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NICEM SUBMISSION

Consultation on Belfast Employability and Skills Framework

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Introduction

1.1 The Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) is an independent non-governmental organisation. As an umbrella organisation¹ we represent the views and interests of black and minority ethnic (BME) communities.² Our mission is to work to bring about social change through partnership and alliance building, and to achieve equality of outcome and full participation in society. Our vision is of a society in which equality and diversity are respected, valued and embraced, that is free from all forms of racism, sectarianism, discrimination and social exclusion, and where human rights are guaranteed.

1.2 Employment is one of the largest concerns amongst all communities living in Northern Ireland (NI). It is notable that many minority groups, including ethnic minorities, face differential outcomes and opportunities in terms of employment and employability in Belfast and throughout NI.

1.3 Furthermore, it is important to note that employment is central to the integration of migrants and refugees into Northern Irish society. Belfast-based respondents to NICEM's integration research identified employment as a 'way of being involved in society' and employment is one of the four key indicators of integration identified by the European Commission following the Zaragoza Declaration in 2010.^{3 4}

1.4 Consequently, NICEM welcomes the publication of the draft Belfast Employability and Skills Framework and the opportunity to consult on its contents.

1. Do you agree with the core values that frame this strategy? Do they fully reflect the Belfast context and wider strategic issues?

2.1 While the core values of the draft Framework are broadly acceptable, the document must acknowledge the need for equality of opportunity for those living in Belfast.

¹ Currently we have 27 affiliated BME groups as full members. This composition is representative of the majority of BME communities in Northern Ireland. Many of these organisations operate on an entirely voluntary basis.

² In this document "Black and Minority Ethnic Communities" or "Minority Ethnic Groups" or "Ethnic Minority" has an inclusive meaning to unite all minority communities. It is a political term that refers to settled ethnic minorities (including Travellers, Roma and Gypsy), settled religious minorities, migrants (EU and non-EU), asylum seekers and refugees and people of other immigration status united together against racism.

³ Rogers, S. and Scullion, G., *'Voices for Change: Mapping the Views of Black and Minority Ethnic People on Integration and their Sense of Belonging in Northern Ireland'* (2014, The Russell Press)

p.22

⁴ Eurostat, 'Indicators of Immigrant Integration: A Pilot Study' (2011) p.10

- 2.2 Many groups face differential opportunity for employment in NI, including ethnic minorities. Recent research on ethnic minorities has found that only 67% of respondents in Belfast have secured employment that provides sufficient remuneration for their families to live on.⁵
- 2.3 Furthermore, only half of Belfast respondents reported having secured employment that uses their qualifications and skills.⁶ Thus, it is clear that even qualified and skilled BME individuals face unequal opportunity for employment in Belfast.
- 2.4 More generally, research has illustrated that BME individuals living in NI are particularly vulnerable to exploitative employment. A combination of isolation, lack of language skills and the absence of adequate advice and information services results in some BME communities being particularly affected by adverse working conditions.⁷
- 2.5 Inequality of opportunity is also perpetuated by the lack of opportunity for skills development amongst particular groups. As noted above, poor employment outcomes can be perpetuated by lack of language skills, which itself is exacerbated by the lack of provision for free English language lessons, due to the failure to acknowledge English as a Second Language (ESOL) as an essential skill in NI. This is in contrast to the position in the rest of the United Kingdom (UK).⁸
- 2.6 Further concerning equality of opportunity, it should be noted that employment opportunities for some BME groups in NI have been disproportionately impacted by the economic downturn. Research conducted just after the economic crash noted that unemployment amongst Polish respondents was almost three times higher than that of the general population.⁹
- 2.7 More recent research has illustrated that this trend has continued throughout times of economic difficulty, with BME communities in the North West facing far higher than average rates of unemployment, despite having much higher qualifications on average than the general population.¹⁰

⁵ ibid

⁶ ibid

⁷ Wallace, A. et al, 'Poverty and Ethnicity in Northern Ireland: An Evidence Review' (2013) Available at: <<http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/poverty-ethnicity-northern-ireland-full.pdf>> [Accessed 26/08/15] p.25

⁸ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, 'Racial Equality Policy: Priorities and Recommendations' (2014) Available at: <http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/RacialEquality_PolicyPosition2014.pdf> [Accessed 26/08/15] p.22

