pupils
- Representing the views of parents
- Promoting contact between the school, parents, pupils, providers of nursery education and the community

- Reporting to the Parent Forum⁶

The parents in our workshops were largely unaware of the extent of the work that Parent Councils could be involved in. 30% of the parents thought the PC's main job was raising money for the school. This is the most visible part of Parent Council's work and where most parents are likely to have contact with them by attending school fairs and fund raising events. Few parents were aware of the PC's role in engaging with them about issues with the school (such as road safety, closing a school facility or developing bullying or homework policies).

Only 26% of the parents said PC's could be involved in the recruiting of head teachers (and other senior management positions)—this included parents who were on the Parent Council! This is one of the areas that the PC can have a significant impact on the way the school is run and its' ethos and values. At Oakgrove primary school, which has a very diverse population, the Parent Council specifically wanted a parent from an ethnic minority to be on the interview panel to help ensure they found a head teacher who would be able to engage with the diverse families. This was an incredibly positive experience for Ahlam, the parent involved, and the head teacher they appointed has done a lot of work to engage with families and communities including introducing community assemblies⁷. (To hear about Ahlam's experience in her own words go to <http://tinyurl.com/m286afr>)

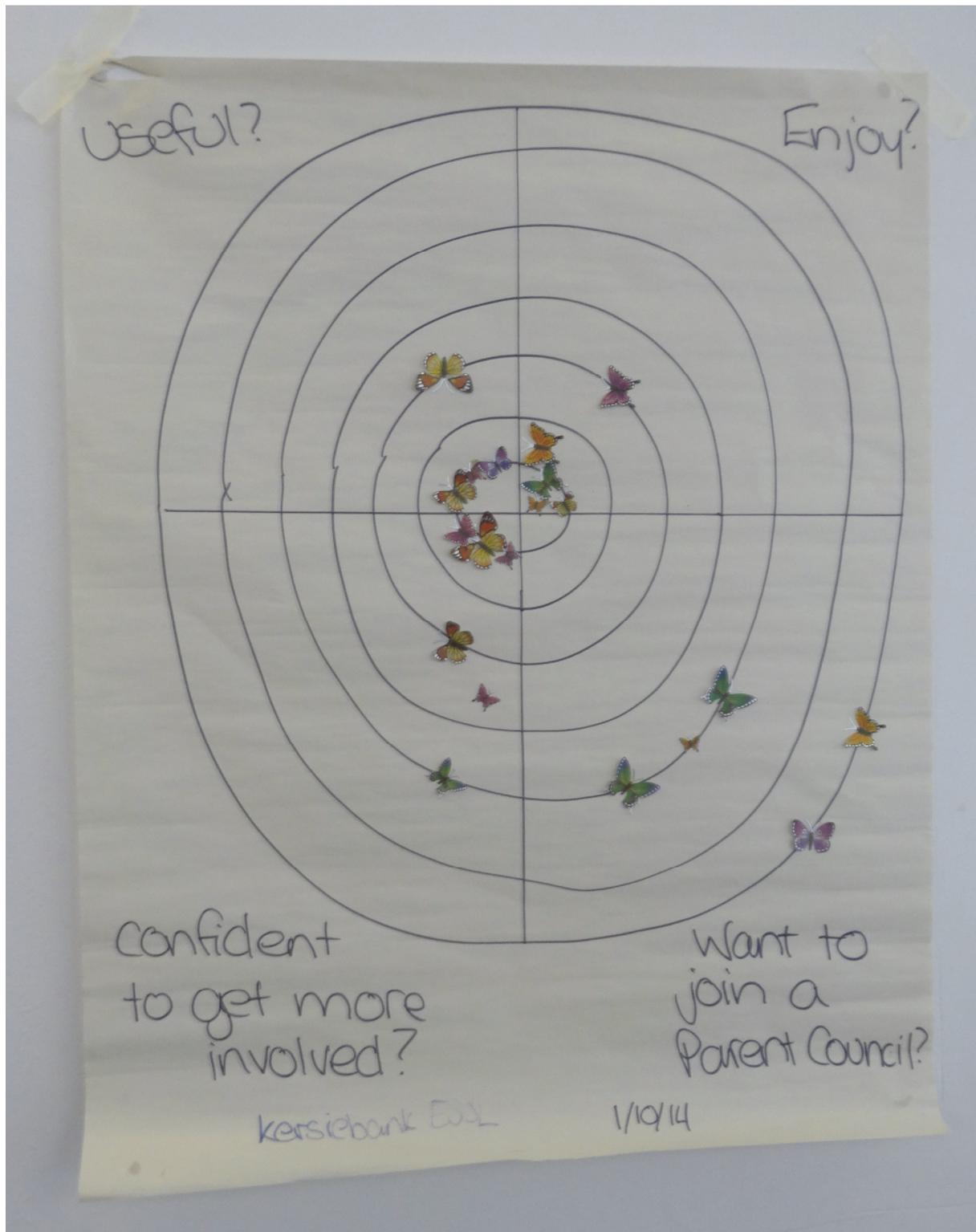
That would be wonderful if it was true (Mother, Glasgow Chinese School)

