CPG Islamophobia Public Inquiry - EIS submission

September 2019

About the EIS

1. This submission is from the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), Scotland's largest and longest-established teaching union with over 60,000 members working at all levels in all sectors of education. We represent 80% of teachers in Scotland.

2. We have an active member-led Equality Committee, with a Sub-Committee taking forward action on Anti-Racist Issues; and a growing national network of Equality Representatives; we're also active within STUC Black Workers' structures.

3. We have a keen interest in the issues of racial and religious prejudice, as they affect teachers, and as they affect learners, educational communities and society more broadly. We are committed to promoting the welfare of teachers and also sound learning; and take a human rights based approach to these matters; as such, we find anti-Muslim prejudice completely unacceptable, and welcome this public inquiry.

Summary of submission

- We prefer to use the term 'anti-Muslim prejudice' (abbreviated henceforth to AMP) than 'Islamophobia', on the advice of our Muslim members, and because we feel it more accurately describes the problem. However, where other organisations have reported on e.g. the prevalence of Islamophobia, we use that term.
- We perceive AMP as a form of racism as well as of religious intolerance. We do not conflate skin colour and faith, but many people do, and there is evidence of non-Muslims being targeted with anti-Muslim hatred, e.g. Sikhs who wear turbans being misidentified as Muslim and subject to hate speech/hate crimes of an anti-Islamic nature. There is a significant overlap between racist attitudes and anti-Muslim attitudes; and media or political narratives about 'difference' often inflame both racial and anti-Muslim prejudice in tandem. Therefore, our submission comments on evidence of racism as well as religious intolerance.
- We find all forms of prejudice completely unacceptable. We welcome diversity in Scotland and believe that efforts to strengthen community cohesion, and cooperation between people of all faiths and none, is vital as a bulwark against the politics of hate.
- Our view is that anti-Muslim prejudice is highly prevalent in Scotland and is rising.
- We believe that there is good evidence that the media exacerbates AMP, particularly certain branches of print media and certain social media channels.
- We see the impact of AMP as significant.

- We suggest that AMP could be overcome by concerted efforts being made to challenge institutional prejudice; and by working with educational establishments and trade unions.

Current nature and extent of AMP in Scotland

4. We believe that AMP is prevalent in Scotland. There is clear evidence of Muslim communities and individuals being targeted for hate.

5. Several mosques and Islamic centres in the UK have been targeted for hate attacks this year, including Elgin mosque, where vandals painted swastika symbols and comments of a deeply offensive religious and sexual nature. An April 2019 attempted break-in to the Al Baitul Mahmood Mosque in Dundee is being treated as a possible hate crime. There have been other cases in recent years where mosques have been targeted, including a petrol bomb attack on the Edinburgh central mosque in Sept 2016 (the offender had started a fire at the mosque a year earlier); and a 2013 incident during which three people desecrated the Edinburgh central mosque, by draping bacon on door handles and throwing bacon strips inside the building.

6. Amina, the Muslim Women's Resource Centre (MWRC), has found that six in ten Scots Muslim women experienced AMP, and reported in March 2019 'countless' stories of women being physically or verbally attacked. Amina said that 64% of women it spoke to had experienced or witnessed Islamophobia, with 74% of those saying they had been the target of a hate attack. Respondents told of having their hijab pulled off, being spat at, and being told "go back to where you came from" despite being born in Scotland. The majority (57%) said the incident took place in the street or neighbourhood, while just under a quarter (23%) said it happened in the workplace. Nine in ten said no bystanders helped them; and a significant majority of respondents (65%) did not report the hate crime.

7. Scotland has high levels of racist hate crime: racially aggravated crime (crime motivated by prejudice based on ethnicity, nationality, skin colour and other characteristics associated with ethnicity, for example styles of dress, headwear etc) remains the most commonly reported hate crime, with 3,249 charges reported in 2017-18[i]. There were 642 religiously aggravated charges reported in 2017-18; and 18% of religiously aggravated charges in Scotland in 2017/18 were for those targeting Muslims. These figures are indicative of the scale the problem, but it should be borne in mind that many incidents are never reported. For example, Hate Crime Scotland estimates that only 20-50% of racist incidents are reported to the police.