⁹ McVeigh, R. and McAfee, C., "'Za Chlebem": The Impact of the Economic Downturn on the Polish Community in Northern Ireland' (2009) Available at: <http://nicem.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Za_Chlebem_Report.pdf> [Accessed 26/08/15] p.52

¹⁰ McAfee, C., 'The Impact of the Economic Downturn on the Black and Minority Ethnic People in the North West of Northern Ireland' (2014)

2.8 Consequently, it is clear that equality of opportunity for BME communities in both Belfast and the wider NI is qualified by a number of different factors. It is notable that, as a public authority, the Belfast City Council is compelled to have due regard to equality of opportunity between persons of different racial groups and religious beliefs, under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Thus, it is important that this Framework adopt equality of opportunity as a core value in the improvement of employability amongst all groups.

2.9 NICEM recommends that a core value be added to the finalised Framework, acknowledging the importance of ensuring equality of opportunity for all communities in Belfast.

2. What are your views on Belfast City Council taking a lead role in driving this framework forward? What do you see your organisation's role to be?

3.1 NICEM agrees that it is appropriate for the Council to take responsibility for delivering the Framework and reemphasises its obligations as a public authority for the purposes of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

3. Are the six key challenges identified for employability and skills in Belfast accurate? Are there additional challenges prevalent to Belfast that need to be addressed?

Underemployment

4.1 One significant issue that is not addressed by the six key challenges identified within the draft Framework is that of underemployment. Underemployment is an issue that affects everyone in NI, with underemployment increasing faster in NI than anywhere else in the UK (by 37% between 2010 and 2014).¹¹

4.2 However, underemployment particularly affects BME communities in NI, with Belfast presenting an extreme example. As noted above, research conducted on BME individuals living in Belfast reported that 50% of respondents did not feel that their employment utilised their skills.¹² This rate of underemployment is significantly higher than that reported in the North West and Mid Ulster and Down regions.¹³

4.3 The key contributors to underemployment amongst BME communities are the lack of recognition given to overseas qualifications and work experience, and the lack of availability of free ESOL lessons.

¹¹ Trade Union Centre, 'A Record Number of People are Looking for Hours to Top Up Their Wages' (2014) Available at: <<https://www.tuc.org.uk/economic-issues/labour-market/record-number-people-are-looking-extra-hours-top-their-wages>> [Accessed 26/08/15]

¹² op cit n 3

¹³ op cit n 3 pp. 29 and 33

4.4 As regards the recognition of qualifications, this was highlighted by BME individuals living in Belfast as one of the main barriers to employment that they faced.¹⁴ This reflects broader NI findings that the failure to recognise overseas qualifications is a significant issue.¹⁵

4.5 While a system does currently exist for recognising overseas qualifications – the UK National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) – there are a number of drawbacks with this system that may render it confusing for migrants.

4.6 For example, the qualifications framework in NI is distinct from the rest of the UK, which means that no single policy can be developed on the recognition of qualifications. Additionally, the assessment process itself has been criticised as being complicated.¹⁶ Thus, the system for recognising qualifications is potentially being underutilised by migrants in NI, including Belfast.

4.7 A further contributor to underemployment amongst BME communities in Belfast is the issue of ESOL provision. As noted above, the failure to acknowledge ESOL as an essential skill in NI – contrary to the position in the rest of the UK – results in a dearth of free language class availability.¹⁷

4.8 As a consequence of this lack of availability, individuals who have migrated into NI may find themselves under or unemployed due to underdeveloped language skills. This effect has been evidenced in Belfast, with BME individuals living in Belfast highlighting English language ability as a barrier to employment.¹⁸

4.9 Ultimately, it is clear that underemployment is a significant challenge for all people living in NI, but particularly for BME communities living in Belfast. It is important for the Employability Framework to acknowledge and address this challenge.

