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Who's a Real Scot? Report
The People Speak

Embracing Multicultural Scotland: The People speak

From May to September 1999, 27 groups comprising 108 grass-roots people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds participated in EMS.

This is what they said.

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Question One:
How would you describe your individual identity?

"My own identity is Indian, that will not change. I am proud of it but in daily life I identify with Scotland."

Most participants gave an initial description of their identity that was based, in some way, on nationality. Those who had come to Scotland later in their lives felt secure in the nationality of their birth, often also stating that they saw Scotland as their home now.

"We will always be Indian, that is very important to me because I have just come here."

On the other hand, those born in this country expressed mixed or dual nationality.

"Chinese British" "Scottish but a Traveller first."

"I feel dual identity, both Scottish and Bangladeshi."

References to religious identity were rarely made with the exception of those participants who were Muslim. In most cases Muslim respondents identified with Scotland, but stated that their religion preceded this in importance for them. It might be noted that a similar order of priority would probably be evident amongst many active Scots Christians.

"My identity is definitely Scottish, Pakistani and Muslim as well. That part is stronger because that is what I do every day. Pakistan is where my parents were born, Scotland is where I was born, but the Muslim part is strongest."

"I would never classify myself as just Scottish. I am a Muslim first."

"People don't just allow you to keep your identity as who you are."

At a deeper level many people felt that their individual identity was inadequately defined by labels or categories. It was often stated that, although certain aspects such as one's ethnicity, or religious beliefs may be at the core, individual identity is a complex, fluid phenomenon that is shaped by both background and experience.

"I am Pakistani but life is a learning process - I will adapt to the place that I am in but I have certain rules that will not change."

The aspects of their identity that were most important to many participants in any given situation were therefore influenced by the context of that situation.

"I am a Malaysian Indian and I live in Scotland, so I carry 3 identities and they change depending on where I am and what I am doing."

Frustration arises where people feel that their identity is defined inappropriately by other people's assumptions.

"Identity is shaped by people's perceptions - I'm seen as Pakistani in Edinburgh and British in Pakistan, therefore I feel myself as Scottish-Asian and neither British nor Pakistani."

A significant number of participants felt that in the predominantly white Scottish society, they were pushed into defining themselves primarily in terms of their colour or country of origin, factors that would not be as immediate to their personal identity by choice.

"I enjoy being a bit of both. I like to mix my dress, I wear both western and Pakistani. It's the same with food and music."

In most cases participants said that they enjoy the diversity of cultural influences that exist within their identity. Some people felt that they could value aspects of other cultures while retaining what was most important from their own. Those who had grown up in Scotland expressed a sense of having rich, interlacing aspects to their identity but this occasionally brought conflict for them .

"I am Scottish with an Indian background. I feel Scottish but due to my colour, home language, and religion I feel part of both countries."

"It is very hard to get a balance. Our parents are scared of us being corrupted by our white friends. It all comes down to religion. It is harder for our parents than it is for us."

Mothers of children born in this country commonly mentioned that their children "believe" or "think" themselves to be Scottish. It was important for them that their children felt linked to and were proud of their ethnic background and a few parents wished that they would follow the culture of their origin rather than Scottish culture. There was clear intergenerational tension and difference on this matter.

Question Two:
What gives you a sense of belonging in Scotland?
What prevents you from having a sense of belonging in Scotland?

"Naturally we identify with Scotland because we have spent all our life here. Our home is here, we have spent time and money setting up our home here."

For those participants who do feel that they belong, this was a simple matter. Most feel a sense of belonging due to having spent a large part, if not all of their life in Scotland. The presence of family, particularly their children, helped some participants feel that they belong in Scotland, and some mentioned the importance of having, and being accepted by white Scottish friends.

"My children feel Scottish so I feel Scottish."

"Friends who are indigenous Scots give a sense of belonging."

Other factors such as having a Scottish accent, knowledge of Scottish culture and valuing the existence of democratic processes were mentioned by a few as contributing to a sense of belonging. Being away from Scotland also gave a feeling of belonging, but the right to believe this was felt to be disregarded by white Scots.

"When I am away from Scotland I feel this is home, but when I come back other people discourage this sense of belonging although I was born here."

"Scottish accent, being away from Scotland."

