

Race/Equality
and
Human Rights



BEA^{IS}

Empowering Scotland's Ethnic and
Cultural Minority Communities

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Strengthening Communities
Tackling Inequalities

SCOTLAND

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and
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Civic Society
and The
Voluntary Sector

Ethnic Minority 3rd Sector Network

**Interim report on consultation themes, discussions and outcomes
of 'The Future of Scotland' events**

Education
and
Employment



**The Scottish
Government**
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Health and
Social Justice

Ethnic Minorities
3rd Sector
Network

University of Glasgow

20 January
2014

*notes

This document contains a summary of three consultation events facilitated by the Ethnic Minority Third Sector Network. The first consultation took place in Glasgow on 20/01/2014 and the second consultation took place in Kirkcaldy on the 06/02/2014 and the third on 28/03/14 in Inverness. The consultations have been attended by over 200 people representing a diverse mix of Scotland's ethnic and cultural minority communities in both personal and representative capacities. A full breakdown of attendee's is available via BEMIS office manager – Sue Barnes at sue.barnes@bemis.org.uk or CEMVO Scotland Equalities Officer Fiaz Khan fiaz.khan@cemvo.org.uk

This document has been prepared by BEMIS Scotland / CEMVO and is representative of the discussions which took place at both events. Some questions – i.e. those submitted via the '*post it note*' option have been literally adopted into the report however the narrative has been drafted as a true reflection, as agreed by BEMIS and CEMVO officers as representative of the conversations and themes approached in workshops and discussion groups.

The White Paper / Referendum and useful links:

A link to the Scottish Governments White Paper can be found here;

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/11/9348/downloads>

We would encourage all delegates and communities to read and consider the White Paper. Many of the 'Post it note' questions with regards the White Paper can be answered by going to the appropriate chapter of this document.

In the event that you need more clarification on any aspects of current Government Policy, The Independence Referendum, national or local issues you have the right to attend surgeries or write to elected representatives. These include MSP's (Scottish Parliament) MEP's (European Parliament) MP's (Westminster) and Councillors (Local Government).

Specific Scottish Government ministerial briefs can be contacted at the following email address; Please state clearly in any correspondence to which ministerial department the communication is directed.

scottish.ministers@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Please note that ministerial department responses may take up to 6 weeks.

The Scottish Government has also produced a specific online portal in reference to the referendum. This can be accessed via the following link which includes a question and answer section.

<http://www.scotreferendum.com/questions-and-answers/>

If your query is not satisfied with the available evidence then there is a provision to contact the referendum dept. directly on 0300 012 1809 or vis this link.

<http://scotreferendum.com/contact/>

Between June – August 2014 the Ethnic Minority 3rd Sector Network will follow up our White Paper consultations with a series of 'conversations' on Independence with representatives of the YES and NO campaigns.

Details of these events will be forthcoming in the weeks ahead via the 'Ethnic Minority Third Sector Network'

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Workshop 1 Race/Equality and Human Rights – Summary and Responses:

Workshop 1 facilitated by Colin Lee (CEMVO) and Danny Boyle (BEMIS) focussed on Race/Equality and Human Rights.

The discussion was generally set around immigration/citizenship and putting policy into practice. Delegates were keen to clarify the status of immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees in the event of an Independent Scotland. This culminated in one of the group questions being;

- a) If Scotland becomes an Independent country will everyone legally living in Scotland automatically become a Scottish Citizen? Furthermore, for individuals seeking refuge or asylum will their cases be transferred to an appropriate Scottish Institution to process their cases and will this have a positive or detrimental effect on the times scales and bureaucracy inherent in the current UKBA process?*

Minister's Response: The Minister clarified that everyone holding British citizenship will have their citizenship transferred. In addition to this with any future Scottish constitution being underpinned by Human Rights and Equality their intended outcome is that the asylum process becomes more humane and respectful of the individuals concerned. This includes a commitment to closing Dungavel Detention Centre.