8. EIS research on teachers' and lecturers' experiences of racism and Islamophobia, conducted in 2018, found that a significant majority (71%, or nearly three-quarters) of all respondents (who came from the BME membership of the union) had experienced racism in their capacity as a teacher or lecturer. Manifestations of racism seen most commonly were racist language used by learners (mentioned by over half of respondents) and racist attitudes among learners (mentioned by nearly half);

colleagues showing racist attitudes was the third most common observation. Several respondents shared examples of anti-Muslim comments, e.g. a lecturer who was asked whilst under his desk fixing something if he was praying to Mecca, and told that "once Scotland was independent, me and all my kind would be chucked out of the country"; and a teacher being asked, "is that a kilt you are wearing on your head?" (in reference to a checked hijab).

9. When we consulted with Muslim members in 2017/18 to inform the development of EIS advice on Challenging Anti-Muslim Prejudice[ii], members shared distressing and traumatic experiences of prejudice. Members reported feeling marginalised and unfairly scrutinised, and experiencing or fearing discrimination, saying things like:
   - *"Every time there is an [terrorist] attack brown people get the blame; I have the fear of these attacks but also the added fear of backlash, retaliation; fears for my wee mum who wears the veil; I asked my brothers to shave off their beards. Why do I have to prove that these values are not my values?"* – Muslim woman, secondary school sector
   - *"It exacerbates the feeling that I don't belong here"* – Muslim woman, primary school teacher, on taking leave to celebrate Eid, and no colleagues showing recognition of its importance
   - *"I would advise my own daughter not to wear a hijab to job interviews"* – Muslim man, FE sector
   - *"I've been told, Muslims don't have the right characteristics to be a teacher, or had people say to me, you can't possibly be a teacher, even when I'm wearing my badge. It's taken me 13 years to be just about accepted."* – Muslim man, FE sector

10. Research by the Muslim Women's Association of Edinburgh highlighted that over half of Muslim children surveyed had experienced Islamophobia[iii]. The MWAE reported that from a survey of 100 Muslim children in Edinburgh, nearly half (46%) were worried about going to school after a highly publicised terrorist attack. One pupil said this was *"because everyone relates Islam to bad things like terrorism and killing."*

11. Research on young people's experiences of racism[iv] has highlighted emerging issues such as 'micro-aggressions' (subtle experiences of racism that happen on a daily basis in public spaces) and 'misrecognition' as Muslim based on ethnicity. Many young people in the study were highly positive about diversity in Scotland and valued schools as safe places to study and develop friendships but they also described in different ways how they were made to feel as though they did not belong, on the basis of accent, colour, faith, dress, nationality and ethnicity.

12. Research conducted by Show Racism the Red Card in spring 2017 found that 37% of young people have experienced racism, in a range of forms. Almost 3,000 racist incidents were reported in Scotland's schools between 2011 and 2016, with two thirds of these incidents occurring in primary schools. It is very concerning that the data available is incomplete.

13. A significant minority of the Scottish population hold negative attitudes towards diversity: the Scottish Social Attitudes survey[v] has found that a

third of people in Scotland (33%) said that they would rather live in an area 'where most people are similar to you', and fewer than half (40%) agreed that 'people from outside Britain who come to live in Scotland make the country a better place'. The 2015 survey found that 41% of respondents agreed to some extent that 'Scotland would begin to lose its identity if more Muslims came to live here'.

14. The passing of 'counter-terrorism' legislation which the EIS views as likely to unfairly and disproportionately impact on Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) people, and on Muslims, (e.g. the Prevent duty[vi]) is a further matter of significant concern. We believe this has contributed to rising intolerance, and to prejudicial behaviour.

15. Scotland has low and declining numbers of minority ethnic teachers (only 1.1% of primary teachers and 1.8% of secondary teachers in Scotland come from an ethnic minority background)[vii], suggesting that BME people experience barriers to entering the teaching profession, with the result that schools gain less social, cultural and linguistic capital than other more diverse workplaces. This creates an obstacle to addressing AMP, not least because there are so few Muslim educators who can act as role models, share accurate information about their faith and counter misinformation (although we would stress that the GTCS values and standards for teachers[viii] make it clear that *all* teachers have a duty to embrace equality and value and respect diversity, not solely those who are Muslim). Having a relatively mono-cultural education sector has also created difficulties which a more diverse sector might have addressed sooner, e.g. there is very variable practice in local authorities around granting teachers leave for holy days/festivals; and examination arrangements are not always as sensitive to the needs of pupils fasting for Ramadan as they could be.

