TACKLING ISLAMOPHOBIA IN SCOTTISH SCHOOLS

A SACC Briefing

Contents

Introduction

A variety of data indicates that anti-Muslim racism is commonplace in the UK and is growing. It is reflected in hate crime, unlawful discrimination, discriminatory and hostile social attitudes and institutional racism.

The number of race-related hate crimes recorded by police in England and Wales has increased sharply since 2011/12, with 62,685 crimes recorded in 2016/17[1]. The much smaller number of religion-related hate crimes has risen even more sharply, with 5,949 crimes recorded in 2016/17.

In Scotland the number of race-related hate crimes has fallen over the same period, with a total of 3,349 such crimes reported by police to the Procurator Fiscal in 2016/17[2]. The number of religion-related hate crimes in Scotland has remained fairly static if offences under the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications Act are excluded, with 673 such crimes reported in 2016/17.

It appears that race and religion-related hate crimes taken together are roughly half as a prevalent, in proportion to the population, in Scotland as they are in England and Wales. But they are much more prevalent in proportion to Scotland's small black and minority ethnic population. So the risk, amongst BME people, of falling victim to a race-related hate crime appears to be substantially higher in Scotland than in England and Wales. On the other hand, it appears that these kinds of hate crime are on a downward trend in contrast to the upward trend in England and Wales.

The figures do not by themselves reveal the extent of anti-Muslim hate crime. Police Scotland do not record anti-Muslim crime as a specific category. A Scottish Government analysis of religiously-aggravated offences, based on data from the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), found that in 2016/17 there were 113 charges where conduct was derogatory towards Islam. The figure rose from 80 in 2012/13 to a peak of 134 in 2015/16. But religiously-aggravated offences do not necessarily include all (or even most) of the offences that might reasonably be categorised as anti-Muslim or Islamophobic.

The figures should in any case be treated with great caution. The Scottish Government's Independent Advisory Group on Hate Crime, Prejudice and Community Cohesion said in 2016:

> *"While official data on reported incidents of hate crime in Scotland establish the existence of a significant problem, it remains difficult to analyse reliable trends. It is widely acknowledged that reporting issues (both underreporting and uncertainty and inconsistency in reporting practices) significantly affect overall figures."*

Even if it is the case that people in Scotland are less likely to commit race and religion related hate crimes than people in England and Wales, and even if the apparent downward trend is taken at face value, this needs to be set against data indicating that hostile attitudes towards Muslims are widespread across the UK, including Scotland.

A 2014 UK-wide survey of Muslim experiences by the Islamic Human Rights Commission[3] found that 56% of respondents had experienced verbal abuse and 17.8% of respondents had experienced physical abuse. The comparable figures in 2010 were 31.9% and 13.9%. 35.8% of respondents in the 2014 survey said they experienced discrimination in a school or educational setting.

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1   *Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2016/17 Statistical Bulletin 17/17,* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/652136/hate-crime-1617-hosb1717.pdf

2   *Hate Crime in Scotland 2016/17,* http://www.copfs.gov.uk/images/Documents/Equality_Diversity/Hate%20Crimes/Hate%20Crime%20in%20Scotland%202016-17.pdf

3   *S. R. Ameli & A. Merali, Environment of Hate: The New Normal for Muslims in the UK. (Wembley, Islamic Human Rights Commission, 2015).*

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A 2017 survey by Chatham House spanning 10 EU countries found that 47% of people in the UK agreed with the statement "all further migration from mainly Muslim countries should be stopped". Support for the statement was even higher in every one of the other 9 EU surveyed countries except for Spain.

The Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2015 found that 41% of respondents agreed to some extent with the statement: "Scotland would begin to lose its identity if more Muslims came to live in Scotland." 34% agreed to some extent with the statement "Scotland would begin to lose its identity if more black and Asian people came to live in Scotland." The question focussed on Scotland's identity, so it cannot be said with certainty that these respondents were hostile to Muslim, Black or Asian immigration, or to people of those backgrounds already living in Scotland. But their responses seem indicative of an outlook unsupportive of Muslims and other minorities.

Samena Dean's survey in 2016 of Muslim school children in Edinburgh[4] found that 55% of high school respondents and 53% of primary school respondents had encountered verbal Islamophobia. 15% of high school respondents and 26% of primary school respondents had encountered physical Islamophobia. 57% of children who reported an incident to a teacher experienced a negative outcome. This is nothing less than institutional Islamophobia. The survey was limited to Edinburgh, but it seems very likely indeed that problems of a broadly similar nature would be found elsewhere.

Islamophobia clearly does not stop at the school gates. Schools, and the Scottish Government, have a duty to ensure not only that Muslim children are safe at school, but also that educational opportunities are equally available to everyone, whatever their race or religion. Schools are uniquely well-placed to shape social attitudes and community relations in tomorrow's Scotland. It is an opportunity they cannot afford to miss.

Islamophobia has assisted and driven the growth of other forms of xenophobia that are now being felt across the UK by EU citizens threatened by Brexit. It has paved Donald Trump's path to the White House. Across Europe it is fuelling the growth of far-right parties that, once empowered, threaten Jews, LGBT people and disabled people.