At the end of the training parents often expressed surprise at how little they had known about Parent Councils. This is concerning as the majority of schools will have a parent councils and its main role is to represent parents. Parent Councils were created to be the link between school and the wider parent forum, supporting parents to have their voice heard about issues that affect them. If a Parent Council is not aware of the experiences of EM parents—like cultural and language barriers, then they are not able to advocate to the school to take actions to support them.

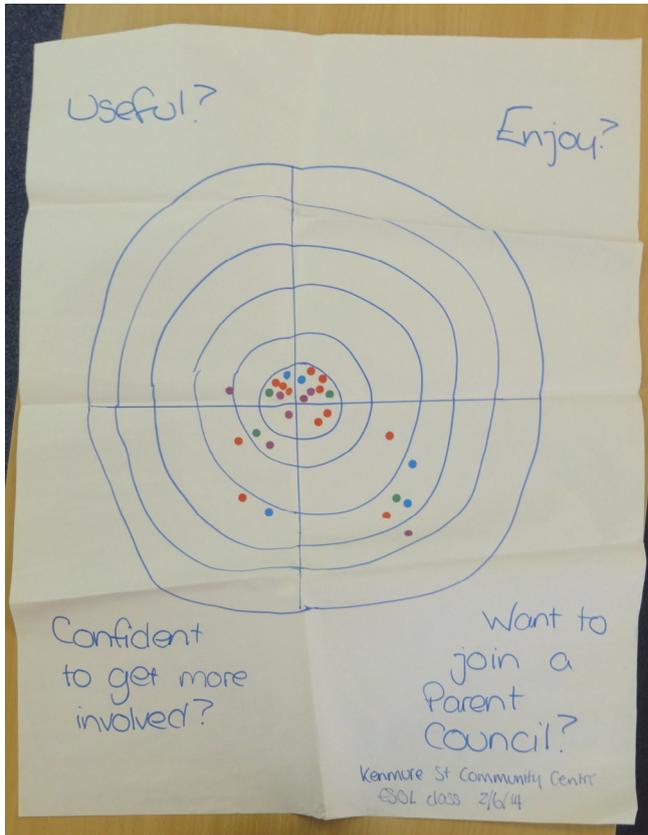
⁶ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/148166/0039411.pdf>

⁷ <http://gatheredtogether.bemis.org.uk/getting-parents-in-over-the-door/>

FEEDBACK FROM THE WORKSHOP



Feedback from Kersiebank family ESOL group, Falkirk



At the end of each workshop for ethnic minority parents, participants were asked to complete a “target” feedback form. Participants were asked to put a sticker in each of the four areas to show to what extent the training had met the target. The nearer to the target the more they agreed with the statement.

The statements were:

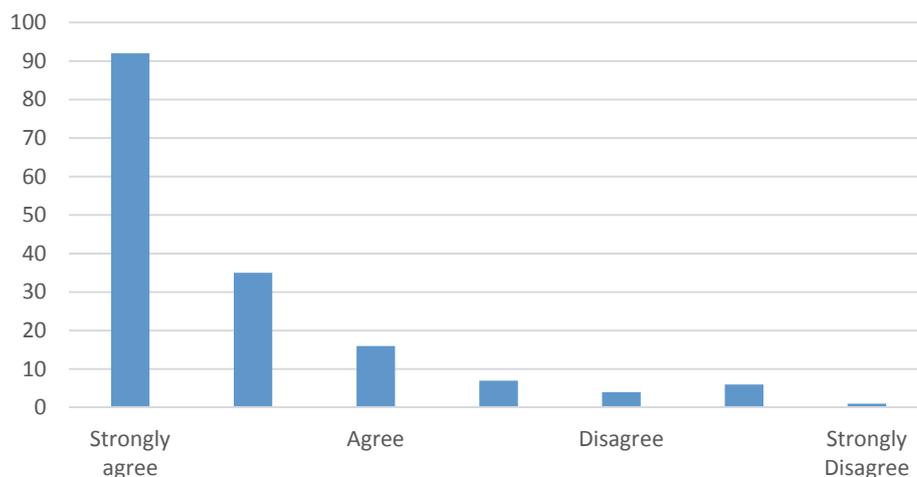
1. The training was useful
2. I enjoyed the training
3. I am confident to get more involved
4. I want to join a Parent Council

This form of gathering feedback was used as it was quick for participants to complete, it was very visual so easier for participants with a lower level of

English and gave the trainers an immediate visual picture of how the training had met its targets.