4.10 NICEM recommends that an additional challenge of underemployment be incorporated into the finalised Framework.

¹⁴ op cit n 3

¹⁵ op cit n 7 p.4

¹⁶ Independent Network of Labour Migration and Integration Experts, ‘Recognition of Qualifications and Competencies in Migrants’ (2013) Available at:

<http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/Recognition_Qualifications_CompetencesofMigrants.pdf> [Accessed 26/08/15] p.186

¹⁷ op cit n 8

¹⁸ op cit n 3

Education and BME Pupils

- 4.11 Another challenge facing BME individuals as regards employability and skills concerns poor educational outcomes. There is an increasing number of BME pupils at school in NI (a 90% increase between 2006/07 and 2014/15)¹⁹, thus the educational outcomes of these groups will have an increasing impact on employment figures; particularly in Belfast, where the BME population is highest.²⁰
- 4.12 Yet, evidence indicates that some BME groups experience significantly worse outcomes than the general population. In 2014, 5.8% of BME pupils left school with no formal qualifications of any kind, as compared to only 0.7% of the majority pupil population. Indeed, BME pupils ranked lower than their peers in every outcome indicator for compulsory education in 2013/14.²¹
- 4.13 There are many potential contributing factors to this underperformance amongst BME groups, including inadequacies in English language provision for newcomer pupils and the widespread practice of racist bullying.
- 4.14 Belfast-based research has found that provision for BME pupils with additional language needs can be inconsistent, with some schools providing more assistance than others. Additionally, some BME parents have reported instances of schools making use of inappropriate measures, such as using maintenance staff or other pupils translate for a newcomer pupil.²²
- 4.15 Indeed, research into provision for newcomer pupils across NI has indicated that there is a lack of availability of appropriate materials for teaching English language to older pupils, which can result in frustration for these children.²³
- 4.16 This research has also indicated the prevalence of racist bullying amongst schools in Belfast. Respondents highlighted racist bullying as a serious issue, with one family finding it difficult to persuade schools to act to prevent physical assaults against their children.²⁴ It is notable that NI-wide research has indicated that 42% of BME pupils have experienced racist bullying.²⁵

¹⁹ See Appendix 1

²⁰ Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 'Ethnic Group (Daytime Population): DT201NI (Administrative Geographies)' (2011)

²¹ Department of Education, 'Qualifications and Destinations of Northern Ireland School Leavers 2013/14' (2015) Available at: <http://www.deni.gov.uk/qualifications_and_destinations_1314.pdf> [Accessed 28/08/15] p.17

²² op cit n 3 p.23

²³ Kernaghan, D., 'Feels Like Home: Exploring the Experiences of Newcomer Pupils in Primary Schools in Northern Ireland' (2015) p.49

²⁴ ibid

²⁵ See, for example: NCB Northern Ireland and ARK YLT, 'Attitudes to Difference: Young people's attitudes to, and experiences of contact with people from different minority ethnic and migrant

4.17 If employability and skills amongst BME groups are to be improved, the Council must ensure that it acts where possible to tackle these root causes of educational underperformance.

4.18 NICEM recommends that Challenge 3 under the Framework be edited to acknowledge the challenge presented by poor educational outcomes amongst BME groups.

4. Do you feel that the targets are ambitious enough? Do you feel they are achievable? Are there any additional strategic targets you feel should be included?

5.1 While these targets seem broadly reasonable, it is reiterated that the Council has obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between protected groups.

5.2 The ECNI has stated that 'due regard' is a stronger requirement than mere 'regard' and that public authorities are obliged to take equality of opportunity into account when carrying out their functions. It has also asserted that 'due regard' means that the weight given to promoting equality of opportunity should be proportionate to the relevance of the given duty to their function.²⁶

5.3 As noted above, there is clear evidence that the employability and skills of BME communities living in Belfast are particularly affected by a number of factors, which in turn impacts upon their opportunity for employment.

5.4 Consequently, it is incumbent upon the Council to target the improvement of BME communities' employability and skills, which will in turn ensure that equal opportunity for employment is afforded to BME groups.

5.5 NICEM recommends that the target and three sub-targets under the draft Framework be edited to state that their aims will be pursued, insofar as possible, on an equal basis with the objective of ensuring equality of opportunity between different groups.

communities in Northern Ireland' (2010) Available at:

<http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/attd_web_final.pdf> [Accessed 28/08/15] p.55

²⁶ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, 'Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998: A Guide for Public Authorities' (2010) Available at:

<<http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/S75GuideforPublicAuthoritiesApril2010.pdf>> [Accessed 28/08/15] pp.26-27

5. What are your views on the 4 key aims of the strategy? Are they progressive and relevant in meeting the proposed targets for the strategy?