It is difficult to imagine any other area of policy where failure to act, and act wisely, will have more serious political consequences.

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4   *Samena Dean, Islamophobia in Edinburgh Schools, 2017, http://www.sacc.org.uk/iphobia*

Defining Islamophobia

"Islamophobia is a concept that emerges precisely to do the work that categories like racism were not doing. It names something that needs to be named." - Salman Sayyid[1]

The term "Islamophobia" is widely used, but its meaning and significance are subject to debate. It is used by Muslims because it provides a shorthand that represents their experiences. To be useful, a definition should help people unfamiliar with the term to understand those who use it. It should not unduly constrain the breadth and depth of people's experience of anti-Muslim hostility. Insofar as it categorises experience, it should do so in a way it enriches our understanding and helps to dismantle prejudice and destructive power relations. It should be succinct enough to be quoted within discussions of Islamophobia. Such a definition will not necessarily be one that could or should be used in law.

Our approach is to seek a definition that encapsulates Muslim experiences of hostility and prejudice and reflects the nature of Islamophobia as a social phenomenon rooted in history and shaped by contemporary politics.

The term came into wide use following the publication by the Runnymede Trust in 1997 of their report "Islamophobia: A Challenge For Us All". The report stated:

> *"In recent years a new word has gained currency... The word is 'Islamophobia'. It was coined in the late 1980s, its first known use in print being in February 1991, in a periodical in the United States. The word is not ideal, but is recognisably similar to 'xenophobia' and 'europhobia', and is a useful shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam - and, therefore, to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims. Such dread and dislike have existed in western countries and cultures for several centuries. In the last twenty years, however, the dislike has become more explicit, more extreme and more dangerous. It is an ingredient of all sections of our media, and is prevalent in all sections of our society."*

The report attracted hostile (and arguably Islamophobic) criticism from the outset. It also attracted constructive criticism. One aspect of this centred on the use of the words "dread" and "fear". They arise from a literal reliance on the etymology of "Islamophobia" but they carry a problematic implication. Islamophobia is arguably a tactic to assert dominance over Muslim minorities, and is not necessarily driven by sincerely-felt fear.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) has adopted a concise definition that avoids attributing Islamophobia to fear:

> *"Islamophobia is closed-minded prejudice against or hatred of Islam and Muslims. An Islamophobe is an individual who holds a closed-minded view of Islam and promotes prejudice against or hatred of Muslims."*

Another criticism of both the Runnymede and CAIR definitions is that they make no reference to racism.

The treatment of racism throughout the 75 pages of the Runnymede report is rather perfunctory. The chapter that explores the nature of anti-Muslim prejudice devotes a good deal of space to discussing "closed" and "open" views of Islam. It states "Islamophobia in Britain is often mixed with racism" and then adds "a closed view of Islam has the effect of justifying such racism". The choice of words is perhaps a careless one, and might be better understood as meaning that a closed view of Islam reinforces racism.

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1   *Salman Sayyid, A measure of Islamophobia. Islamophobia Studies Journal, Vol 2, Number 1, Spring 2014,*

Defining Islamophobia

But the sparcity of explicit references to race throughout the report cannot just be carelessness. Much of the report amounts to a discussion of processes of racialisation that are not described as such. The discussion was ground-breaking at the time, but it cries out in vain for the process to be named.

The report was published at a time when there were suggestions that Britain was close to becoming a post-racial society. It should be obvious now, even if it wasn't so at the time, that this is neither an accurate picture of society nor one that is likely to help the fight against racism.

> *"I have argued that it is important to clarify the conceptual haze surrounding Islamophobia so as to better understand what kind of ameliorative measures can be taken. To this end, I have suggested that it is important to understand Islamophobia as belonging to the family of racism."*
> - Salman Sayyid[2]

> *"In sum, Islamophobia as a form of racism against Muslim people is not only manifested in the labor market, education, public sphere, global war against terrorism or the global economy, but also in the epistemological battleground about the definition of the priorities in the world today."*
> - Ramón Grosfoguel and Eic Mielants[3]

Saied Reza Ameli, Arzu Merali and others have developed the domination hate model of intercultural relations[4] as a tool for understanding how hate environments like the environment experience by Muslims are created. Racialisation is presented as arising through overlapping structural phenonena. Looked at in this way there is no dichotomy between racial and religious prejudice.

To deal adequately with Islamophobia in Scotland, the phenomenon needs to be publicly named and acknowledged. The best way to do this would be for the Scottish Government to use the term in its own policies and to adopt a definition of the term. It is important that any definition contextualises Islamophobia as "belonging to the family of racism". Failure to do so will promote the misleading idea that Islamophobia is just another form of religious prejudice and can be understood and tackled on that basis alone. It cannot.