The findings from each of the sessions have been numbered and recorded. As the targets were drawn slightly differently each time, with variations in the number of circles this has been an attempt to record results as accurately as possible using a scale of 1-7 (with 7 strongly agree, 1 strongly disagree).

The training was useful



The overwhelming majority of the respondents found the training enjoyable and useful, 57% strongly agreed that the training was useful, only one person strongly disagreed and felt the training was not useful. This shows that there was a need for this workshops for

parents, both to have their experiences heard and to give them the information about how they can become involved in their children’s education.

We know from some of the sessions the “useful” target was not met because members of the group did not have children and felt it did not apply to them. In order to engage with as diverse a group of EM parents as possible Gathered Together ran workshops in partnership with ESOL classes, schools, community groups and faith groups. While the majority of these groups were made up of parents there were some participants who did not have children—especially in ESOL classes—and it is likely that they gave lower scores as it was not relevant to them.

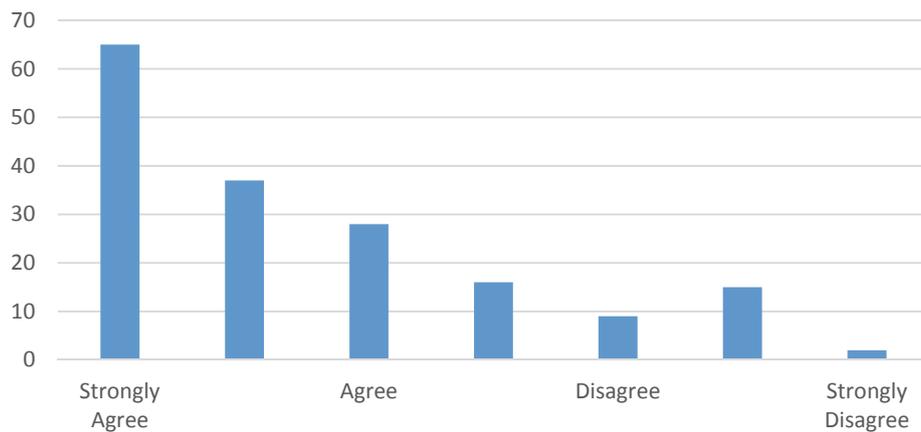


52% of the respondents also strongly agreed that they enjoyed the training, this reflects the experience of the facilitators as there were often lively discussions and the opportunity for parents to share experiences.



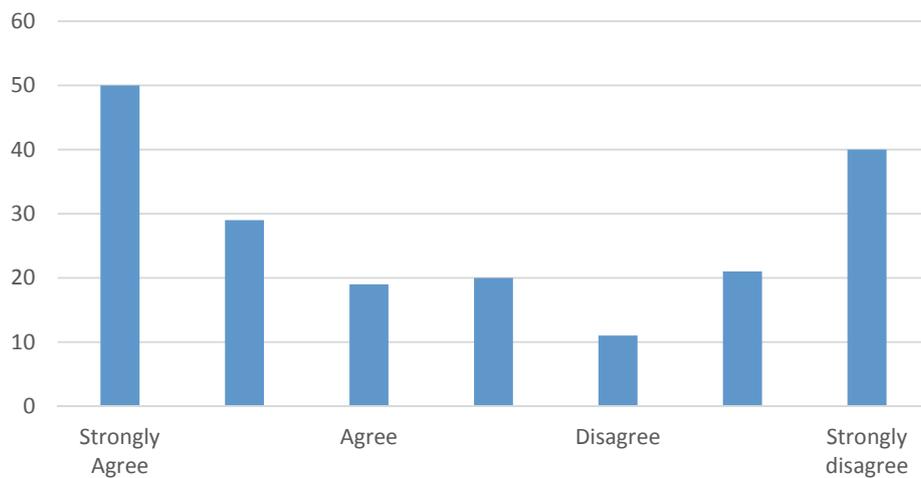
Karibu Group, Glasgow

I am more confident to get more involved with my children's school and education?



Following the workshop the majority of participants recorded that they felt an increase in confidence to become more involved in their children’s school and education. While this was often at a low level—for example speaking to teachers and asking for ways to support their children’s learning or coming along to school events, this was valuable and shows the training was able to meet its main aim.