With regards to ***'Putting Policy into Practice'*** delegates were concerned that although policies on paper were positive in reality their implementation was somewhat different. Ethnic and Cultural Minority Communities still face institutionalised barriers to personal and community development. In light of this the following question was drafted for group submission to the minister;

- b) How will the Scottish Government ensure that Policy is put into practice when it is recognised that Ethnic minority communities still face institutionalised barriers in the development of race equality.*

Minister's Response: Recognition that we can never say anything is 'perfect' but that the will is there to challenge discrimination and progress the race equality agenda in conjunction with Ethnic and Cultural Minority communities. This was reinforced by the commitment that any future constitution must be developed in conjunction with relevant stakeholders in Scotland including Scotland's diverse minority/ethnic communities.

Delegates were invited to submit written questions to be delivered to the Equality Unit / Scottish Government for consideration. The following responses were submitted anonymously by the participants in workshop 1 – Race/Equality and Human Rights.

Queries raised via written questions;

- In what ways would an Independent Scotland continue to engage with Ethnic Minority communities and empower them to take part as citizens on equal grounds?
- How would an Independent Scotland deal with Illegal immigrants and over stayers?
- If Scotland becomes Independent will we keep the 'British Pound'?
- Should the BME communities in Scotland (If Independent) be worried about political parties like UKIP, EDL/SDL etc??? what measures are being put in place??
- Will the Independent Scotland belong to the Scottish People: i.e. nationalisation of core public services transport, oil + gas, royal mail to be developed and used for the benefit of everyone? From my perspective the economic development of Scotland is stifled by increasing and unaffordable transport costs for example a high peak rail ticket between our two major cities is £22.80 – this is ultimately unaffordable to most workers and families and constrains our potential and capacity. What provisions will the Government make to make Scotland not only an economic success but most importantly internally affordable to the people of Scotland??
- How will an Independent Scotland pursue an open and radical inward migration policy for economic growth while sharing open borders with other parts of the UK who have different priorities?
- How would an Independent Scotland guarantee protection of individuals rights in the face of discrimination on multiple grounds?
- Will the Scottish Borders close? How will this effect inward/outward migration and citizenship? Passport changes? Dual citizenship?
- In the policies for Human Rights, what consideration if being made for religious rights?
- What provisions will be in place to prevent elected representatives and in particular Government Ministers from making unilateral procedural and moral decisions which potentially impinge on citizens human rights? I refer specifically to the incomprehensible number of stop and searches without legal recourse carried out on 15-20 year olds in Scotland in the last year numbering 145,600. The SHRC have outlined concerns that this policy will have detrimental effect on community relations while also contravening individual's human rights. The

Justice Minister has responded by saying that “*It is quite clear and self-evident that crime is disproportionately perpetrated by young people*”?

Workshop 2 - Civic Society and the Voluntary Sector

Workshop two was facilitated by Rami Ousta (CEO of BEMIS Scotland) and Fiaz Khan (CEMVO). The workshop focussed on the voluntary sector and both the current and future relationship with local and national government.

Delegates were keen to ascertain the commitment of the Scottish Government to the sustainability and development of the ethnic minority voluntary sector and mitigating institutionalised barriers as perceived by delegates.

These themes were reflected in the two questions selected by the workshop to be articulated to the Deputy First Minister;

a) How would the SG ensure that the ethnic minority voluntary sector is resourced and empowered (capacity building) to be active?

Ministers Response: The minister articulated her support and the support of the Scottish Government to the vast and diverse nature of the third sector and in particular the ethnic minority third sector. The third sector is highly valued by the Scottish Government and play a crucial role in the development of individuals, communities and broader society.

b) Will attention to race equality and institutional racism be a priority?

Ministers Response: The minister outlined that the Scottish Government currently recognise that although we face challenges in a race equality setting the Scottish Government is committed to positively and pro-actively tackling discrimination. Furthermore the integration of human rights legislation into a written constitution would supplement this policy and the involvement of communities and key stakeholders would be integral to this process.

Delegates were invited to submit written questions to be delivered to the Equality Unit / Scottish Government for consideration. The following responses were submitted anonymously by the participants in workshop 2 – Civic Society and the Voluntary Sector

- How will the Scottish Government ensure that the Private sector adhere properly to the equality act?
 - The role of the media in Scotland is important. Sometimes they portray ethnic minority communities in a negative way. How will the SG ensure that national media outlets behave responsibly in their reporting of minority issues? What will happen to the BBC if Scotland becomes independent?
 - How will the Scottish Government balance the relationship between welfare reform and the voluntary sector? There are increasing signs that a greater emphasis on service provision is being left with the voluntary sector, how do you propose to support this capacity sustainability?
 - Food banks and poverty is increasing in Scotland. Many of the EM communities reside in areas of multiple deprivation, how will the government help those people and communities?
-

Workshop 3 Education and Employment

Workshop 3, facilitated by Marion Fairweather (BEMIS) and Shaista Asghar (CEMVO) focussed on education and employment.

