The Education and Culture Committee –

Implications for schools, teachers and pupils of the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce

Submission by the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CRER)

Summary

As a Scottish strategic anti-racist organisation, CRER has an interest in education and employment issues where these have the potential for a differential race equality impact. CRER welcomes the focus on tackling inequalities contained in the final report of the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce and subsequent government strategy. Tackling these inequalities is first and foremost a matter of social justice and human rights; additionally, it makes no economic sense for the full range of skills and expertise of a significant part of the population to be lost from the labour market.

Different levels of educational attainment and access to the labour market linked to race and ethnicity have been well documented, and concerted and sustained attempts to tackle these attainment and access gaps are welcome, if overdue. As noted by the Commission and Scottish Government, there is strong evidence that young people from BME communities "encounter significant inequalities within education and employment" – they are more likely to embark on a narrower range of vocation pathways, more likely to experience prejudice and stereotyping and more likely to experience unemployment. We agree that there are no "quick fixes" to inequality in education and youth employment.

While the report and strategy are broadly welcome, we do believe the scope of the strategy is limited and doesn’t address the full range of barriers and inequalities faced by BME people. The focus appears to be on changing attitudes in BME communities rather than the attitudes and prejudices of others. Particular concerns include the following:

- Action to embed equalities throughout education would be welcome, but action plans to broaden educational opportunities and choices must be tailored to specific BME communities;
- Access to training, including Modern Apprenticeships, must be open, transparent and carefully monitored to ensure equality;
- There is a gap in the Commission report and Government strategy regarding how we ensure employers involved in education, training and partnerships with schools also embed equalities best practice.

Increasing options

CRER agrees there is merit in undertaking extensive work to ensure all pupils are aware of and feel able to undertake the broadest range of education and training, and to overcome barriers which limit the choices of BME young people. The Commission report notes that attitudes can be rooted from an early stage so it is essential that equality is embedded throughout curriculum for excellence, including pre-school (recommendation 26).

The Commission report is absolutely right to point out that communication and promotion of vocational training to pupils and parents will require to be tailored to specific communities in

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different parts of the country (recommendation 31) – as the challenges in and faced by each of the different BME communities are often very different from each other. We are unsure if this has been properly reflected in section 3 of the Government strategy, where action plans for different equalities strands appear to be pencilled in for 2016-17. In fact action plans not just for different strands, but for different BME groups will be necessary. CRER’s report “State of the Nation – Education” highlighted some of the key differences in educational attainment between different ethnic groups, and different course and qualification preferences.

More fundamentally, work to change perceptions in BME communities will be undermined if some of the issues that give rise to those perceptions aren’t tackled at the same time, as explained below.

Equal access to vocational opportunities – including modern apprenticeships

Both the Commission report (recommendation 8) and Government strategy advocate increasing pathways to undertake vocational qualifications at school, including the first year of a modern apprenticeship and better quality work experience (recommendation 3).

As the Commission has noted, less than 2% of all Modern Apprenticeship entrants are BME despite making up 6% of Scotland’s young population. CRER has repeatedly raised concerns that modern apprentices are often only recruited by word of mouth, without any open advertisement. This clearly provides a head-start to young people whose families have better networks or connections to those in a position to offer apprenticeships. Fair and open advertising of apprenticeships should be a pre-requisite of employer access to the Modern Apprenticeship scheme. “Consistent concern about the difficulty many young people face in accessing a Modern Apprenticeship” was noted by the Commission, and we agree wholeheartedly that “a national online Modern Apprenticeship application service should be developed in which all employers and prospective apprentices should have the option of participating.” It is essential, as the Commission suggests, that the online Modern Apprenticeship application system should be designed to allow Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to monitor both applications and starts from equalities groups. The strategy currently suggests that by year 3 “it will be easier for young people to find Modern Apprenticeship vacancies through the relaunched My World of Work”. We would welcome clarity that all modern apprenticeships – including those starting at school – will be openly and transparently recruited. Our view is that advertising MA vacancies on My World of Work should be a mandatory requirement, with the exception of where an MA is offered to an existing member of staff.

Similarly, CRER has repeatedly suggested that employers taking part in the MA scheme, and benefitting from government funding as a result, should be required to have in place a strong equal opportunities policy. It is unacceptable that there is no such requirement.