I want to join a Parent Council



In relation to joining a Parent Council there was a far more mixed response—many parents reported feeling it was “not for them” or were concerned about being asked to do too much. While the training raised awareness around the role of the Parent Council 21% of the participants strongly disagreed with the statement. Comparing this to the results for parents feeling confident to become more involved suggests joining the Parent Councils was a “step too far” for many of the parents. This shows the need for greater support to help EM parents develop confidence to take a more active role in Parent Councils and have their voice heard within the school.



St Albert's Primary, learning together club

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In all our sessions the parents clearly showed they cared deeply about their children's education. We feel the parents have the will to work in partnership with schools to support their children's learning but that there needs to be more done to support them overcome the barriers that they face. In this section we will highlight the areas where we feel there is a need for greater work.

Celebrating diversity

Ethnic minority parents bring with them experiences of other cultures, languages and beliefs—we believe providing them opportunities to become involved in the school through sharing their experiences could support schools in helping all children become “responsible citizens”. We have heard about good practice where schools approached parents to come into school to talk about their religion or tell a story in their mother tongue. Activities like these help all children to “*develop understanding of the world and Scotland's place in it*” and “*understand different beliefs and cultures*”⁸. This would benefit all the children giving them the opportunity to widen their experience as well as providing opportunities to recognise and celebrate the diversity of cultures within the school.

Parental involvement from ethnic minority communities also has the potential to support central areas of the Curriculum for Excellence including Global Citizenship and the “1+2” language approach. The parents we met often said they were not approached by the school and that, maybe if they were specifically asked they would become involved. By recognising the unique gifts that parents from other countries and cultures could bring to the school and directly approaching parents there would be higher levels of involvement, parents would feel their culture was being recognised and respected.

⁸ <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/thepurposeofthecurriculum/index.asp>

Providing the right information

One of the central issues that came up through our work with ethnic minority parents was the lack of information parents had about the Scottish Education system. This led to anxiety about how their children were doing in school and parents were not able to support their children in areas such as homework and making career decisions. We have heard about workshops for parents on how their children are learning and how to support them with their studies and parents really value this opportunity. We are aware, particularly in secondary school, EM parents feel uninformed and unable to support their children. Parents coming from other cultures are often unaware of the myriad options that are open to their children, including college courses and modern apprenticeships, and the services that could support them.

Parents also highlighted that they struggled to understand the information that schools give them—one parent attended an information evening about the new exams but found the language too technical to take in. Schools and Parent Councils need to work together to ensure that information provided in a straight-forward and accessible. The ethnic minority parents we met often had a lot of questions about Scottish Education and we feel the opportunity to have a dialogue—where their specific questions could be answered—would be more valuable than only providing written information.

Building confidence

In all discussions with ethnic minority parents, the issue of lower levels of confidence—in their language, their ability to support their children’s learning and to go into school—have been important. Approaches with parents that have been most successful in promoting ethnic minority parental involvement have worked to develop the confidence of parents. Projects such as homework clubs that teach parents how their children are being taught and how they could support their children’s learning as well as giving them the opportunity to come into the school and develop informal relations with school staff helped to improve the confidence of both the children and parents. In the words of one EAL teacher who ran a “learning together club” for her EAL families, the led to, “*confident individuals—guaranteed*”.

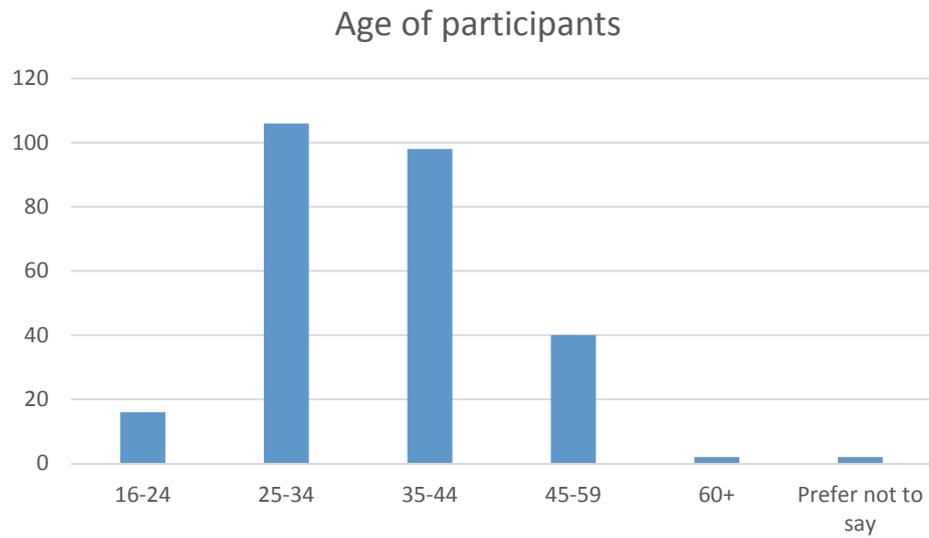
Awareness of ethnic minority parents’ experiences

From work that we have done with Parent Councils there was often a lack of awareness of the barriers that ethnic minority parents faced—including assuming parents were not interested or that it was the perception of Parent Councils as “cliques” that prevented them becoming involved. This in and of itself provides an additional barrier to involvement in that attempts to reduce barriers are less likely to be focussed on the real barrier parents experience. It is therefore important that schools and parent councils use evidence to inform their view of the barriers that minority groups face: sourcing this either from national datasets, such as this, or, preferably, from engaging in discussion at a local level with these groups.