As a starting point for discussion, we offer the following concise working definition, borrowing from the CAIR definition as well as the Runnymede report and the work of Sayyid, Grosfoguel, Ameli, Merali and others:

> **"Islamophobia is a form of anti-Muslim racism, often characterised by a closed-minded prejudice against or hatred of Islam and Muslims."**

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2   Salman Sayyid, A measure of Islamophobia. Islamophobia Studies Journal, Vol 2, Number 1, Spring 2014,

3   Grosfoguel, Ramón and Mielants, Eric (2006) "The Long-Durée Entanglement Between Islamophobia and Racism in the Modern/Colonial Capitalist/Patriarchal World-System: An Introduction," Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge: Vol. 5 : Iss. 1

4   For example, see S. R. Ameli & A. Merali, Environment of Hate: The New Normal for Muslims in the UK. (Wembley, Islamic Human Rights Commission, 2015).

Goals

Our goal is to eradicate Islamophobia in Scottish schools. This is unlikely to be achieved as long as there are significant levels of Islamophobia in Scottish society. Accordingly, we propose two intermediate goals:

- **Schools are pro-active in tackling Islamophobia so that instead of reflecting the level of Islamophobia in wider society, schools are in the lead in reducing it.**

- **Virtually all students or staff who experience specific Islamophobic incidents feel well supported by their school and feel that their problem has either been resolved or very substantially ameliorated.**

These are modest but important goals and we see no reason why they could not be achieved, or very largely achieved, in a year.
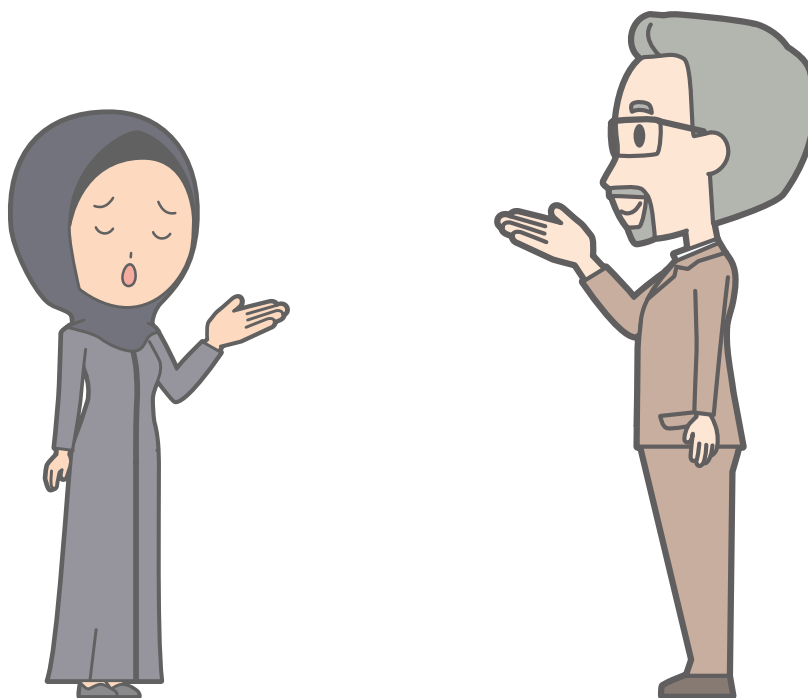
Our SUBMISSION to the EQUALITIES & HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE June 2017

Introduction

Written submission from SACC to the Scottish Parliament's Equalities and Human Rights Committee (EHRiC) for its Inquiry into Bullying and Harassment of Children and Young People in Schools.
8 June 2017[1].

SACC was founded in 2003 to campaign against human rights abuses carried out in the name of the "war on terror", with a particular focus on unjust anti-terrorism legislation and other related legislation, and on monitoring any discriminatory effect it has on minority communities. Muslims have overwhelmingly been the target of this legislation, so we have a special interest in Islamophobia manifested through, or directly or indirectly triggered by, this legislation.

The passage of time has consolidated the climate of Islamophobia and racism created by the "war on terror". Other political developments, including Brexit, have tended to reinforce that climate. This has led to our increasing engagement with Islamophobia as a wider social and political issue, whether or not it is straightforwardly related to legislation.

SACC and the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) have jointly organised successful UK Islamophobia conferences each December since 2014. The 2014 conference was held in London. The 2015 and 2016 conferences were split between London and Edinburgh.

We also have a strong interest in tackling other forms of racism besides Islamophobia.

In October and November 2016 Samena Dean, as a personal initiative, carried out a survey into experiences of Islamophobia at school amongst Muslim children in Edinburgh. SACC subsequently assisted her in taking this work forward. Following a series of in-depth discussions of her findings, this culminated in our publication of an 18-page booklet, *Islamophobia in Edinburgh Schools*, on 2 June 2017. While the work remains the intellectual property of Samena Dean, it is supported and endorsed by SACC. The result is that we now have data to illuminate an issue that we have long been aware of and concerned about.

