

Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise
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Natalie Don MSP
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Kaukab Stewart MSP
Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee
The Scottish Parliament
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By email: ehrcj.committee@parliament.scot

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Dear Kaukab Stewart MSP

Follow Up to Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee Budget Scrutiny 2024-25

I am writing in response to your letter dated 15 November which set out questions raised at the session of the Committee in October last year. I am aware that the Committee has also written to the Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees and the Minister has responded separately. Given the questions relate to how we will work together my response to the questions is contained within the response from Ms Roddick which I have set out in ANNEX A.

The progress on delivering the Promise and the cross cutting Portfolio considerations are the focus of the direction of our Cabinet Sub-Committee on the Promise which met for the first time last year. At the first meeting we discussed the importance of maintaining the pace of change required to ensure we continue to drive forward that change.

I recognise the importance of cross-portfolio work in order to ensure change needed is made across systems and services and that Ministers need to work together to ensure we aren't operating in silos. Given the links between our two portfolios, the Minister and I will continue to work closely as aligned work progresses to discuss challenges, issues, opportunities and how to ensure equality and diversity is a core aspect of work to keep the promise.

Natalie Don

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Responses

The panel think it's important that Scottish Government Ministers work together to find ways to close the poverty gap without people having to rely on charities and social security payments. Keeping the Promise is one way that children and families could be supported, but it must be delivered by a diverse workforce. **How will you, as Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise, work with the Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees to ensure that the Promise considers, reflects and supports the cultural and ethnic diversity of all of Scotland's children?**

Through the Whole Family Wellbeing Funding we are committed to investing £500 million to improving holistic family support. This funding is a key driver to addressing the challenges of child poverty by ensuring that families can access the support they need, where and when they need it. The Whole Family Wellbeing Funding is supporting local areas to transform their services and to prioritise preventative, holistic family support. This is about listening to families and taking a tailored approach to meeting their needs, instead of being driven by the local systems or structures that are in place.

In addition, our second Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, Best Start, Bright Futures, backed by a range of investment, including the £50 million Tackling Child Poverty Fund, sets out the action we will take to make progress towards the ambitious targets set out in the Child Poverty Act. This includes action designed to influence the three key drivers of child poverty reduction – increasing income for work and earning; reducing household costs; and maximising income from social security and benefits in kind – and retaining a sharp focus on supporting the six priority family at greatest risk of poverty.

As set out in Programme for Government, we will establish a new Ministerial group, focusing on the delivery of Best Start, Bright Futures across government to strengthen our approach and maximise our collective impact on child poverty. We have set out plans to expand access to funded childcare for 13,000 more children and families by the end of this Parliament – a key step in tackling child poverty. We will continue to do everything within the scope of our powers and budget in order to meet our statutory child poverty targets and be relentless in that focus.

In 2022 the Scottish Government published our Keeping The Promise Implementation Plan which sets out the actions and commitments that we will take across Ministerial portfolios to keep The Promise. This includes policy, legislative and financial actions for change. The Implementation Plan compliments the commitments made to Tackle Child Poverty, the National Strategy for Economic Transformation and is aligned with the strategic approach to education, health, justice, transport and communities.

Fiona Duncan and The Promise Scotland are leading work to develop the next Promise delivery Plan 24-30. It will be important that all partners are involved and the voice of the care experienced community is carried in the development of this single strategy, and the metrics identified to monitor its implementation, to ensure that all are clear and onboard with what they must do between now and 2030.

The Scottish Government is working with The Promise Scotland to scope the need for a national lifelong advocacy service for care-experienced people and their families which will

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help them navigate the system better ensuring their voice is heard. As part of our future delivery of the Promise, there is an opportunity to explore the scope to leverage philanthropic and social investment to accelerate investment to support our target priority families. This could help deliver a wider preventative social policy reform agenda, including reducing child poverty and improving early child development.

The Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser (OCSWA) is working alongside Scottish Association of Social Work (SASW) and other organisations to reduce experiences of racism and racist behaviour in Scottish social work. OCSWA's National Anti-racism Action Plan for the Social Work Workforce pursues the creation of an actively anti-racist culture in the Scottish social work sector. The Plan has been modelled upon the earlier Action Plan developed by SASW. By mirroring an existing action plan that is already familiar with key delivery partners within the sector, we hope our plan will ensure there is no duplication and our efforts are aligned. This Action Plan also seeks to support the adoption of the Scottish Government's Anti-Racist Employment Strategy, which is developed around 4 key areas of focus:

- Knowing your workforce through data
- Action on recruitment and representation
- Driving cultural and attitudinal change; and
- Fair Work policy context and legislation.

To that aim, the Action Plan will promote the implementation of the Strategy suggested actions, advice and resources for employers, which should help build an anti-racist workplace culture and equip employers with the necessary tools to support those having to deal with specific instances of racial discrimination. The Action Plan is a step towards dismantling institutional and systemic racism within the social work sector. It will help implement the anti-racist employment strategy that Scottish Government published in December last year, which seeks to respond to the scale and challenge of institutional racism.