APPENDIX 1:

Profile of participants at Gathered Together Workshops

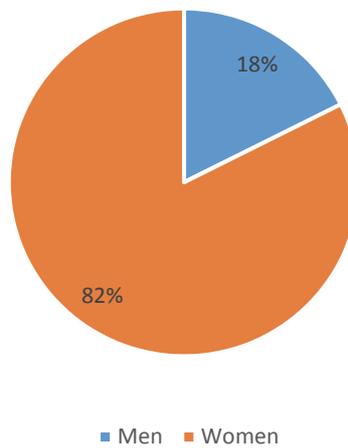
Age



16-24	25-34	35-44	45-59	60+	Prefer not to say
16	106	98	40	2	2

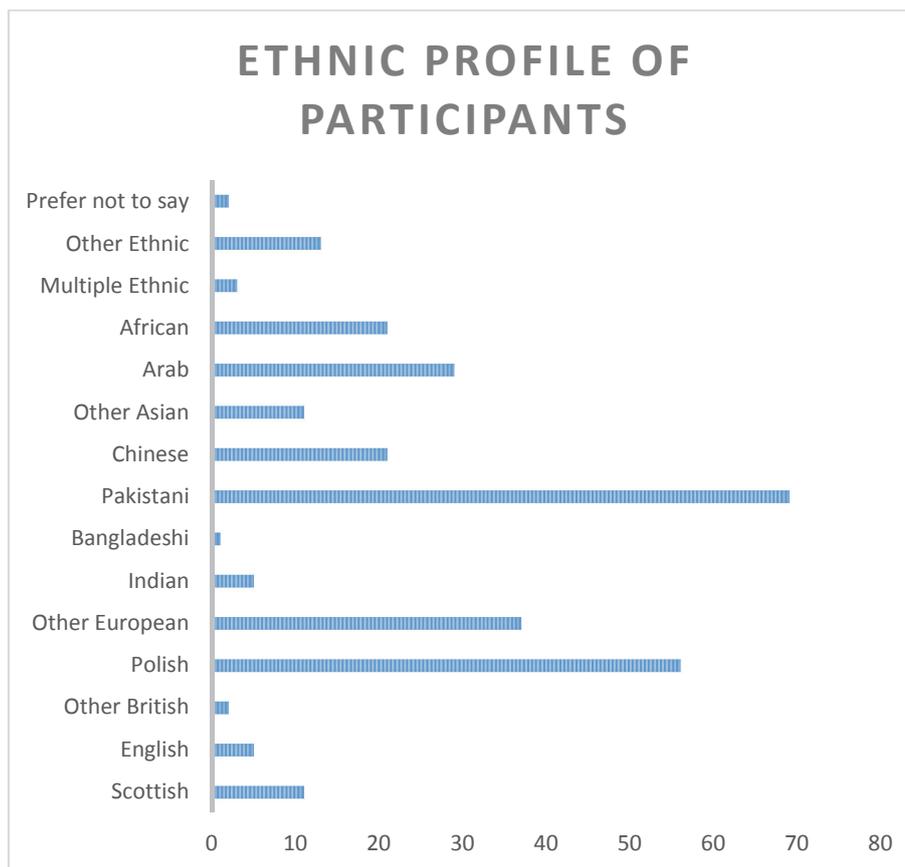
Gender

Gender of participants



Male	47
Female	220

Ethnic Identity



Scottish	11	Chinese	21
English	5	Other Asian	11
Other British	2	Arab	29
Polish	56	African	21
Other European	37	Multiple Ethnic	3
Indian	5	Other Ethnic	13
Bangladeshi	1	Prefer not to say	2
Pakistani	69		

Other European included Portugal, Romanian, Lithuanian, Latvian, Hungarian and Italian

Other Asian included Thai, Nepalese, and Filipino

African included Sudan, Cameroon and Zimbabwe

Multiple ethnic identities included Polish/ Scottish, Russian/ Mongolian and Italian/ Roma

Other Ethnic included Russian, Turkish and Brazilian

APPENDIX 2:

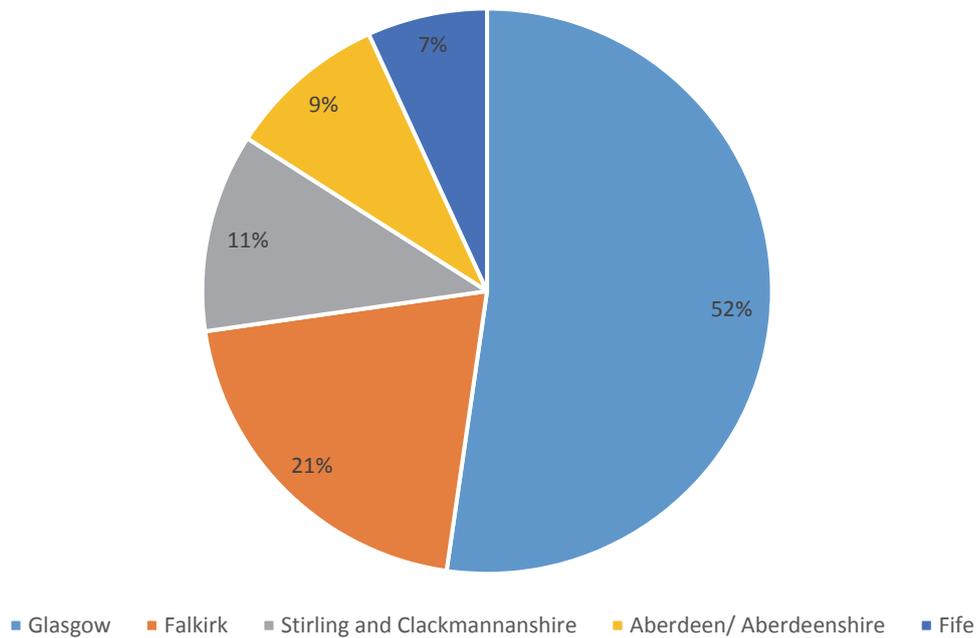
Organisations involved in hosting Gathered Together workshops for EM parents

Maryhill Integration Network	Jewels of Islam
Glasgow Women's Library	Red Cross—Refugee Support
Glasgow Clyde College	Falkirk Rainbow Muslim Women's group
Scottish Association of Arab Women	Kirkcaldy North primary school
International Women's Group	Falkirk family ESOL groups
Central Scotland Regional Equality Council	West and Central Integration Network
Karibu	Forth Valley College
Russian Centre	Deaf Connections
City of Glasgow College	St Peter's primary school (Aberdeen)
Falkirk Islamic Learning Centre	Hanover Street primary school (Aberdeen)
Glasgow Life	Central Scotland Islamic Centre
Home Start Glasgow South	Russian School (Aberdeen)
Kingsway women's group	Gilcomstone Primary school (Aberdeen)
Stirling Family ESOL	Skeene Square Primary school (Aberdeen)
Glasgow Chinese School	

APPENDIX 3:

Ethnic minority parent workshops by local authority

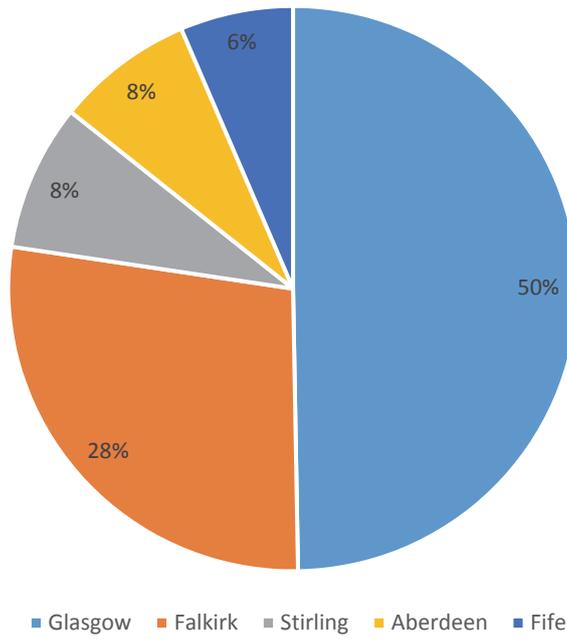
EM sessions by local authority



Glasgow	Falkirk	Stirling and Clackmannanshire	Aberdeen/Aberdeenshire	Fife
23	9	5	4	3

Workshops held in Aberdeen were also open to EM parents from Aberdeenshire—many families will come into Aberdeen to access services including the Russian school.