We believe that *Islamophobia in Edinburgh Schools* provides important new data in an area where data is scarce and bears strongly upon the first two of the questions posed in the scoping session of this inquiry, namely:

1. The nature and extent of prejudice and bullying in schools.

2. How schools respond to bullying and how are they supported in that role.

The third question posed in the scoping session was:

3. What needs to change to ensure schools can deal with cases of bullying and promote inclusivity in schools.

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1   *Our submission to the EHRiC was originally published in a different format as a stand-alone document. It was included in its original format in the public papers for the 16th EHRiC Meeting* http://www.parliament.scot/S5_Equal_Opps/General%20Documents/20170615_16th_EHRiC_Meeting_-_Public_Papers.pdf

Introduction

In relation to all of these questions, but particularly to questions 2 and 3, it is important to recognise that the data is derived exclusively from the perceptions of Muslim school students, and not from the perceptions of teachers.

Islamophobia in Edinburgh Schools avoids detailed recommendations (**What Needs to Change**) as we felt that this would require more and wider discussion than fell within the scope of preparing the booklet. However, in her concluding remarks for the booklet and in her presentation at the booklet's launch Samena Dean has made some suggestions as to the way forward. SACC supports these suggestions and they are outlined in this submission. We are currently initiating a process of discussion and consultation to develop our view on this. Our submission reflects our approach and we hope that it will be of assistance to the Committee.

The report deals with Edinburgh. It cannot be assumed that quantitatively similar results would be obtained in other parts of Scotland, especially in areas with a markedly different demography. But we think it very likely indeed that problems of a broadly similar nature would be found elsewhere. We believe that the report provides a useful basis for addressing this issue across Scotland.

We expect that non-Muslim children perceived as Muslim will also be negatively impacted. However, Islamophobia in Edinburgh Schools looked exclusively at the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim children

We do not think that the impact on non-Muslims perceived as Muslim can be reliably inferred from it, and we therefore do not deal with that issue in our submission.

We welcome the inquiry into bullying and harassment of children and young people in schools and we are grateful for the opportunity to submit our evidence to it. We think that the issues raised by Islamophobia in Edinburgh Schools need to be reflected in Scotland's anti-bullying strategy but we do not think they can be adequately dealt with entirely within that strategy.

Islamophobia in Edinburgh Schools – Summary of Findings

Islamophobia in Edinburgh Schools describes findings obtained from interviews with 100 students from years p5 to s6 attending primary and secondary schools across Edinburgh. The interviews were conducted at after-school Islamic Studies groups and Muslim youth groups.

- **55%** of high school respondents said that they had encountered verbal Islamophobia, and **35%** had experienced it personally. **53%** of primary school respondents said that they had encountered verbal Islamophobia and **29%** had experienced it themselves. Examples of verbal Islamophobia included being called a "terrorist", "bomber", "ISIS", "suicide squad", "al Qaeda", making fun of God, making fun of Allah, being asked if they had a gun under their scarf.

- **15%** of high school respondents said they had encountered physical Islamophobia, and **6%** had experienced it personally. **26%** of primary school respondents said that they had encountered physical Islamophobia, and **14%** had experienced it personally. Examples of physical Islamophobia included being punched, being kicked, being pushed and having their hijabs pulled off.

- **59%** of respondents said that they would tell their parents if they experienced Islamophobia at school, but only **33%** said that they would tell a teacher. The most frequent explanations given by those who would not tell a teacher included: "don't help at all", "they wouldn't take it seriously", "they may not understand what we are going through" and "they may not know much about Islam".

- **14%** of respondents said that they had in fact told a teacher about an experience of Islamophobia. The respondents gave free-form answers about the outcome which Dean categorised as positive or negative. She considered **43%** of outcomes to be positive and **57%** to be negative. In categorising the outcomes, Dean counted an action undertaken by a teacher as positive, even if the respondent felt the outcome was less than fully satisfactory.

Respondents were asked how they felt when Islam or terrorism were talked about in class. Dean categorised their response as positive or negative.

- **57%** of the children felt positive about Islam being discussed in class. They felt proud of their religion, Dean said, and happy that people were talking about it. **30%** felt negatively about it, and felt awkward and uncomfortable.

- **17%** gave responses categorised as positive to terrorism being discussed. They felt OK, or didn't feel anything about it. **65%** felt negatively about the discussion. Dean said that they felt scared and worried, or that "something was going to happen to them" after they left the class.

- **46%** of respondents said they were worried about going to school after a terrorist attack. **8%** said that they didn't go to school. **15%** said that their school had taken special measures in this situation.

- **21%** of the children said that, apart from these exceptional situations after a terrorist attack, they were afraid of going to school just because they were Muslim. They said, for example, that they were scared of abuse and getting attacked, or of what people might think of them for wearing a hijab.

We have provided the full report to the inquiry as a separate file.

What is Bullying?

There are a variety of definitions of bullying. We believe the following definition used by the EIS to be a useful one and it underpins our understanding of bullying for the purposes of this submission:

> *"Persistent, offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious, or insulting behaviour, abuse of power, or unfair penal sanctions which make the recipient feel upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable, which undermines their self-confidence and which may cause them to suffer stress."*

For reasons of confidentiality, the research for Islamophobia in Edinburgh Schools did not attempt to gather full details of the background to the children's responses. It seems self-evident that a high proportion of the negative experiences recorded would fall within this definition. It should perhaps not be assumed that all would do so. But we think it is clear that all would be harmful both to the child directly affected and to the culture within the school and would impact negatively on inclusivity.