Education and employment are key issues throughout Scotland and this was represented by the in-depth discussion around these two dynamics of the conference. The following two questions were communicated to the minister following the general workshop discussion.

***a)** Are the Scottish Government committed to free education for Scottish students in the event of an Independent Scotland? Why do students from other parts of the UK need to pay for education in Scotland as opposed to Europeans?*

Ministers response: The Scottish Government is committed to free education. There would be a continuation of this policy within an Independent Scotland. It is necessary for tuition fees to be charged to students from other parts of the UK because university fees are significantly higher in other UK domiciles meaning that an influx of non-domicile students taking advantage of lower Scottish fees would effectively squeeze out Scottish students.

***b)** Will equality in employment be enshrined in the constitution ensuring that employment rights are ensured regardless of Government?*

Ministers response: The Scottish Government aspires to enshrine employment rights within a written constitution. With the full economic levers on the economy the

Scottish Government would be in a position to develop and implement employment policies relative to the needs of Scotland and Scottish citizens.

Delegates were invited to submit written questions to be delivered to the Equality Unit / Scottish Government for consideration. The following responses were submitted anonymously by the participants in workshop 3 – Education and Employment;

- We should be talking about a living wage as opposed to a minimum wage. Will the Scottish Government ensure that in the event of Independence our reliance on food banks and the culture of working to survive rather than live will be tackled?
 - We must do something to tackle unpaid internships and zero hours contracts. The destruction of the trade union movement has left many employees totally unaware of their basic rights and unfortunately many companies have taken advantage of this. How will the Scottish Government ensure standards across the public, private and voluntary sector?
 - Will there be enough university places for foreign students?
 - Will there be enough university places for Scottish students?
 - Why do people have to wait to be unemployed before being supported?
 - For future immigrants, in the event of an Independent Scotland will qualifications and skills recognised in initial countries be recognised in Scotland?
 - Childcare is currently extremely expensive in Scotland and makes it harder for single parent families to return to work. How will the Scottish Government support these families?
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Workshop 4 – Health and Social Justice.

Although health is a devolved power the workshop discussed factors which have a detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of communities in Scotland. Some of the points to come out of this part of the discussion were:

- Concerns for young people relating to obesity and unhealthy diet. Participants identified that this can often be linked to poverty and deprivation.

- ➔ Participants were keen to know: what are the plans for tackling these issues? And identified that there should be a national plan which links poverty and equality and which is aimed at all communities
- Participants also pointed out that it is a misconception that smoking, and drug and alcohol abuse are not a problem in ethnic minority communities. Highlighting that these issues do exist and the problem is aggravated by the fact that it remains a hidden issue.

There is a risk that stereotypes and assumptions inform policy decisions.

- ➔ Current schemes to tackle alcohol and drug misuse may not be reaching individuals from ethnic minority communities. The participants suggested more should be done to look into this and tackle the problem.
- The point was also made that 'cultural change' – adjusting to new cultures or surroundings – can have a huge impact on mental health. It was identified that this is problem facing new communities, for example asylum seekers and refugees.
- ➔ There needs to be a focus on education and integration to help ease this. Cultural awareness programmes should be set up to support new arrivals.

There was also discussion around access to services particularly centred on the provision of interpreting services and translated forms and literature. Participants identified that huge cuts in interpreting budget have created a barrier to accessing services such as health services and welfare support. One participant highlighted that the UK government is planning to cut budget for interpreting services, creating further barriers to accessing services.

- ➔ Participants were keen to see Scottish Government improve access to services.
- ➔ Funding decisions/cuts should also be impact assessed in order to identify any potential negative impact

Another aspect of this discussion was access to GP's surgeries. Some participants felt that this community based health service was being under used.