Discussion of influences that gave a sense of belonging was generally brief. This may have been due to the fact that some people felt their belongingness to be synonymous with their presence and with the life that they had established for themselves. They had therefore not thought more deeply about it.

"We are living here, have properties here."

The richness of discussion of things that prevent a sense of belonging may indicate that, actually, absence of belonging is a more salient aspect of daily life.

"Nothing gives a sense of belonging: ethnicity and parents' origin prevent it."

The majority of respondents talked about experiences of racism and its effects upon their lives.

"I always feel a stranger because they say "Paki go back!". Everything is not comfortable."

In general the feeling was that racism and discrimination were largely due to skin colour.

"Basically it is our appearance that prevents us, or their response to our appearance."

"Having Scottish accents, you can be ordering something on the phone and when you give your name you can hear it in their voice, you realise that they thought they were talking to a white person."

"If you speak a South Asian language they think that you can't speak English, but European languages are accepted as a skill."

Some resentment was demonstrated regarding the perceived ease with which white immigrants to Scotland are accepted. It was suggested that European immigrants are respected in a way that black incomers are not. Language was felt to be an indicator of this and some stated that while their children were considered by their teachers to be disadvantaged if their first language was not English, a European language was valued in the same situation.

"The seat beside me is always the last taken. It is because we are coloured immigrants. If we were white we would be accepted."

The experiences of Scottish Travellers also show the discrimination that they suffer.

"We're treated as second class citizens, not treated fairly. This is our country."

"Racism makes us feel bad and insecure. It causes problems for the kids who feel worse as they feel they are Scottish."

There was concern from some minority ethnic mothers that their children, who had been born in Scotland, would suffer more from racism's damage. One mother stated that she kept her children separate from white children in an attempt to protect them both from racism and from what she saw as an opposing culture.

"When the children feel discriminated I feel sad. I have some origin in India and can fall back on that but my

children don't have that."

"They can't accept that we can be Scottish but that we wear Asian clothes because we are proud of our Asian identity."

Young people often said that their dual identity, of which they are proud, is not always recognised by white Scots. Many felt that their Scottish identity was not accepted.

"Being born and growing up in Scotland give a sense of belonging but being Chinese prevents it."

It may be that the reported lack of awareness within the general population about other cultures is contributory to this. The ability to openly share your beliefs and lifestyle with others could certainly contribute to a sense of belonging.

"I don't see myself as Scottish although I have lived here all my life - the culture does not include me."

Participants found it difficult to belong when they encountered restrictions on practising their cultural and religious beliefs. They stated that the underlying lack of understanding of cultural and religious differences that they experienced was also a barrier.

"They don't know anything about us, they only know Scotland. We have to know everything."

"They like our food but they don't like us."

Many participants felt that their contribution to Scotland was completely disregarded by society.

Some mentioned the contribution their businesses made to the economy, while others discussed the feeling that aspects of their culture, such as food, had been favoured by white Scots without recognition or value for the people to whom the culture belongs.

"They ruled us for 200 years. We are here just working hard, contributing to the economy, not ruling and they still can't accept us."

Question Three:
Imagine that it is now the year 2020 and Scotland has become a truly multicultural society. What has changed and how is it now truly multicultural?

"Black people are integrated at work, black and white together. There are no black organisations, nor white organisations - just all working together."

Equal opportunities in both education and employment were strongly linked with visions of a multicultural society. It was felt that in such a society, not only would black and ethnic minority people have equal access to employment, but they would also be equally likely to reach high and influential positions.

"The head of the Scottish Parliament is black and female!"

Education was similarly envisioned as being open and supportive to all in a multicultural Scotland.

"There is nothing holding my daughter back. When I was at school they just assumed that I would get married,

not go on. I want her to go as far as she can and do whatever she wants- be something."

"In educational institutions equal respect is given to all and all get equal levels of education."

"More English classes."

"People are treated as individuals - it is not where you come from, or who you are but what you are made up of."

Some felt that a multicultural Scotland was simply inconceivable. This was linked to the feeling that racism is to do with colour and that as a result there can never be a place for people who are not white in Scotland.

"It is a dream. I don't think that we can reach multiculturalism. The colour of our skin will remain. One can mingle if physical features are the same. We can not even if we want to."

Others were more positive.

"We will be celebrating brownness."

"Educational system teaches tolerance and erodes ignorance of cultural diversity - compulsory."

