

EIS BME Members' Event: Addressing the Diversity Deficit

BME members put anti-racist education and BME teacher leadership firmly on the agenda



On Saturday 7 May, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) members of the EIS came together for an event to explore approaches to anti-racist education, opportunities for involving BME members in union structures, and issues of leadership as they affect BME teachers.

The context for this event was the continuing trend of woeful under-representation of BME teachers in Scotland's education workforce, including in promoted posts; and the lack of visible, consistent anti-racist education approaches in schools – as a delegate to the STUC Black Workers' Conference 2016 put it, "Anti-racist education has fallen off a cliff."

The education workforce in Scotland is overwhelmingly white. Only 1% of teachers in Scotland come from a BME background. Yet the 2011 census found that 4% of Scotland's population is made up of people from BME backgrounds, and in some cities the figure is much higher - for example, 17% in Glasgow. BME people are also hugely under-represented in promoted posts in the sector; and often rendered invisible in the official government statistics on Headteachers and deputies in Scotland's schools, due to the vanishingly small numbers and concerns about identifying individuals.

The event, held at the STUC, and with participants from across Scotland, involved inputs from the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights, Show Racism the Red Card, and the Scottish College for Educational Leadership. The newly elected STUC

president, Satnam Ner (the first ever Black President of the STUC) also attended, and provided input to a workshop on leadership.

Members heard about and discussed:

- Educational resources that can be used to bolster anti-racist education, such as CRER's new book, "It Wasn't Us: The Truth about Glasgow and Slavery", and the EIS's 'Myths of Immigration' booklets;
- The availability of free workshops on topics such as Islamophobia, Hate Crime, and Refugee Inclusion (provided across Scotland by Show Racism the Red Card and BEMIS);
- The opportunities presented by Black History Month (October), e.g. to discuss the 1919 race riots in Glasgow, the contribution of Indian suffragettes to the UK suffrage movement, and Scotland's role in the slave trade;
- Opportunities to become an EIS Equality Rep or Learning Rep;
- The STUC BME Leadership Programme;
- The SCEL leadership programme and framework.

Throughout the day, the role of union reps, who can lobby for stronger local policies and practices around challenging racism, disseminate educational resources, and keep these issues on the agenda, was a recurring theme. BME members are strongly encouraged to contact their Local

Association or Branch and get involved in the union. Your voices are needed.

The event was ably co-chaired by the President, Margaret Smith, and Equality Committee member Samreen Shah; and closing remarks were offered by Equality Convener Bill Ramsay, and Council member Khadija Mohammed. Members of the Anti-Racist Sub Committee facilitated workshops, which provided an opportunity for members to share their experiences and knowledge.

As for the question of what comes next, we asked members what they would do next as a result of attending, and the answers included, "look into SCEL"; "apply for the SCEL leadership programme"; "read the resources mentioned"; "look into becoming an Equality Rep" and "disseminate information to colleagues." The Anti-Racist Sub Committee will consider a detailed report of the event, and will make recommendations for the future. Any BME members who have ideas about what topics could usefully be explored at any future event are welcome to contact National Officer Jenny Kemp (jkemp@eis.org.uk) with suggestions.

Ultimately, delegates at the event were in agreement that the need for action is urgent. In the interests of social justice, of securing strong and equitable outcomes for all learners, and of creating safe and welcoming workplaces for staff, it is crucial that the teaching workforce reflects the diversity of the population, and that all educational establishments inculcate an environment where racism is simply not tolerated.