We believe that bullying that arises from Islamophobia and racism has a particularly severe impact and we strongly support the following statement from the submission by CRER (November 2016) to the scoping session of this inquiry, on the understanding that the term "racism" is taken to include Islamophobia (see the following section of this submission, headed What is Islamophobia?):

> *"It has also been established that the impact of racist incidents and bullying on children and young people is different from the impact of other forms of bullying. Racism is experienced not just as a personal attack on a young person, but as something deeper which undermines and degrades their family, their community and their culture."*

The comments from children quoted in Islamophobia in Edinburgh Schools give a powerful illustration of this.

Beyond the added impact that an incident has on a child because of the child's identification with their community, there is a further impact on the family and community who must deal with an upset child that they may find themselves unable to help effectively for reasons connected with their own identity. And beyond that lies the impact the incident may have in normalising Islamophobic views and conduct within the majority community. Racist and Islamophobic incidents are always likely to have a strong collective dimension.

For these reasons we think it is very important that the special significance of prejudice-based bullying should be recognised in any anti-bullying strategy, and that Islamophobia-based bullying should be recognised within that framework. We also think that it is important that prejudice-based bullying is clearly defined. We are not persuaded that there is any benefit to extending the concept of prejudice-based bullying beyond the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act, and are mindful that doing so risks diluting the concept and deflecting attention from the special impact that prejudice-based bullying has, both on the individual immediately affected and on the wider community.

What is Islamophobia?

The significance and implications of the term "Islamophobia" have been the subject of wide discussion since the term was popularised by the Runnymede Trust in 1997. A succinct and useful definition is given by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR):

> *"Islamophobia is closed-minded prejudice against or hatred of Islam and Muslims. An Islamophobe is an individual who holds a closed-minded view of Islam and promotes prejudice against or hatred of Muslims."*

This definition underpins our understanding of Islamophobia for the purposes of this submission.

Islamophobia is a highly racialised phenomenon that engages both the "race" and "religion and belief" protected characteristics under the Equality Act. Views differ on whether it should be regarded as a form of racism, or as a somewhat distinct but closely inter-related phenomenon. Debate about which of these views should be adopted is not necessarily fruitful. The Domination Hate Model of Intercultural Relations developed by the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) provides a useful framework for understanding the interplay of these aspects of Islamophobia.

The Human Rights Framework

Islamophobic bullying potentially engages the Equality Act. Unaddressed and systematic Islamophobic bullying also potentially engages rights under the European Convention on Human Rights to freedom of expression (article 10); to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (article 9) and to education (article 2 of the 1st protocol). These rights are enforceable under domestic and European law and provide a potential pathway for redress for individuals affected by Islamophobic bullying.

Unaddressed and systematic Islamophobic bullying also potentially engages the UK's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

How schools respond to Islamophobic bullying

A high proportion of the Muslim children interviewed clearly lacked confidence in their schools' response. Where an appeal to a teacher resulted in a somewhat positive response, it often still fell short of what might reasonably be thought necessary to mitigate the stress and reduced self-confidence referred to in the EIS definition of bullying.

The data doesn't tell us what teachers thought about these incidents or allow us to track schools' responses through case studies. But we are left with a very strong impression that teachers are reluctant to recognise an incident as Islamophobic or to act on it in ways that would be suggested by recognition of its Islamophobic nature.

In conversations with members of the majority community we often encounter the view that highlighting a racist/Islamophobic incident as such could risk further stigmatising the individual affected and could "make matters worse." We virtually never encounter that view from the people supposedly at risk of being stigmatised. Recognising a racist/Islamophobic comment or incident for what it is an essential step towards tackling the problem. We believe that systematic failure to recognise racist/Islamophobic incidents, whatever the reason for it, is a form of institutional racism/Islamophobia.

The testimonies of the children recorded in *Islamophobia in Edinburgh Schools* cover incidents potentially involving criminal offences. We are extremely cautious about the value of involving police or the criminal justice system in incidents involving young people. We think it risks eroding trust between school students and teachers. But there is currently a problem of trust for the opposite reason – failure to take Islamophobic incidents sufficiently seriously. Police involvement also risks replicating within the school system problems that we see in the approach police take to community relations. But the fact that Islamophobia in Edinburgh Schools appears to indicate unaddressed criminal conduct highlights both the likely severity of the impact on individuals and the seriousness of schools' frequent apparent failure to respond.

Some of the testimonies of the children indicate a marked sense of injustice. As discussed under the heading **What is Bullying?**, justice in the handling of racist/Islamophobic incidents inevitably engages wider issues of racial justice. We are very sympathetic to the view that a restorative approach to children who engage in bullying is generally preferable to a punitive one. But it is crucial that the outcome of a complaint about Islamophobic bullying should be felt by the child affected and their family to be just. Anything less risks normalising Islamophobia in the majority community and normalising helplessness in the Muslim community.