16. Anti-Muslim prejudice can sometimes be exposed within majority white communities which would not previously have believed they had a problem with such prejudice. We are aware of one example of a school in a rural area of Scotland, with a very small BME population, some of whose parents reportedly withdrew from an exchange trip with a school abroad because they were not willing to host Muslim children in their homes. This exposes deeply concerning parental/community attitudes; and underlines the importance of tackling anti-Muslim prejudice in every community in Scotland, as a preventative rather than a reactive strategy.

The role of the media

17. We believe that the media in the UK exacerbates AMP. We are deeply concerned by the increasingly hostile and anti-Muslim rhetoric in the media and in political discourse which creates the backdrop to horrific events like those in Christchurch. In the UK one such example was the Conservative Party MP for Uxbridge and South Ruislip, and current Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, using his column in a national newspaper to refer to Muslim women wearing the niqab as "letterboxes" and "bank robbers". When challenged on that language in Parliament recently by Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi MP, the Prime Minister did not apologise.[ix]

18. In our view, there has been a general trend of more prominence being given to racist and extremist views in political discourse, associated with e.g. the Trump administration in the USA, and the 'Brexit' referendum. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has highlighted this issue, saying, "There continues to be considerable intolerant political discourse" which it links to "an increase in xenophobic sentiments". It reports that "Muslims are similarly portrayed in a negative light by certain politicians and as a result of some government policies".[x]

19. There has also been increasingly hostile and anti-Muslim media coverage of particular world events such as the global refugee crisis: the ECRI has raised concerns about some British media outlets, particularly tabloid newspapers, using "offensive, discriminatory and provocative terminology" and says that it considers that "hate speech in some traditional [UK] media continues to be a serious problem." [xi]

20. Social media channels can also be used to spread myths and hate speech and exacerbate prejudice. For example, some online virtual communities, and hate groups use Facebook "to share a violent, Islamophobic and racist narrative which attempts to create a hostile virtual environment". A 2016 study found Muslims being demonised and vilified online, through negative attitudes, discrimination, stereotypes, physical threats and online harassment. [xii]

21. We believe that all countries are inter-connected, and that racism and prejudice can ripple from events overseas, such as the appalling massacre of worshipping Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019; or the decision taken by Austrian MPs in May 2019 to ban the headscarf in primary schools. Events and decisions such as these can embolden racists and bigots, and in a globalised world, where information (and misinformation) spreads quickly on social networks and global news platforms, people with racist and intolerant views are more likely than ever to learn about tactics and approaches used by hate groups (or individuals) in other countries. This creates a context in which AMP can flourish; and underlines the need for responsible reporting.

The impact of AMP on children, young people and families

22. We believe that AMP has a serious impact on children and young people. The research we cited above by MWAE for example shows that many Muslim children feel fearful and distressed either because of what they have experienced or because they fear repercussions from incidents reported in the news which have nothing to do with them.

23. Although beyond the scope of this inquiry, we would also wish to draw attention to the impact of AMP on BME teachers. We are aware through case work, and through consultation with members, of Muslim teachers experiencing marginalisation, racist attitudes and behaviours, and harassment, including from pupils. As reported at paragraph 9 above, our Muslim members experience deep distress and trauma when they encounter prejudice.

The steps to be taken to overcome AMP

24. We believe that AMP can be lessened and ultimately prevented with sufficient political will. After the Stephen Lawrence inquiry,[1] and the 1999 publication of the resulting Macpherson Report, there was a considerable focus on challenging institutional racism across the public sector, including in educational establishments. That focus waned over the years that followed. Tackling institutional prejudice needs to become a priority once more.

25. The education system has an important role to play in tackling AMP but cannot be held to be the only responsible body – it is a part of a society in which media, families, etc have great influence. Children are only in school for part of 190 days per year, spending most of their time with family or other carers. We are wary therefore of any narratives that suggest that educational establishments alone can eradicate religious or racial prejudice. However, we believe that nurseries, schools, colleges and universities can and do play a vital role in challenging prejudice, by promoting a culture of equality and respect, in which all children and young people are able to flourish and no-one is limited by their ethnicity or their faith. These efforts need to be significantly extended.