Number of parents by local authority



Glasgow	Falkirk	Stirling	Aberdeen	Fife
178	99	30	28	23

APPENDIX 4:

Awareness of Parent Councils

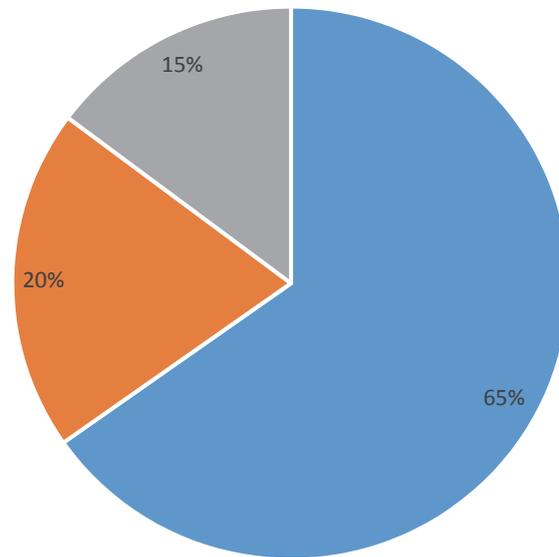
Answers to true/false exercise

- 1) All parents/carers are part of the Parent Forum **True**
- 2) All schools have a Parent Council **False—this is up to the parent forum, some schools are so small they don't feel there is a need for a parent council**
- 3) The Local Authority gives money to the Parent Council **True**
- 4) Only members of the Parent Council can attend Parent Councils meetings **False—any member of the parent forum can attend**
- 5) Parent Councils take part in recruiting a head teacher **True**
- 6) Other people can be asked to join the parent council for a short while if needed **True—teachers, local community leaders, road safety advisors etc. can be invited to join the parent council**
- 7) Head teachers have a right and a duty to attend the parent council meetings **True—they are there to help advise and should not run the meetings**
- 8) Parent councils' main job is to raise money for the school. **False—raising money is only part of what they can do; they are there to represent the parent forum**

Breakdown of results

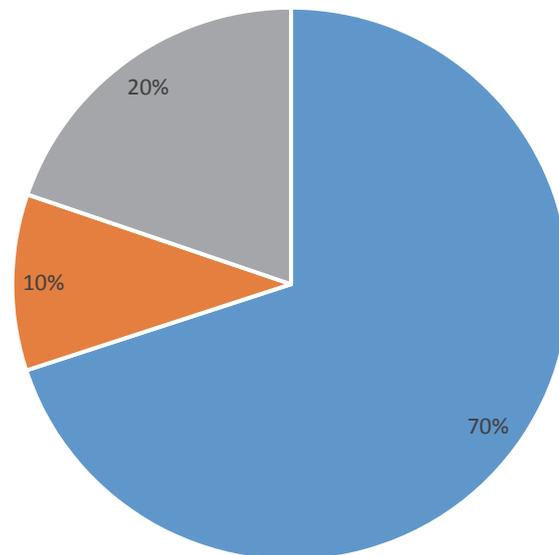
All Parents/Carers are part of the Parent Forum (True)

■ Q1 True ■ Q1 False ■ Q1 Don't Know



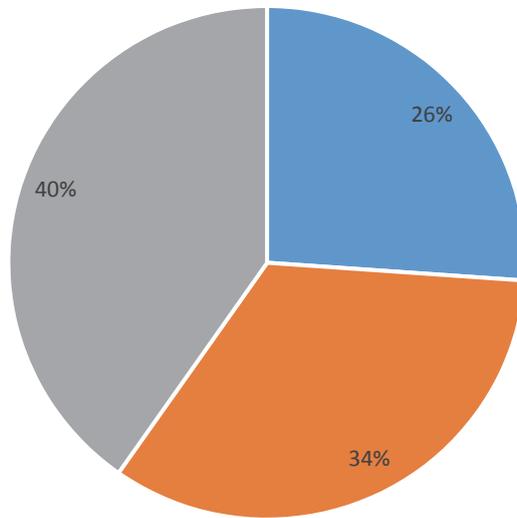
All Schools have a Parents' Council (False)

■ Q2 True ■ Q2 False ■ Q2 Don't Know



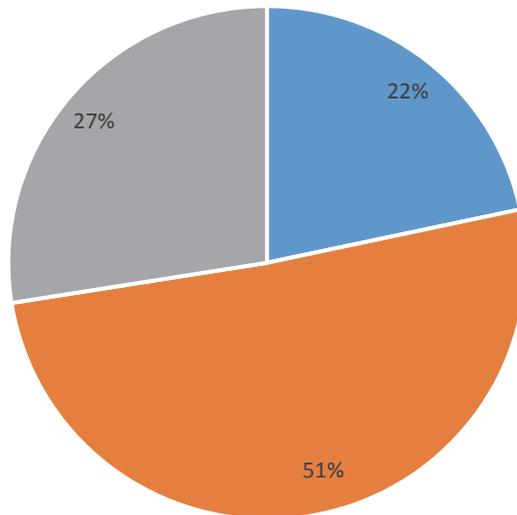
The Local Authority gives money to the Parent Councils
(True)