- Opening hours are a barrier – evenings and weekends would increase accessibility to those working unsocial hours/shifts etc

Discussion also involved comments on care for the elderly. One question posed was: 'What are they doing about day care services for elderly people from ethnic minority communities?' Participants identified that at the moment pockets of 'culturally sensitive' elderly services are being delivered by ethnic minority voluntary organisations. The point was raised that we should be mainstreaming 'culturally sensitive' services and the needs to ethnic minority communities so that they can access all services.

➔ It was stated that we can't have centres or services for every different community – we need an inclusive approach.

Question was also asked – why can mainstreaming not be about funding ethnic minority run services which are open and inclusive of non-ethnic minority service users (rather than the other way around)?

There was also discussion around the current asylum and immigration procedures. One of the participants raised the question: 'Is there anything addressing destitution of asylum seekers and refugees?'

At this point we had been joined by a representative from Scottish Government who was able to inform the group that Scottish Government are currently working with Scottish Refugee Council to develop a strategy to deal with this issue. The representative also confirmed that it proposed in the white paper that and Independent Scotland would have a separate Scottish Asylum service, which would be distinct from any authority dealing with immigration.

Another concern raised by the group was the impact of the no recourse to public funds condition attached to visas. Participants identified that this makes women particularly vulnerable to violence against them.

➔ At present the domestic violence concession has been put in place by the UK government for women on spousal visas who have no recourse to public funds. What will happen to this condition and this concession if Scotland becomes independent?

Another point of discussion was Dungavel detention centre. Participants were of the opinion that more needs to be done to tackle the causes of crime; which they identified as social and economic disadvantage, strict conditions imposed on asylum seekers, and a lack of awareness of the laws in this country in contrast to their home country, in addition to addressing the crime itself. 'Proactive rather than re-active'

Other points and questions raised in group discussion:

- Often communities are lumped together as ethnic minorities – this can mean that the needs of smaller/newer communities are overlooked.
- We are not 'hard to reach'. We pay taxes. The taxman knows where we live.

- The other political parties are not committing to anything post-independence referendum. I.e. What will Scottish Labour do if we vote yes? Similarly what will SNP do if we vote no?
- All these commitments in the white paper. Will they be upheld if a different political party comes in to power?
- Still insufficient evidence and monitoring so we do not know the real picture?

Comments and questions submitted by participants at the end of discussion:

- Obesity is proposed to increase in UK. How will independence and Scotland's Health Service prevent this?
- Drugs/Alcohol issue in Scotland is worst in UK, what are the plans? E.g. increasing age
- How will the Scottish Government ensure greater accountability for monitoring equality outcomes (publishing regular reports) in statutory health services, so that issues around preventative (ill) health, access & quality will be fully addressed for diverse communities?
- At the moment we have to wait for very long time for an operation – long waiting list.
- Will Scottish Government look into destitution of asylum seekers? Will there be at least permission to work granted so that people support themselves 'til asylum is fully determined? (from Positive Action in Housing)
- Would independent Scotland allow ethnic minority doctors to be in management levels?
- Mainstream provision of (elderly) day care services that are inclusive – not as it is at present – piecemeal – provided by BME projects for BME communities.
- How will Scottish Government address the issues of no recourse to public funds (in relation to violence against women) which is currently funded by UK government?
- In Scottish Immigration system what will be done to cases which are (currently) being handled by Croydon?
- What will be done to address hate crime?
- Scotland should increase more health centres then people do not need to wait for long (time) on list.
- Scotland should increase more police to tackle the crime or to reduce it.
- Some aspects of violence against minority ethnic women have international roots and dimensions. How will Scotland address issues such as FGM, forced marriage and other harmful traditional practises which have an international dimension?
- What will the means-tested process in welfare comprise of?
- How will independence protect poor against private companies price rise?

- Will the independent Scottish Government do business as usual with Pakistan despite their worst human rights record towards Ahmadi Muslim community in Pakistan? (Ahmadi's are a very small minority in Scotland) (submitted by Dr. Ata Khalid – ata.khalid@glasgow.ac.uk)
- Ethnicity is a risk factor in a number of health conditions. Scotland's ethnic population has doubled since 2001 but with some major geographical differences. How do we ensure local health services fully/appropriately serve their communities; anticipate scenarios and develop strategies?
- Acknowledge BME people as 'tax payers' not the 'other' lumped under BME – we are Scottish only a slightly different 'colour'.
- (on tackling hate crime) Maybe a better understanding between BME (communities) and Police and the business?
- Health issues within BME (communities): smoking, alcohol, drug misuse, violence, suicide.
- (GP) surgeries are front line to many people especially ethnic minority families. (Suggest) Longer opening hours to prevent blockage of A&E departments.