Islamophobic attitudes are very widespread in society and are likely to be picked up even by young children. Because of this, we think that in most cases it would be inappropriate and counter-productive to react to a child who engages in Islamophobic bullying with a search for influencers amongst their family and friends. An Islamophobic incident may be an indicator of more widely-held attitudes amongst children at the school. In these circumstances, a holistic and positive approach aiming to educate everyone about Islam and equalities may be the best approach.

Scotland's Muslim population is small but growing and is skewed towards the young in comparison with the population as a whole. BME people are under-represented in the Scottish teaching workforce. BME recruitment into teaching needs to be encouraged. At the same time, it should be recognised that unfamiliarity with Muslims amongst non-Muslim teachers is to some degree a natural consequence of Scotland's demography. It is neither surprising nor in itself shameful, but it does need to be addressed.

Limitations of the bullying paradigm

Separately from the evidence reported in Islamophobia in Edinburgh Schools, we think it should be recognised that Islamophobic conduct may occur in other situations besides bullying, or in situations that can only be described as bullying if the term is extended in ways that risk weakening it.

But in all circumstances, Islamophobic conduct strengthens Islamophobia in the school environment and in society more widely. In all circumstance, action is needed to address the issue, whether direct or indirect, immediate or deferred.

Institutional Islamophobia/Racism

On the basis set out in the section **What is Islamophobia?** we will take Islamophobia to be included within the term "racism" as used in discussions of institutional racism.

The report on the Macpherson Inquiry into the Stephen Lawrence case[1] noted that short summaries of work on institutional racism are not necessarily helpful and emphasised that it aimed to set out its own "standpoint" rather than "a definition cast in stone". It then said:

> *"For the purposes of our Inquiry the concept of institutional racism which we apply consists of:*
>
> *The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people."*

The report added:

> *"It persists because of the failure of the organisation openly and adequately to recognise and address its existence and causes by policy, example and leadership. Without recognition and action to eliminate such racism it can prevail as part of the ethos or culture of the organisation. It is a corrosive disease."*

While noting that the Macpherson inquiry made no claim for the broader applicability of its standpoint, we believe that the passages quoted above provide a helpful basis for understanding how institutional Islamophobia may operate in schools. This standpoint recognises the effect of prejudice that is "unwitting". Intentionality is not required in order for the corrosive mechanisms of institutional racism to operate.

We believe that the strong evidence from children's testimonies of widespread shortcomings in schools' responses to Islamophobic incidents points inescapably to the operation of institutional racism in Edinburgh schools. We think it likely that a similar pattern operates throughout Scotland.

We note and endorse the concerns about the Prevent agenda raised in the EIS submission to this inquiry (November 2016). Prevent is likely to reinforce or even drive institutional Islamophobia in schools.

Comments relating to terrorism are a striking feature of the testimonies of Muslim children. The treatment of terrorism as an outcome of "ideology" by Prevent and in other official discourse provides an institutional reinforcement and driver for the public and media perception of a link between Islam and terrorism.

There is a risk that lessons covering terrorism may tend to reflect and reinforce institutional Islamophobia. The influence of Prevent on the curriculum is a particular concern.

Islamophobia is institutionalised in ways that are beyond the control of schools but impact the school environment. A series of anti-terrorism laws has been passed since 2000, all with a clear understanding on the part of the MPs voting for them and the police officers implementing them that they are directed overwhelmingly towards Muslims. An expanding body of anti-immigration legislation has also been enacted, all with the claim that immigration is a separate issue from race, and all in the context of media, public and political discourse (the latter fortunately mostly absent in Scotland) that problematises the presence of ethnic minorities in the UK. This discourse often focusses particularly on Muslims and Muslim immigration.

This makes up a formidable apparatus of institutional Islamophobia that has no parallel in connection with other forms of prejudice-based bullying. In this climate, any strategy to tackle Islamophobic bullying is bound to fail unless it is given a high priority and is configured to stimulate a pro-active approach.

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1   *https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-stephen-lawrence-inquiry*

What needs to Change

The children's testimonies in *Islamophobia in Edinburgh Schools* cry out for much greater alertness in recognising Islamophobic incidents and for this to be a high priority in any anti-bullying policy. This is the overriding matter that needs to change.

We believe that strong leadership from head teachers could accomplish this fairly quickly and easily. Once done, we would hope that many teachers would begin engaging with Muslim children and parents in a richer and more constructive way, and that this would organically address some of the problems we have noted about education and awareness amongst teaching staff.

The existence of institutional Islamophobia within the school system needs to be recognised. Teaching staff need to be alert to its effects and alert to the impact that institutional Islamophobia originating in other bodies such as the police could have on schools. Teaching staff need to be pro-active in seeking ways to remove the barriers to inclusivity that institutional Islamophobia creates.

The following points are provisional and are subject to ongoing discussion within SACC.

Attention needs to be paid to the provision of educational material about Islam both for use in the classroom and in the training of teachers. We would like to draw attention to the material developed by MEND (Muslim Engagement and Development). Some of it makes specific references to the English curriculum, but it appears to be more generally applicable.