■ Q3 True ■ Q3 False ■ Q3 Don't Know



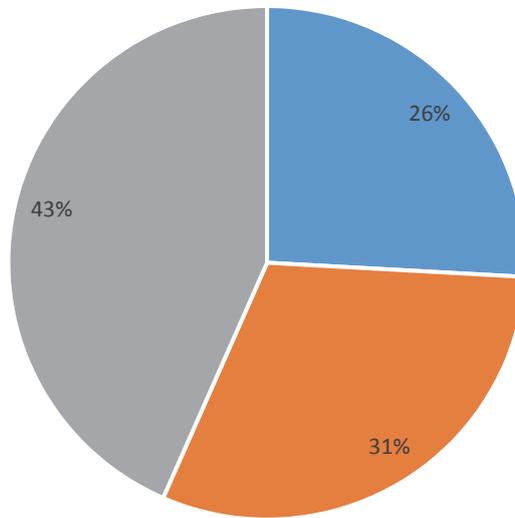
Only members of a Parent Council can attend meetings
(False)

■ Q4 True ■ Q4 False ■ Q4 Don't Know



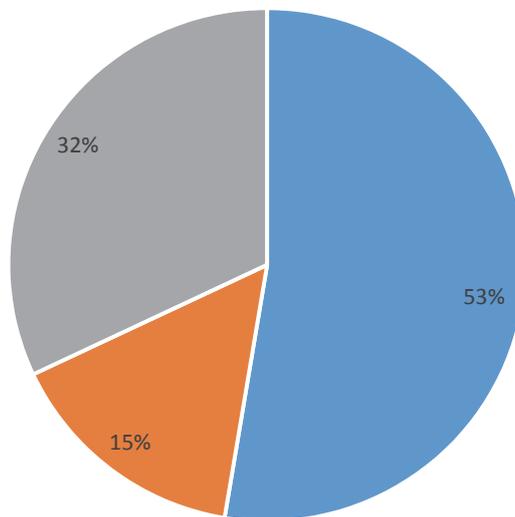
Parent Councils take part in recruiting a Head Teacher (True)

■ Q5 True ■ Q5 False ■ Q5 Don't Know



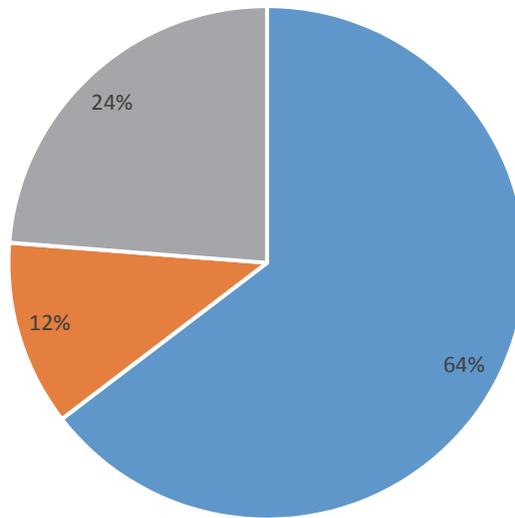
Other people can be asked to join the Parent Council for a short while if needed (True)

■ Q6 True ■ Q6 False ■ Q6 Don't Know



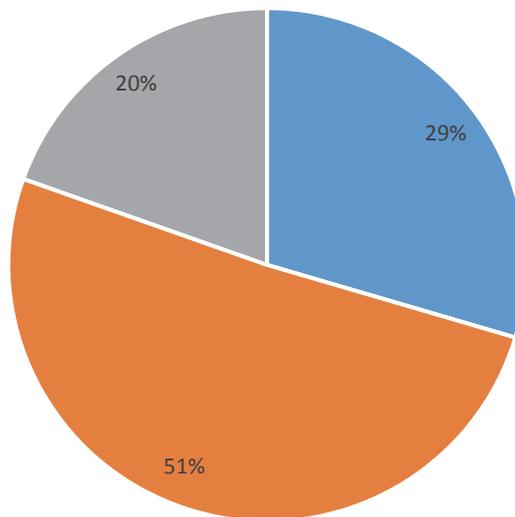
Head Teachers have a right and a duty to attend Parent Council meetings (**True**)

■ Q7 True ■ Q7 False ■ Q7 Don't Know



Parent Councils' main job is to raise money for the school (**False**)

■ Q8 True ■ Q8 False ■ Q8 Don't Know



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