Aim 2

6.1 It is important for the Framework's aims to adequately target the particular challenges faced by BME communities in Belfast in obtaining and retaining relevant employment.

6.2 While Aim 2 acknowledges the barriers to employment presented by a lack of basic skills and aims to develop a 'whole-life package of entry and lower level skills development', it does not specifically consider the need for broader ESOL provision.

6.3 As noted above, the failure to recognise ESOL as an essential skill has resulted in a dearth of availability of free classes, to the detriment of workers who have migrated into the country and in contrast to the approach taken in the rest of the UK. Research illustrates that the expense of classes has actively prevented some BME individuals from attending.²⁷

6.4 The ability of some BME groups, particularly BME women, to improve their language abilities - and thus their employment potential - is also undermined by the lack of availability of ESOL classes at hours that do not clash with their work or family commitments.^{28 29}

6.5 Of further relevance to Aim 2 of the Framework is the above-mentioned issue of educational underattainment amongst BME pupils in NI. Again, there are issues that may contribute to this underattainment that are unique to BME pupils (as highlighted above) and will require unique attention to resolve.

6.6 NICEM recommends that Aim 2 of the Framework be edited to read 'To provide a rounded and whole-life package of entry and lower level skills development and provision, including initiatives to address the specific challenges faced by BME communities in this regard'.

²⁷ McDermott, P., *Migrant Languages in the Public Space: A Case Study from Northern Ireland* (LIT Verlag Münster, 2011) p.190

²⁸ Isal, S., 'The Experiences of Ethnic Minority Women Living in Northern Ireland' (2013) Available at: <<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/EoEMWiNI.pdf>> [Accessed 01/09/15] p.29

²⁹ op cit n 27 p.192

Aim 3

6.7 While Aim 3 seeks to improve the higher-level skills quotient amongst Belfast residents, it does not acknowledge the underutilisation of skills that already exist amongst this group. As discussed above, many individuals who have migrated into Belfast are underemployed as a consequence of a number of factors, including a failure to invest in ESOL provision and complications concerning the system for recognising overseas qualifications.

6.8 It is important for the Framework to aim to address this problem as part of any strategy for increasing the supply of highly skilled labour in Belfast.

6.9 NICEM recommends that the third aim under the Framework be edited to read ‘to develop more highly skilled Belfast residents and improve the utilisation of skills amongst those who are already qualified’.

Action Plan 1:

1. Do you agree with the purpose and partnership structure proposed in the action plan for Aim 1?

7.1 NICEM notes with approval that the draft Framework’s proposals for an employability and skills partnership refers to a number of high level actors, including DEL, DSD, FE Colleges, recruitment agencies et cetera.

7.2 However, the action plan does not currently envision a direct relationship with employers, other than through representative bodies, which may not cover all areas of employment in Belfast. Research conducted on local authority schemes on employability has shown that employers are able to provide a unique contribution to employment and skills programmes, such as through:

- increasing the number of apprenticeships in the Council area;
- consulting on skills needs in the area to inform the Council’s programme, and;
- ensuring the provision of work experience and providing assistance to those involved in large-scale redundancy programmes.³⁰

³⁰ Rolfe, H. et al, ‘Local Authority Schemes Supporting People Towards Work: An Independent Report for the Local Government Association’ (2015) Available at:
<<http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/11309/NIESR+independent+analysis+council+led+schemes+to+support+people+towards+work+JAN+2015.pdf/0250422e-0c9c-4df5-9e90-3b8aff91f2e6>>
[Accessed 01/09/15] pp.6, 9 and 32

7.3 Ultimately, it has been evidenced that including employers as partners in an employability and skills programme can allow actions to be taken that complement the work of the local authority in satisfying their aims and objectives.³¹

7.4 The draft Framework's proposals for a partnership also fail to envision a role for NGOs. Again, this is an oversight, as these organisations can provide a great deal of support for the implementation of the Council's Framework.

7.5 For example, NGOs can assist local authorities by providing training to the un/underemployed or providing information on the skills needs of their communities, which can inform targeted action by the Council or other partners.