It needs to be recognised that some Islamophobic incidents occurring in schools may amount to hate crime, that in these cases the individuals affected have a right to press for justice through the criminal justice system, and that this unavoidably remains the case even where is a general policy – as we would recommend – of avoiding police involvement in educating against Islamophobia and racism and in the handling of non-criminal incidents.

Separately from the previous point, there needs to be respect for the demands of justice (and recognition of the wider issues of racial justice that are engaged) in responding to Islamophobic incidents.

Our
RECOMMENDATIONS
to the
SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT
October 2017

Our Recommendations to the Scottish Government

*Our recommendations incorporate and build on the points applicable to the Scottish Government covered in the **What needs to change?** section of our submission to the EHRiC.*

1. **In responding to any Islamophobic incident in a school, the welfare of Muslim children impacted by the incident should be paramount.**

    It might seem that this should go without saying, but it appears that a variety of concerns are apt to take precedence over the welfare of the Muslim child. This needs to change.

2. **The Scottish Government should encourage much greater alertness in recognising Islamophobia and Islamophobic incidents in schools, and should prioritise this in its policies (including its anti-bullying policy).**

    Strong leadership from head teachers could accomplish this fairly quickly and easily. Once this is done, we would hope that many teachers would begin engaging with Muslim children and parents in a richer and more constructive way, and that this would organically address some of the problems we have noted about education and awareness amongst teaching staff.

    There needs to more open and broad discussion of the benefits of diversity among the whole school community and in assemblies and formal lessons not just as add ons to the curriculum.

3. **Islamophobia should be understood, for the purposes of Scottish Government policy, as a form of anti-Muslim racism.**

    Islamophobic abuse often involves references to religion or to a supposed linkage between Islam and terrorism. It may be directed at Muslims of any ethnicity, including "white British". It is nevertheless driven by racism and has the effect of curtailing Muslim participation in society, or of placing conditions on participation.

    "This approach understands Muslims as victims of racialization and racialized discourse and thus victims of racism."[1]

4. **The Scottish Government should work towards developing and adopting a concise, easily understood working definition of Islamophobia that incorporates an understanding of Islamophobia as a form of racism.**

    This is in line with the recommendation by the Independent Advisory Group on Hate Crime, Prejudice and Community Cohesion that *"the Scottish Government should lead discussion on the development of clearer terminology and definitions around hate crime, prejudice and community cohesion"*[2].

    The CAIR definition of Islamophobia referred to in our submission to the EHRiC is concise and useful, but taken by itself it does not reflect the view set out in our submission that "Islamophobia is a highly racialised phenomenon."

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1   *Countering Islamophobia through the Development of Best Practice in the use of Counter-Narratives in EU Member States., Arzu Merali (July 2017),* http://cik.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/36/2017/07/2017.07.31-WS1-UK-Final-with-Cover.pdf

2   *Report of Independent Advisory Group on Hate Crime, Prejudice and Community Cohesion (September 2016),* http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/09/3565/downloads

Debate about the part that racism and religious prejudice play in Islamophobia has been going on for some time and is not necessarily fruitful. But any policy that fails to explicitly recognise both aspects of Islamophobia is flawed and is likely to become an impediment to progress.

As a starting point for discussion, we offer the following definition:

"Islamophobia is a form of anti-Muslim racism, often characterised by a closed-minded prejudice against or hatred of Islam and Muslims."

5. **The existence of institutional Islamophobia, operating as a form of institutional racism within the school system, needs to be recognised.**

School staff (including teachers, teaching assistants and youth workers) need to be alert to its effects and alert to the impact that institutional Islamophobia originating in other bodies such as the police could have on schools. Staff need to be pro-active in seeking ways to remove the barriers to inclusivity that institutional Islamophobia creates. The Macpherson definition of institutional racism[3] is helpful in recognising and understanding the problem.

6. **Implementation of 'Prevent' should be halted in schools. Failing this, care should be taken to separate PREVENT from work to promote equalities and inclusivity and counter hate incidents.**

'Prevent' (the strand of the UK Government's counter-terrorism policy said to aimed at preventing people being drawn into terrorism) institutionalises Islamophobia and creates a climate of suspicion towards Muslims. It encourages staff to see behaviour and views linked to Islamic practice, or to an interest in the affairs of Muslims overseas, as potential signs of "radicalisation". It also encourages staff to see behavioural changes indicative of stress as signs of "radicalisation". Inevitably, staff influenced by 'Prevent' will be particularly alert to such changes in Muslim students. Behaviour linked to Islamic practice will often be a trigger for Islamophobic incidents, and signs of stress will often be the result. 'Prevent' makes it harder for staff to respond in a supportive way to Muslim students who have experienced Islamophobia, and harder to gain (or deserve) their trust.

In dealing with the spread of far-right views 'Prevent' is unhelpful at best and counter-productive at worst.

We do not accept that 'Prevent', as it is implemented in Scotland, is either proportionate or rights-based, as the Scottish Government states in its response to the EHRiC[4].