26. There are steps that all educational establishments can take. More anti-racist education is urgently needed, across the curriculum, and resources should be provided to schools to enable this; in particular resources for professional learning. We are concerned that the level of pedagogical support for anti-racist education has declined in Scotland since Education Scotland was established, replacing Learning and Teaching Scotland; and would ask the CPG to press Education Scotland on how it can better support education which tackles racial and religious prejudice. We would also suggest that the CPG urge the Scottish Government to elaborate on and fully implement the Race Equality Action Plan, which is somewhat vague on how 'equality and intercultural competency training' will be delivered, but which promises action on this area by the end of 2019[xiii].

27. It is also vital that racist and religiously aggravated incidents, including Hate Crimes, are appropriately reported and recorded within educational establishments, to enable better identification and understanding of patterns of incidents, and to inform prevention strategies, which should form part of establishments' broad anti-racist approaches. The CPG could usefully raise this issue with COSLA.

28. We suggest that the development of a programme of work to tackle AMP across Scottish society should start from listening to and learning from Muslims' lived experience, and the experiences of those who have

[1] Stephen Lawrence Inquiry: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-stephen-lawrence-inquiry

experienced such prejudice, even if they are not of the Muslim faith. It should also recognise that the Muslim community is diverse, and that people with different and/or multiple protected characteristics under the Equality Act will experience prejudice differently, e.g. Muslim women who wear hijabs appear to be at greater risk of hate crime; Muslims with disabilities may experience different forms of prejudice.

29. We would argue that for meaningful change to happen, more people in positions of power, who are leaders within decision-making structures, need to acknowledge that they have white privilege; and that systems have institutional bias. The onus needs to shift from individuals raising complaints to system level change (as per the aspirations of the Public Sector Equality Duty). We would suggest that the CPG engage with the forthcoming review of the PSED and share the learning from this inquiry.

30. Trade unions have an important role to play, especially as prejudice can be experienced in the workplace; and as building workers' capacity to promote equality and challenge discrimination is a powerful tool in advancing a more socially just society. We would like to see the development of a comprehensive STUC strategy to challenge anti-Muslim prejudice in workplaces in Scotland. The CPG could press the STUC to expedite this work. The CPG could also usefully press for Trade Union Equality Reps to be granted facility time to carry out their duties.

More information

For more information please contact:

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[i] Hate Crime statistics: https://www.copfs.gov.uk/images/Documents/Statistics/Hate%20Crime%202017-18/Hate%20Crime%20in%20Scotland%202017-18.pdf

[ii] EIS advice: https://www.eis.org.uk/Anti-Racism/ChallengingAntiMuslimPrejudice

[iii] MWAE research: https://www.sacc.org.uk/articles/2017/islamophobia-edinburgh-schools

[iv] University of Edinburgh briefing paper: https://www.ed.ac.uk/education/election-briefings/experiences-of-minority-ethnic

[v] Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2015: Report of Attitudes to Discrimination: http://www.ssa.natcen.ac.uk/read-the-reports/scottish-social-attitudes-2015/attitudes-to-discrimination-positive-action.aspx

[vi] EIS guidance on the Prevent Duty: http://www.eis.org.uk/Equality-Policies/Prevent

[vii] Teacher Census, 2018, Chart 3: https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/teachcenssuppdata/teasup2018

[viii] Professional Standards: http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/FILES/the-standards/standards-for-registration-1212.pdf

[ix] PQ on Islamophobia: https://www.politicshome.com/news/uk/political-parties/conservative-party/boris-johnson/news/106291/watch-sikh-mp-applauded-he

[x] Paras 33-39, Hate Speech in Political Discourse: https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/United_Kingdom/GBR-CbC-V-2016-038-ENG.pdf

[xi] ECRI REPORT ON THE UNITED KINGDOM (fifth monitoring cycle), 4 October 2016: https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/United_Kingdom/GBR-CbC-V-2016-038-ENG.pdf

xii Islamophobia on social media research:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305619150_Islamophobia_on_Social_Media_A_Qualitative_Analysis_of_the_Facebook's_Walls_of_Hate
xiii SG Race Equality Action Plan: https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-race-equality-action-plan-2017-2021-highlight-report/pages/4/