The Social Work Anti-racism Oversight Group will explore ways to support and encourage employers to embed an anti-racism and intersectional approach in their employment policies and practice, with special focus to recruitment, retention and progression. Other avenues, our Action Plan will seek to support are data/building the evidence base; and creating an anti-racism workplace culture.

As set out in our Promise Implementation Plan we are working on an Advanced Social Work Practice Framework. Whilst focusing on social work practice, the development and implementation of the framework will be cognisant of the diversity of social work practice alongside the multiagency and interdisciplinary landscape which exists in all practice areas. The framework will support the workforce across a range of practice models to improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

We have set out in our Promise Implementation Plan that we will build person centred services and continue to recognise that our care experienced children, young people and families are diverse and all have different needs. We are committed to ensuring all our care experienced people are treated equally and that their individual needs are understood. In taking a person centred and rights based approach, we will continue to deliver our Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and seek opportunities to recognise and consider the impact on care experienced people throughout development of our policies.

The citizens panel has concerns that, even though diversity education in personal, social, health and economic classes has a lot of detail on issues such as sexuality, race and

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gender, there is little reflection on or understanding of cultural differences. **How are you, as Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise working with the Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees to ensure that teachers have the appropriate equalities and diversity training to fully support the teaching of cultural diversity and delivery of PSHE in a culturally sensitive way?**

A teacher's ongoing registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland is contingent on them adhering to the professional values of integrity, trust, respect and social justice. Teachers should be positive role models and demonstrate welcoming, encouraging and inclusive behaviours to ensure that everyone they encounter feels valued and is treated with respect.

In doing so, teachers align with the expectations of the Equality Act 2010 and the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, which set out the legal requirements to protect people from discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and for the provision of additional support for learning. It is the responsibility of all staff in schools to promote and facilitate a culture and ethos of equality and diversity and to address individual and institutional discrimination.

Teachers have access to a range of equality and diversity training at all stages of their careers. The General Teaching Council for Scotland has Professional Standards for Teachers which must be adhered to in order to achieve and retain teacher registration. This includes a commitment to General Teaching Council for Scotland's professional values. One of these focuses on Social Justice and includes the following "everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities now and in the future." This includes an expectation that teachers will:

- Embrace global educational and social values of sustainability, equality, equity, and justice and recognising children's rights;
- Respect the rights of all learners as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC);
- Demonstrate a commitment to engaging learners in real world issues;
- Commit to social justice through fair, transparent, inclusive, and sustainable policies and practices in relation to protected characteristics, (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation) and the impact of their intersections.

In her Teaching in a Diverse Scotland reports) Professor Rowena Arshad noted that there is a need to ensure that teachers and education staff in Scotland are racially literate and not race evasive. As a result, the Scottish Government's Anti-Racism in Education Programme worked with Education Scotland to create the award winning Building Racial Literacy Programme. The Programme promotes anti-racism as a baseline professional value. It was co-designed by a range of anti-racist experts and educators across Scotland. It is now delivering its fourth cohort, by the end of which, over 400 educators will have participated, from across all 32 Scottish local authorities.

Academics leading programmes of Initial Teacher Education at Scottish Universities have also now engaged with the programme. We are aiming to ensure that everyone involved in delivering Initial Teacher Education is able to experience the programme and utilise their learning to support students and to consider the content and context of the Initial Teacher Education curriculum.

The Scottish Council of Deans of Education has recently published its new National Framework for Anti-Racism in Initial Teacher Education. The framework contains suggested

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areas for action to embed anti-racism across Initial Teacher Education, including within the curriculum and general pedagogy.

The panel think that the universal bus pass policy has been a great way to tackle inequality and poverty, and that a similar approach should be used for free school meals, including removing stigma and barriers by taking away token schemes and raising the age of free meals to 18. **What work have you done alongside the Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees to understand the equalities impacts of the current approach to free school meals, and will she commit to carrying out work on understanding how cross-cutting successes like the universal bus pass can be replicated in other policy areas to alleviate inequality?**

The Scottish Government remains committed to the expansion of universal free school meals and our Programme for Government set out that we will work with COSLA to prepare schools and infrastructure for the expansion of universal free school meals to Primary 6 & 7 pupils during 2026. We have already made free school meals available to all children in Primary 1 – 5 and to all children in special schools, and our next phase of expansion will be to provide free meals to primary 6 and 7 pupils whose families are in receipt of the Scottish Child Payment. From Primary 6 onwards, free school meals are available to pupils if their parents or carers are in receipt of any of the eligible qualifying benefits. Our free school meal offer is the most generous in the UK and saves families taking those meals around £400 per child per year. The expansion of free school meals is one of a number actions which the Scottish Government have taken to reduce the cost of the school day for families and help ensure that children are equipped to take part in the school day.

Education authorities are responsible for ensuring that the identity of those in receipt of free school meals is protected. This requirement is to ensure that young people are not stigmatised as a result of being in receipt of free school meals.

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