7.6 Indeed, the International Finance Corporation has concluded, regarding strategies seeking to tackle a mismatch between skills and employment, that the best approach is a comprehensive one, which involves stakeholders from multiple sectors, including NGOs.³²

7.7 NICEM recommends that the action regarding a skills and employability partnership be edited to allow broader inclusion of employers and a role for NGOs that represent communities where un/underemployment is a particular challenge.

2. How can these partnerships be developed to maximise impact and effectiveness?

8.1 The Council should ensure that partnerships are reciprocal insofar as is possible. For example, the Council can provide support to employers, through the provision of guidance on employers' responsibilities and on the additional needs of any particular groups of unemployed persons.³³ If the Council engages appropriately with employers, there is potential for both the needs of employers and those who are un/underemployed to be met.³⁴

8.2 As regards interacting with NGO partners, it is important for the Council to ensure that any programme aimed at gathering information on the skills needs of particular groups or for the training of un/underemployed people is adequately funded. In this way, the Council can adopt a targeted, tailored approach that is more likely to succeed.

³¹ *ibid* p.9

³² International Finance Corporation, 'IFC Jobs Study: Assessing Private Sector Contributions to Job Creation and Poverty Reduction' (2013) Available at: <http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2013/12/20/000356161_20131220163832/Rendered/PDF/835080WP01FC0J00Box382079B00PUBLIC0.pdf> [Accessed 01/09/15] p.103

³³ *op cit* n 30 p.6

³⁴ *ibid* p.14

8.3 It is notable that funding the voluntary sector to provide tailored training to particular groups, including asylum seekers, has formed part of Government recommendations on tackling unemployment before.³⁵ Indeed, this approach has been successful in tackling unemployment amongst BME communities in particular.³⁶

8.4 Contrariwise, a failure to adequately fund groups in order to perform this role has been highlighted as a cause of ineffectiveness in outreach programmes.³⁷

8.5 NICEM recommends that the Council ensure that its relationship with all partners is reciprocal, insofar as possible. Additionally, the Council should ensure that NGOs are adequately funded in order to provide training and gather information on the skills needs of particular communities.

3. Are there other key activities that should be undertaken under Aim 1?

9.1 As noted above, the Council will need to ensure that NGOs are adequately funded in order to carry out training and information gathering as part of a comprehensive, tailored approach to tackling un/underemployment in Belfast.

9.2 Even if the Council does not consider NGOs to be necessary partners in its employability and skills partnership, the provision of tailored training has been highlighted by the Work and Pensions Select Committee as an attribute of employment schemes that successfully target BME communities.³⁸

9.3 NICEM recommends that the Council make an additional action, committing to the provision of adequate funding to NGOs representing communities where un/underemployment is a particular challenge, in order to support the delivery of the Framework via the provision of training and the gathering of information relating to these communities.

³⁵ National Audit Office, 'Increasing Employment for Ethnic Minorities: A Summary of Research Findings' (2008) Available at: http://cesi.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/NAO_increasing_employment_ethnic_minorities_summary_0.pdf [Accessed 02/09/15] pp.35 and 38

³⁶ *ibid* p.42

³⁷ *ibid* p.41

³⁸ *op cit* n 36

4. Are there additional key partners who should be included and at what level?

10.1 As noted above, the Council should ensure that it engages employers outside of business representative bodies (particularly those that hire low-skilled and high-skilled workers) and NGOs that work with communities for whom un/underemployment is a particular challenge.

10.2 NICEM reiterates its recommendation that employers be engaged on a broader basis and NGOs that represent communities for whom un/underemployment is a particular challenge also be engaged as partners.

5. How can we engage with employers and are further employer structures required?

11.1 As noted above, the Council should ensure that it engages with employers that are not represented by business groups, particularly those who employ low skilled workers and those who employ high skilled workers. It should also ensure that it generates reciprocal relationships with employers in order to attract their participation in the partnership.

11.2 NICEM reiterates its above recommendations on employers, as regards engagement on a broad basis and the development of reciprocal relationships with employers by the Council.

6. To evaluate impact and performance we need to monitor activity across the sector. How can we best share data and evaluate impact?