Kirkcaldy White Paper Consultation summary; 06/02/14

On Thursday 6th February 2014 the consultation process moved to the Fife town of Kirkcaldy. Kirkcaldy has a high ethnic demographic with representation from the following communities' and organisations at this event;

- Fife Migrants Forum
- Kirkcaldy Islamic Cultural Centre
- Polish Club Kirkcaldy
- Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Éireann (Greater Glasgow, Dundee and Coatbridge)
- Trust, Hanover and Bield Housing Associations
- Kirkcaldy Central Mosque

The EM3SN made a commitment to return to Kirkcaldy at a later date in order to engage with the broader communities and individuals resident in the area. This has been intimated to us by the individuals and organisations in attendance and will be followed up in the weeks ahead.

Due to the smaller nature of this event the group discussion was facilitated by an introduction from Colin (CEMVO) and Tanveer (BEMIS). Following this each delegate including CEMVO and BEMIS broader staff were invited to introduce themselves and

share a brief analysis of the White Paper and their thoughts on the Independence Referendum in general. Both BEMIS and CEMVO staff maintained a neutral stance in the discussion but clarified where possible the content of the white paper and current policy settings i.e. devolved and reserved powers between Scotland and Westminster.

In the first half of the consultation delegates were invited to discuss the themes which they believe to be key to the referendum debate. The second half of the consultation, similarly to the Glasgow event encouraged delegates to define questions to be incorporated into this report for the Scottish Government.

In light of this the discussion took on the broad themes of the referendum and delegates were not split into specific workshops 1-4 as had been the case in Glasgow. The following titles have been adopted in order to best summarise the 1st half of the consultation;

- (vi) Immigration
- (vii) Welfare
- (viii) Human Rights and Citizenship
- (ix) Economy and Business – National and local
- (x) General Questions and Outcomes

Immigration:

A number of delegates were keen to discuss the current settings of Immigration policy in the UK and the implications for Scotland in the event of a YES vote. A broader understanding of the Scottish Governments plans for a post-Independence immigration policy was sought. The issues discussed included;

- What will the provisions be for non-UK citizens coming to Scotland from holiday or visiting from non-eu countries? i.e. Pakistan – India.
- Will a Scottish government be positive towards immigration or mirror the UK perception of negative stereotypes around migrants, for example the UKBA go home campaign?
- Will the Scottish Government help to facilitate a culture where migrants are aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Are migrants asking the right questions? Voting is only the **‘tip of the iceberg’** in democratic citizenship, are they (migrants) aware that they can participate in local, national democracy and the referendum debate? How do they do this?

Welfare:

The reform of the welfare system to meet the demands of an aging population at a time of economic recession was considered by the delegates. Raised by the Hannover

and Bield housing association who work with a number of ethnic minority individuals and families, they were keen to clarify the implications of a YES vote in the maintenance and development of essential services.

The theme was raised throughout the discussion. It was acknowledged that the Scottish Government currently uses its power within the reserved areas of governance to implement policies which are more socially just. For example, free prescriptions and transport for elderly. The following analysis was raised however;

- Will these popular policies continue to be affordable in the event of a YES vote?
- In rural areas due to the privatisation of transport the free bus pass is made redundant if there is little to no service on which to use them. In light of this what will the Scottish Government do to mitigate this problem and increase the service provision of privatised public services?

Human Rights / Citizenship and Modern Scotland:

Human Rights and its relationship with society and subsidiary areas of influence on religion and cultural expression was considered throughout the discussion.

A concern was raised that the rhetoric emanating from the current UK government was negative towards Human Rights and indeed has publically considered removing Britain from treaties which we currently adhere too.

A theme which was also raised at the Glasgow consultation sought clarity on the relationship between human rights and religious rights. For example the ability for organised religion which opposes same sex marriage on the grounds that it is incompatible with their religious beliefs to be able to continue to operate that stance within a religious context? This was echoed in the Glasgow event with regards to circumcision and the ability to carry out religious practices independent of potential human rights outcomes incorporated into any future Scottish constitution.