The majority of participants said that in a society where all cultures were valued and respected there would be emphasis put on learning about, and understanding the diversity that exists within the society.

"Compulsory time spent at school learning about different cultures, even if there are no children of that culture at the school."

In having their differences understood, people looked forward to being accepted regardless of diverse and varied identities.

"Tolerance is a word that has to go - it has been replaced by acceptance."

"Our identity would be a positive point, not seen as a hindrance by others as it is now."

"Scottish people recognise people born in Scotland as Scottish - not having to justify being Scottish."

"Different identities are accepted. The successful Asians don't have to give up their culture as they seem to now."

Question Four:

What should the Scottish Parliament do to work with you to achieve this vision?

"Implement the Equal Opportunity laws that already exist"

Participants stated that Parliament can make significant steps towards achieving equality for black and minority ethnic people simply by implementing existing legislation, such as the Race Relations Act, 1976. The need for effective action on the 70 recommendations made by the MacPherson Report was also raised.

"Right from the beginning schools should build confidence in ethnic minorities for better employment."

Education and employment in particular were highlighted as key areas in which improvements are required in

terms of equality for black people. It was felt that black and ethnic minority children are not supported in their education to the same degree as white Scottish children.

"More encouragement for us from school to go into politics or in fact any walk of life. Need to also target the parents."

It is clear that better access to education is one way in which also to improve employment - a further area of life in Scotland to which participants stated they do not have equal access.

"There should be coding for employment because the names put employers off."

As one group responded, the Scottish Parliament must *"accept that we live in a society with institutionalised racism."*

Many groups felt that more radical measures must be implemented to ensure that racial prejudice within this society cannot be supported.

"Review the education system, exams and interviews. Accept it is a white middle class system."

In targeting equal opportunities for black people, many felt that the Scottish Parliament could make progress in ensuring that the imbalance of representation, not only within the Parliament but society as a whole, is redressed.

"Have ethnic minority members to be able to move up to [becoming] decision makers."

"*Get rid of the view that 'British' means white.*"

The overwhelming majority of participants indicated that for them, Scotland is home. Many, particularly those born in Scotland, want to be accepted as Scots whilst retaining other cultural or religious identities. Participants indicated that respect for their dual identities will be achieved when the Scottish Parliament ensures that tackling racism has priority on the political agenda.

A greater understanding and acceptance by all for diverse cultures was felt to be central to overcoming racism and embracing multiculturalism. Although the need for changes in media representation were mentioned, formal education and training were considered to be the priorities.

"Education at all levels of all sectors about awareness of different cultures that gives an understanding, which actually changes their feelings of superiority."

"*Confidence in the Scottish Parliament will increase when there is action and not just words.*"

Many participants expressed their frustration at the number of times they had been consulted for research into the needs of minority communities with no apparent change or developments resulting. Some expressed resignation: the new Parliament would be no different. However, many directed a clear message to the Parliament:

"There have to be visible signs of change!"

"Stop research that is just filed away - work at the information from research."

"*All communities should be supported, there should be black MSPs but they should not be just for black people. We should not be stereotyped, ghettoised. Not black for black.*"

Concern was expressed that black politicians could be seen only as politicians for black people.

"Deal with racism at Parliament level; there should be more opportunites for black people."

A fully integrated parliament was envisioned by participants. Many felt that if their voices were heard and if present systems are changed, then future culturally aware MSPs, representing the diversity within Scotland's population, will be more sensitive to and supportive of the needs of all their constituents.

"See the Parliament as parents to the children. If MSPs are representative of different cultures and languages then automatically other organisations will follow."

"Listen to our needs and respond - seek advice. Invite members of the community to meetings to discuss issues."

A number of participants pointed to the wealth of skills, knowledge and experience existing within black and ethnic minority communities and agencies. It was felt that the newly inaugurated Scottish Parliament lacks MSPs from minority groups and that very few of the present political representatives have a record for challenging racism. It was suggested that Parliament should therefore value the contribution that can be made by individuals and organisations within the community, and that their work should be supported.

"Empower black and ethnic minority agencies and communities, co-ordinate minority interests."

The need to recognise gender sensitivities and roles was remarked upon, for example, men not presuming to shake the hands of Muslim women. Women have a high level of involvement in many community groups.

"The Scottish Parliament should talk to mums because fathers are too busy."

[Who's a Real Scot?] *Reflections from the CHE*