12.1 Firstly, as stated above, the Council should ensure that NGOs representing communities that are commonly un/underemployed are adequately funded to perform data collection within their areas. This could assist both in terms of targeting actions and assessing the impact of actions already taken.

12.2 Secondly, the Council should consider the needs of particular, hard-to-reach groups when determining what outcomes it will measure in evaluating the Framework's impact. It may be that measuring success solely on the basis of individuals obtaining employment would be inappropriate, as some communities face particular challenges such that employment may not necessarily result in the short term.

12.3 In the context of the proposed Framework and BME communities in Belfast, it may be illuminating to evaluate impact via the uptake of English language classes or the rate at which individuals have their qualifications recognised via NARIC. This will assist in measuring the positive impact of the Framework, even where employment is not consequent.

12.4 It is notable that monitoring alternative outcome measurements for hard-to-reach groups has been a characteristic of successful Local Government employability and skills schemes in the past.³⁹

12.5 Thirdly, considering the Council's obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, it would be useful for any data on outcomes to be disaggregated by ethnicity. Consequently, the Framework's success in furthering employment and skills development on an equal basis may be demonstrated.

12.6 Finally, in light of the Council's obligations under Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, it would be appropriate for the Council to develop an Equality Impact Assessment on the Framework's proposals, so that any differential impact on different groups may be identified and ameliorated. This should be developed in accordance with the ECNI's guidance for the production of EQIAs.⁴⁰

12.7 NICEM reiterates its recommendation that NGOs representing hard-to-reach groups be adequately funded to conduct data collection amongst their respective communities.

12.8 NICEM also recommends that the Council consider using additional indicators other than employment in order to monitor the positive effects of the Framework where employment is not attained.

12.9 NICEM further recommends that any data gathered by the Council informing or illustrating the impact of the Framework be disaggregated by ethnicity.

12.10 NICEM additionally recommends that the Council conduct an Equality Impact Assessment on the proposals for the Framework, in order to identify and ameliorated any differential impacts, in accordance with its Section 75 obligations.

Action Plan 2:

1. Are there other key activities that should be undertaken under Aim 2?

13.1 Aim 2 of the draft Framework seeks to target lower level skills development and provision. As noted above, many BME individuals in NI are failing to attain basic skills as a consequence of inadequate ESOL provision and issues within the education system.

³⁹ op cit n 30 p.21

⁴⁰ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, 'Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998' (2005) Available at:

<<http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/Public%20Authorities/EQIA-PracticalGuidance%282005%29.pdf>> [Accessed 03/09/15]

- 13.2 As regards ESOL provision, it is ultimately vital that this be recognised as an essential skill in NI. Poor English language ability was one of the main obstacles to employment raised by Belfast-based BME participants in recent research.⁴¹
- 13.3 While the Council does not have the ability to make this change, it can compensate for the obstacle to employment presented by this omission for many migrants by ensuring that ESOL classes, including vocational English Language classes, are adequately funded and thus freely available within Belfast.
- 13.4 Furthermore, NICEM notes with approval that the action plan aims to influence attainment within schools. As has been discussed above, BME pupils generally obtain lower outcomes from schools than their majority peers due to a number of additional challenges, including the perpetuation of racist bullying and shortcomings in the system for dealing with newcomer pupils.
- 13.5 As part of this action, the Council should work to address the issues underlying BME underattainment. It is notable that ensuring schools provide language support and developing an atmosphere of mutual respect in schools have both formed part of successful UK Council initiatives to tackle BME educational underattainment in the past.⁴²
- 13.6 NICEM recommends that an action be included under this Action Plan 2 aimed at providing funding for ESOL classes, including vocational ESOL classes, within the Belfast area, so that there is increased availability of free language lessons.**
- 13.7 NICEM also recommends that an activity be included under the first action of the action plan, reading: ‘Engage with Belfast schools to ensure the provision of adequate and consistent language support to newcomer pupils, and develop schemes to raise awareness of and tackle racist bullying’.**

⁴¹ op cit n 3 p.22

⁴² Bristol City Council, ‘Developing Effective Partnerships’ (2005) Available at: <<https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/index.cfm?action=media.download&uuid=2AE10892-E940-0120-95A3161B347FFD6F>> [Accessed 04/09/15] p.25

Action Plan 3:

1. Are there other key activities that should be undertaken under Aim 3?

14.1 As noted above, a key challenge facing BME individuals who are underemployed in Belfast is the lack of recognition given to their qualifications. This problem can stem from the fact that they are unaware of NARIC and the need to determine the equivalency of their own qualifications, or that they have had their qualifications processed by NARIC but their overseas qualifications are valued lower in the UK than their country of origin.