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3   *Report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, Sir William Macpherson (February 1999), p49,* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-stephen-lawrence-inquiry

4   *Scottish Government response to a request for clarification on PREVENT, Committee Recommendation number 13,* http://www.parliament.scot/S5_Equal_Opps/Inquiries/SG_Response_to_EHRiC_Report_-_Its_not_cool_to_be_cruel_20170901.pdf

7. **Education Scotland's '*How Good is Our School'* self-evaluation document[5] should be revised to reflect more thoroughly the public sector equality duty created by the Equality Act 2010, and to reflect the growing social problem of Islamophobia.**

    The equality duty is covered in *Section 3.1 Ensuring Wellbeing*, and also impacts on other sections. We recommend the following changes in these other sections:

    Under *Section 2.1 Safeguarding and Child Protection*, under the heading *National Guidance and Legislation*, remove the racially charged term "radicalisation" and highlight the growing problems of racism and Islamophobia by changing the sentence: *"Staff are aware of emerging issues within society such as radicalisation and child sexual exploitation"* to *"Staff are aware of emerging issues within society such as racism, Islamophobia child and child sexual exploitation"*.

    Under *Section 2.4 Personalised Support*, add: *"Staff are highly-responsive to the circumstances of children impacted by prejudice relating to the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act."*

8. **Improve training of school staff to raise awareness of Islamophobia and racism, to improve understanding of Islam and Muslim community life, and to give staff the confidence to challenge Islamophobia and racism.**

    Training should be provided for all appropriate school staff including teachers, teaching assistants and youth workers. For teachers, training should be included as a part of Initial Teacher Training and through Continuing Professional Development. Changes should be discussed with trade unions, particularly where a mandatory element is being considered.

    Training should cover (but not be limited to) the recommendations on training made in EHRiC's report *It is not Cool to be Cruel: prejudice-based bullying and harassment of children and young people in schools.*

9. **Improve the coverage in the curriculum of Islam, Muslim community life and related matters; ensure that Islam is presented in a way recognised by Muslims as meaningful; ensure that the curriculum is not influenced by the UK concept of "British values"; remove all requirements for the curriculum to reflect PREVENT.**

    The EHRiC states: *"We are concerned the curriculum places a great deal of emphasis, albeit well-meaning, on teaching about the differences between cultures, races and traditions instead of focussing on commonality and empathy."[6]*

    Concern over teaching about "differences" should not deflect from the urgent need to redress the shortcomings of the current coverage of Islam in the curriculum. Concern to promote "commonality" should not lead to policies akin to the UK Government's policy on "British values" or to policies that tend to promote assimilation and undermine respect for diversity. "Commonality" should include the Muslim contribution to the common and intertwined histories of peoples. A focus on "empathy" should include empathetic education on Islam and Muslim community life.

    Many Muslim students are likely to welcome well-implemented coverage of Islam in the curriculum. But any tendency to treat Muslim students as a teaching resource should be carefully avoided.

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5   https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/Frameworks_SelfEvaluation/FRWK2_NIHeditHGIOS/ FRWK2_HGIOS4.pdf

6   Recommendation 25, EHRiC report, http://www.parliament.scot/S5_Equal_Opps/Inquiries/EHRiC_5th_ Report_2017_SP_Paper_185.pdf

Our Recommendations to the Scottish Government

10. **We support the recommendation by the EHRiC that the National Anti-Bullying Approach should emphasise prevention and should "focus on creating a whole-school culture which is inclusive."[7]**

11. **The Scottish Government should provide guidance, in the National Anti-Bullying Approach and elsewhere, to assist schools in ensuring that any child experiencing Islamophobia (whether through bullying or otherwise) feels supported by the school and feels that a just outcome has been achieved.**

    Failure to do this will leave Muslim communities feeling vulnerable, may undermine the child's capacity to deal with Islamophobia in later life and may empower Islamophobes. Similar concerns apply in connection with other forms of prejudice-based bullying. We are disappointed that this point is not emphasised in the EHRiC recommendations, having perhaps been obscured by the very welcome emphasis on prevention. The problem is particularly acute for Muslims in view of the prevalence and growth of Islamophobia in wider society.

12. **We support the recommendation by the EHRiC that the Scottish Government should "clarify when bullying constitutes a hate crime or a sexual offence" and "provide assurance that all those working in schools are trained when to report bullying to the police."[8]**

13. **Schools should be encouraged to see educating against Islamophobia as the responsibility of teachers, not of police.**

Where teachers lack confidence in dealing with Islamophobia, or where parents are not confident of a supportive attitude from teachers, there may be a tendency to seek help from police over incidents that are not criminal or over general matters. This undermines the mainstreaming of equality within the school. Teachers must feel empowered to take responsibility for these matters.

7   Recommendation number 3, EHRiC report, http://www.parliament.scot/S5_Equal_Opps/Inquiries/EHRiC_5th_Report_2017_SP_Paper_185.pdf
8   Recommendation number 6, EHRiC report, http://www.parliament.scot/S5_Equal_Opps/Inquiries/EHRiC_5th_Report_2017_SP_Paper_185.pdf

TACKLING ISLAMOPHOBIA IN SCOTTISH SCHOOLS

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