One delegate spoke at length about ***‘what are human rights?’*** Government must make a clear distinction between societal groups who effect change and ensure that it is relevant to individuals and communities.

- (i) Local communities and individuals.
- (ii) Intermediary Organisation/Civil Servants (Scottish Government and Local Authority)
- (iii) Elected members (Scottish Parliament)

A concern was highlighted that policy and legislative decision making processes cannot take the experience of the average and effected citizen into the equation as the ‘decision makers’ are unaware of what the reality is on the ground. Noted by the delegate that the majority of the Asian community are involved in small business retail

at a local level and that legislation which is unaware of the challenges they face as small business owners proves to be highly challenging. The delegate cited anecdotal evidence in the change in societal attitudes;

- (i) 35 years ago – no shutters or CCTV
- (ii) Weekly payments i.e. milk left at door to collect
- (iii) Thief has more right than the victim
- (iv) Human Rights are a framework for the powerful to maintain the status quo

Human Rights issue around freedom of speech and ability to express individual or community identity. Irish community is enforced into a framework of sectarianism underpinned by negative attitudes and miss-perceptions. This results in it being illegal in Scotland to celebrate elements of Irish identity which are perceived to be 'offensive' yet crucially are not illegal in any other UK jurisdiction. Will the Irish community continued to be perceived within a sectarian framework in an independent Scotland?

Economy – Business – Local and National

Economic forecasts from the YES and NO campaigns respectively and independence outcomes point to a 7.5 billion swing between respective campaigns. Who is telling the truth? The majority of ethnic minority communities are in bottom 1% of wage earners, they currently have no assurances and full knowledge of the financial implications for Scotland.

On the day of the consultation the '*Glasgow Herald*' newspaper carried as its front page lead story that in the opinion of UK Business Minister Vince Cable and the UK government a plethora of multi-national companies would remove their business from Scotland in the event of a YES vote. One delegate also noted that this has already been done by 'Standard Life' who had relocated to London and then Hong Kong due to a more equitable financial environment being on offer there for them to proceed with their business. There was a concern that economy drivers would leave Scotland in the event of a YES vote, naturally the question arose as to what the Scottish Government would do to relieve this concern? What plans do the Government have that business and employers stay?

It was noted that in FIFE the main employers are Fife Council, Diageo Drinks Company and Call centres. There is a concern that opportunity access for personal and community development is stifled by a tri-dimensional local jobs market and relies too heavily on three routes of employment.

It was noted by a delegate that FIFE used to be a Coal mining area. The breakdown of this industry brought years of difficulty to the area, in light of this economic stability is a key consideration in the debate and further assurances and plans are needed in the future.

Considerations and Outcomes:

Delegates noted that the White Paper is the current Scottish Governments proposal for government in the event Scotland votes YES and as such is technically an SNP manifesto. With UK government elections due on 7th May 2015 and Scottish Parliament elections due on 5th May 2016 two months after a proposed Independence date then a degree of uncertainty is maintained.

It was universally agreed by delegates that feel they need more information and would welcome a similar document to the White Paper outlining the 'NO' campaigns proposals regardless of the referendums outcome. A general consensus was agreed that the status quo will not prevail following the referendum.

The nature of a future Kirkcaldy event would need to reflect the consensus reached in this regard and allow a platform for both respective campaigns to outline their strategies and potential policies to the local community. This will be considered in the weeks ahead about how to best facilitate an event of this nature by the EM3SN.

The 2nd half of the consultation allowed the delegates to refine the discussion and draft questions to be delivered as part of this report.

- 1) What provisions do the Scottish Government propose to make to protect Scotland's economic drivers at a local and national level?
 - 2) We have seen an increase in foodbanks, poverty and unemployment. How will an Independent Scotland face up to these challenges and how will we be able to afford it?
 - 3) What does Scotland propose to do about welfare reform? i.e. an aging population and less money available?
 - 4) Transport is an issue in rural areas such as Fife – free bus passes are useless if there is a lack of service, trains are very expensive. What will the government do to ensure the mobility of elderly and/or rural populations is not stifled by lack of service or unaffordable costs?
 - 5) There is a wish for increased accountability on all areas of democracy at a local and national level how do the Scottish Government propose to increase transparency and accountability?
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Inverness Consultation – 28/03/2014

On Friday the 28th March, Danny Boyle (BEMIS) and Fiaz Khan (CEMVO) facilitated a white paper consultation in Clava House, Inverness.