The target in the Government’s strategy to increase the number of apprenticeship starts from minority ethnic communities to equal the population share by 2021 (KPI 9) appears reasonable. However, it is essential that progress against this should be reported on annually (recommendation 32), as well as thoroughly scrutinised.

Employer involvement in education

As well as a direct pathway to apprenticeships from schools, both the Commission report and government strategy suggest a far broader involvement of employers in schools – including partnerships.

The points we make above regarding access to the Modern Apprenticeship scheme apply more generally. Potentially valuable work to embed equality education across Curriculum for Excellence (recommendation 26) would risk being undermined unless we were sure similar standards were being maintained by employers involved in partnerships, training or work experience with schools.
Broadening the range of options BME young people are attracted to will be undermined if their experience of recruitment and training then reinforces some of the reasons for initial scepticism about a particular career choice. Promotion and monitoring of equalities policies and practices of employers engaging in education is essential.

As noted in the Commission’s Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA), “there is a complex range of factors relating to the choices young people are encouraged to take, the impact of the attitudes of adults on these choices and in some cases to the attitudes of employers”. As young people from BME groups told those undertaking the EQIA, there is concern about discrimination among some employers (page 13). The Commission itself noted that while work to broaden horizons and change perceptions of vocational education could make a contribution, additionally “there are deep rooted mindsets which need to be changed.”

This may be true of both public and private employers. We know that just 1.3% of police staff, 1.1% of local authority staff, and 0.85% of fire service staff are BME2 - a significant underrepresentation of the 4% population share. Even in areas with larger ethnic minority populations the underrepresentation remains – for example Glasgow City Council’s BME workforce is 1.9% of the total, despite the BME population of the city amounting to 11.6%. We also know that in 2011/12, while 7.1% of white applicants for public sector posts were appointed, only 4.4% of non-white applicants were successful. For local authorities the figures were even starker: 6.1% V 2.1%.3  This supports DWP-commissioned research carried out in 2009 – which included Scottish employers - that showed a person with a ‘BME name’ had to send an application away 16 times to achieve a successful response compared to the 9 times for someone with a ‘white name’ despite submitting the same application4.

We therefore cannot assume employers involved in education and training are operating to equalities standards. This has not been addressed in the Commission report or indeed the government strategy.

Specific inquiry questions

- if the Wood report were fully implemented, what the likely impact on attainment in schools would be and which pupils would benefit most;
- whether any measures other than those advocated in the report are needed to ensure more young people leave school with “high level vocational qualifications which have strong currency in the labour market”

The Commission recommendations that the relaunched website for Modern Apprenticeships tracks ethnicity of both applicants and successful new starts is important – and also that all recruitment is done openly through the site. Similar monitoring should be considered for other forms of vocational training. We would also argue for monitoring of dropout rates by training providers, as we know from monitoring of higher and further education and exits from public sector employment that rates

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3 “The State of the Nation: Race & Racism in Scotland – Employment”
4 “A test for racial discrimination in recruitment practice in British cities” (Research Report No 607), Department for Work and Pensions (http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/20541/test-for-racial-discrimination.pdf)
for BME groups may be higher. We need to ensure not only that more BME people are recruited – but that they are also able to stay the course.

- whether the report – which includes a section on improving equalities – places enough emphasis on pupils’ socio-economic inequalities and how these could be overcome;

We welcome the specific focus on specific equalities groups, including race. Explaining different participation rates from BME communities purely as an issue of socio-economic inequality would fail to acknowledge the structural racism which BME communities face. Research also shows that some minority ethnic groups do not get the same economic benefit from social mobility\(^5\) and that enhanced educational outcomes do not lead to enhanced labour market outcomes to the same extent as for young white people\(^6\). So a specific strategy for race is essential. Whether or not a general consideration of the effect of socio-economic inequalities should have been a more central concern of the commission or a separate issues is debatable.

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**About CRER**

The Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights works to eliminate racial discrimination and promote racial justice across Scotland. Through capacity building, research and campaigning activities which respond to the needs of communities, our work takes a strategic approach to tackling deep rooted issues of racial inequality. CRER has experience of anti-racist work covering areas such as community engagement and empowerment, research and resource development, practical training and equality mainstreaming support for Public and Voluntary Sector organisations.

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