

PE1813/A + PE1814/A

Scottish Government submission of 14 August 2020

This letter covers two petitions lodged on the same subject: the inclusion of the history of black and minority ethnic people in the taught school curriculum

- PE1813 – Eunice Olumide – which has collected up to and including 5 August 2020 - 3,330 signatures.
- PE1814 - Tobe Amamize : which has collected up to and including 5 August 2020 - 3,443 signatures on change.org

We have received many individual pieces of correspondence from individuals asking that more is done to ensure that social inequality, racism and black history are covered in the curriculum.

The Scottish Government stands in solidarity with the world-wide anti-racism movement. We agree that education plays a crucial role in teaching our young people about Scotland's past and the importance of tolerance and anti-racism in Scotland's present.

Mr John Swinney, MSP, Deputy First Minister Cabinet Secretary for Education issued a public statement on 14 July setting out the Scottish Government's position on these issues and this can be accessed at:

<https://blogs.gov.scot/education/2020/07/14/black-history-in-scotlands-curriculum/>

It may be helpful if I expand on some details and explain what we are doing to tackle the concerns raised in the correspondence we have received and in these petitions.

As the Deputy First Minister explains, Scotland's curriculum is not prescriptive. It provides teachers with a flexible framework through the Experiences and Outcomes and benchmarks which provide a broad framework for schools to develop school level curricula and courses of learning. We consider that this framework already provides opportunities for young people to learn about all aspects of history, heritage and culture of Scotland, including the role that Scotland played in the slave trade – both as part of the broad general education and as part of courses at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher level.

More broadly, Curriculum for Excellence provides a positive context for schools to incorporate these issues into their curriculum and the wider ethos and life of the school because it is underpinned by the values of wisdom, justice, compassion, integrity and respect for human rights and because of the focus on global citizenship as a theme across all learning and the life of a school.

Furthermore, as a condition of their registration to teach, all teachers in Scotland must put respect for social and cultural diversity at the heart of what they do and engage learners in real world issues and help them, in turn, to embrace equality and social justice.

Whilst we are clear that there is a strong basis for responsible and respectful teaching of Black history and human rights across schools in Scotland, we are also clear this is not always the experience for our pupils. We recognise that teachers and pupils need the skills and resources to deliver and access that learning.

To support schools to make diverse choices about how they approach the curriculum, Education Scotland officials are in the process of working to exemplify how race equality can be addressed through whole school approaches which seek to build and champion diversity throughout all aspects of the ethos and life of the school, as well as across all curricular areas. An external reference group, including BEMIS and CRER, are informing the work and a race equality in education resource for practitioners is nearly complete, due for launch in September. The initial focus is on curriculum mapping and signposting resources but the next phase will look at how work with Community Learning and Development and with parents and families can support whole school approaches to promoting race equality.

As part of this wider work, Education Scotland have reviewed the social studies Experiences and Outcomes and benchmarks. They confirm that these provide opportunities for teaching and learning about black history and about race equality in Scotland today. To highlight these opportunities, they have developed a quick reference guide to key resources for practitioners to support investigations into Scotland's Black history and teaching about Minority Ethnic heritage culture as well as the slave trade and Scotland's role in it. Further resources will be included within this as they are developed and identified. These resources will help teachers to plan and provide Black history in schools in ways that reflect their learners' needs and local contexts. The resources can be accessed at:

<https://wakelet.com/wake/ikmX1k5YvcHGhZo3cDUQa>

Education Scotland also offers professional learning opportunities to teachers and school leaders on race equality and diversity in collaboration with Khadija Mohammed, from University of West of Scotland and chair of SAMEE (Scottish Association of Minority Ethnic Educators).

In addition, Education Scotland's Improving Gender Balance and Equalities officers are working with schools and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings to highlight practical ways to address gender bias, unconscious bias and stereotyping to tackle inequity in learning. While this has been initially focused on gender, the support and resources will also be applicable in allowing practitioners to understand wider bias such as race, poverty and disability.

As set out in the Deputy First Minister's blog, he will meet stakeholders in Scotland to identify what further steps can be taken. In the meantime, officials are already taking forward discussions around engagement with a range of relevant stakeholders to explore the issues in more detail, highlight the above work that is already underway and understand where there may be key opportunities for change.

Conclusion

I hope this provides reassurance that we recognise the fundamental importance of the issues raised by petitioners, and we are working to ensure issues around social inequality, racism and Black history are properly addressed within the curriculum and wider school life so that the diversity of our society is recognised and reflected within our education system overall.

I would be happy to update the Committee on progress with our discussions with stakeholders.