The event was well attended with a diverse representation from the Chinese, Nepalese, Indian, Russian, Highland Multi-Cultural Forum and women's advocacy charity.

Similarly to previous events in Glasgow and Kirkcaldy the discussion centred around recurring themes;

- Nationality
- Integration
- Currency
- Welfare
- Education/University Tuition - Employment
- The Economy / Pensions
- Membership of the European Union

Both BEMIS and CEMVO have taken a neutral position in the referendum however the consultation facilitators clarified where possible the content of the white paper in relation to delegates queries.

Nationality/Residency/Status:

Following introductions and setting the scene the first question focussed on the implications of Independence on citizens of Ethnic Minority backgrounds residency status and citizenship. The White Paper is very clear in this respect. Anyone with the right to live and work in Scotland regardless of previous applications processes will have this legal status carried into any potential Scottish State.

In addition, delegates were informed of the message delivered by DFM Nicola Sturgeon at the event in Glasgow that the current Scottish Government in the event of an Independent Scotland and the SNP forming the next government would work to ensure Scotland had a humane and fair immigration/asylum system underpinned by a constitution into which Human Rights obligations would be enshrined. This would include the pledge to close institutions such as Dungavel Detention Centre.

Integration:

Delegates were keen to share their experience of engagement with the broader Scottish population. There were differing experiences within the group with individuals citing both positive and negative examples of broader community engagement. It is with concern that some delegates outlined experience of what they perceive to be a lingering of racism/prejudice and miss-interpretation of ethnic minority communities stifling their ability to fully integrate.

A specific concern focussed on the potential rise of racism/prejudice in the event that an Independent Scotland 'struggles' economically and ethnic minority communities in Scotland are singled out for blame. BEMIS and CEMVO officers jointly articulated that while we do not profess to live in a racial utopia there is a consensus and motivation across Government and civic society to challenge racism and prejudice. That the Equality Act and through this the Public Sector Equality Duties local authorities shared a responsibility in supporting the integration of these communities. A consensus was reached that while these are positive measures more support was needed to encourage positive and successful integration. Both BEMIS, CEMVO and members of the broader community acknowledged their willingness to participate and support any measure drawing on their positive experience and advice.

Currency:

The issue of Currency was discussed in light of the ongoing debate surrounding a 'currency union'. While this area is out with the expertise of BEMIS and CEMVO it was outlined that the white paper supports a currency union, sterling zone and retention of the pound. Delegates were keen to ascertain the feasibility of a currency union particularly if interest rates continued to be set by an unaccountable **'Bank of England'**.

BEMIS/CEMVO outlined that this will be an evolving dynamic of the Independence debate and is a central issue to the Scottish electorate at large. Delegates were encouraged to engage with parliamentarians and the official YES and NO campaigns in reference to currency. Following the consultation and prior to the writing of this summary the currency question evolved again with an unnamed UK minister declaring via the UK national press that a currency union would be in the best interests of all current UK countries. The query with regards Independence while being tied to BOE interest rates will be debated in the months ahead.

Welfare:

Welfare was a subject which evoked strong opinions and some delegates were keen to outline that in general ethnic minority communities are culturally not reliant on welfare support. They work hard, contribute culturally and through taxation and prefer to be mobile, active and participating citizens.

This was universally recognised by attendee's but countered by BEMIS delegate D.Boyle who used the analogy of Immigration to outline that negative stereotypes are usually the focus of attention as opposed to the broader positive or necessary reality.

The welfare state in principle is something which should be supported and societal issues in reference to endemic poverty and reliance on benefits should be tackled with education and opportunity as well as living costs. There was a consensus that while not being opposed to welfare more should be done to encourage and facilitate a return to work as opposed to a reliance on welfare.

This complemented the white paper message of a 'joined up approach' to tackling poverty by channelling resources to encourage a cultural shift in social mobility as opposed to 'firefighting' issues as they arise in relation to associated legislation (i.e the bedroom tax) or personal circumstances.