14.2 Consequently, there are two issues that the Council must address to ensure that talent already present in Belfast is not underexploited: firstly, the lack of awareness of NARIC and secondly the lack of courses for updating the extant skills of migrant workers.

14.3 Regarding the first issue, it is clear that the onus placed on migrant workers to approach NARIC is problematic, with a better advertisement of the service being needed.⁴³ If the Council wishes to ensure that the skills of migrant workers in Belfast are fully utilised, then it must also ensure that they are aware of NARIC and the process for having their qualifications recognised.

14.4 Concerning the second issue, it is notable that there is a dearth of courses for upgrading the skills of migrants in NI. For example, there has been no bridging course for overseas nurses in NI in many years, with the only available course being in London.

14.5 Consequently, there is no opportunity for nurses who migrate to Belfast and find their qualifications to have a lower equivalence in the UK to update their skills and begin work here. This is an overlooked opportunity on the part of the City of Belfast, as bridging courses are an excellent way of capitalising on the skills that people migrating into a country already have.⁴⁴

14.6 NICEM recommends that an action be included under Action Plan 3 to raise awareness amongst BME communities of the service offered by NARIC, including instruction on how to use this service.

14.7 NICEM also recommends that an action be included under Action Plan 3 to allow for the Council to work with educational establishments to foster the development of bridging courses for migrants with professional training, particularly but not limited to the field of nursing.

⁴³ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 'Entry To, And Progression In, Work' (2015) Available at: <<http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/entry-progression-work-summary.pdf>> [Accessed 04/09/15] p.7

⁴⁴ OECD, 'How Can Migrants' Skills Be Put to Use?' 3 Migration Policy Debates 1

Action Plan 4:

1. Are there other key activities that should be undertaken under Aim 4?

15.1 BME individuals living in Belfast have identified the 'glass ceiling' – a de facto inability to progress one's career beyond a particular point – as a perceptible problem.⁴⁵ Research respondents suggested that one potential way of tackling this issue would be positive action measures.

15.2 Local authorities may take positive action to promote employment and develop skills in a number of ways. For example, the Council could work with employers and diversity groups to create work experience placements for minority groups.⁴⁶

15.3 The Council could also offer training schemes targeted at particular groups in order to improve their skills. Furthermore, the Council could work with employers and community groups to ensure that members of minority groups are made aware of open days and workshops.⁴⁷

15.4 Further concerning this issue, it is important to note that having adequate English language skills is an essential part of maintaining upwards mobility in employment in NI. Consequently, the above recommendations regarding language provisions are re-emphasised.

15.5 Finally, ensuring that employees have their qualifications recognised is similarly important to maintaining their upwards mobility within the workplace. Thus, the above recommendations regarding the recognition of overseas qualifications should be considered.

15.6 NICEM recommends that Action Plan 4 include an action outlining positive action measures that the Council will take in order to tackle the 'glass ceiling' experienced by many BME individuals living in Belfast.

15.7 NICEM re-emphasises its recommendations regarding English language provision and the recognition of overseas qualifications.

⁴⁵ op cit n 3

⁴⁶ Hull City Council, 'Positive Action Framework' (2009) Available at: <<https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/83114/response/208859/attach/5/POSITIVE%20ACTION%20FRAMEWORK.DOC.doc>> [Accessed 07/09/15] p.3

⁴⁷ ibid pp.3-4

For further enquiries about this submission, please contact the following:

Mr. Luke Kelly, Volunteer Policy Officer or
Patrick Yu, Executive Director of NICEM

Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities
Ascot House, 1/F
24-31 Shaftesbury Square
Belfast BT2 7DB
Northern Ireland
UK
Tel: +44 28 9023 9645
Fax: +44 28 9031 9485
Email: luke@nicem.org.uk or patrick@nicem.org.uk