The scrapping of 'Universal Credit' was queried in reference to Scotland branding itself as a state which 'cares', this did not seem to chime with that message?

The white paper however conveys that while 'Universal Credit' will be scrapped this should not be perceived as a negative approach to welfare. The current Scottish Governments proposals post-Independence are to channel welfare to those most in need incorporating a consensus approach across areas such as welfare, education, health and childcare to alleviate poverty and increase social mobility and opportunity.

Education / University Tuition and Employment:

In relation to education a delegate was concerned about the impact of independence on the Scottish education system. While it was acknowledged that budgets in an Independent Scotland were still to be determined education is already a devolved area of governance. In light of this it is fair to conclude that the education system will still be a key consideration and priority for any future Scottish Government.

Free university tuition to Scottish and European students is the current reality in Scotland. Delegates were keen to query and probe the fairness of this system and its financial feasibility. The historical context was outlined as to why Scotland has found

itself at this juncture and the reasons why students from the rest of the UK are unable to avail of free tuition in Scotland. In some regards Scotland is a victim of its own principles by continuing to maintain free education, however in principle this was seen as a positive benefit. Delegates were however concerned that in the event of an Independent Scotland students from other parts of the UK would now have the same rights as EU students and in light of this Scottish students and institutions would be at a disadvantage.

The white paper proposes to continue the current settings in regard to UK countries, Scottish students will continue to receive free higher education while students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland will be charged fees. The legal ramifications of this in relation to EU membership and the obligation for an Independent Scotland to extend free tuition to member states including the rest of the UK was raised. Similarly to the currency debate, our understanding is that this issue will continue to be debated in the months ahead and that in the event of Independence this would form part of any settlement agreement with the rest of the UK.

The Economy/Pensions:

On the economy concerns were raised with reference to the bureaucratic impact of Independence. That we should heed lessons from other countries in that fragmentation will stifle business opportunities as well as increase costs in terms of regional and international transactions.

There was also a concern, similar to the welfare query about the feasibility of Scotland being able to afford its current pension obligations.

It was recognised that the economy, while being volatile particularly in the immediate aftermath of the 'banking crisis' and the global nature of commerce had indications of a solid potential and would not regress 'over-night'. These sectors include, tourism, arts/culture, hospitality, computing, finance, food and drink and renewable energy.

In relation to pensions, the white paper promises to protect state, private and public sector pensions and to work closely with the UK pension's agency to ensure that regulation is considered jointly between the UK and an Independent Scottish equivalent institution.

European Union Membership:

Delegates were keen to clarify the feasibility of the Scottish membership of the EU ensuring free movement and stability. The White Paper outlines that as Scotland is currently a member of the EU as part of the UK this 'continuity of membership' will be guaranteed in the event of a YES vote and integration negotiated between September 19th and the proposed independence day of 26th March 2016.

Conclusions:

The 'eyes of the world' currently rest on Scotland. There is a huge interest in the Independence referendum and 2014 is an exciting and invigorating time to be living here.

The level of interest and participation by diverse ethnic minority communities across Scotland reflect the trends being set across other electoral dynamics.

As of 03/04/2014 - 4.1 million Scots have registered to vote. There are clear indications that the 'Independence Referendum' will be the foremost political and democratic decision of a generation. Scottish Parliamentary elections between 1999 – 2011 have plateaued at a 53% turnout. The Independence referendum has seen a marked increase in active, participative, democratic, citizenship across Scotland with communities debating and discussing local, national and international issues. Indications are that the Independence referendum will see a voter turnout of between 60 – 80% based upon the 1999 devolution turnout and the continued increase in electoral registration and a peak in the politicisation of the population.

Within this context it is incumbent upon all participants to maintain the respect and aspiration invested in them by the electorate. As the content and conduct of the debate rises and evolves as we draw towards September 18th we firmly advocate that all participants in individual, community or organisational capacities support this ethos of positive participation reflected by a culture of respect in diverse opinion.

The EM3SN believe that regardless of the referendum outcome Scotland is set on a course for further change in the form of an extension of the devolution settlement or full Independence.

In light of this and recognising that on September 19th we will all continue to work together for positive change in Scotland we embrace the debate in the months ahead and will endeavour to reply to this series of consultations by facilitating further engagement with representatives of both the YES and NO campaigns.

03/04/14

