Developing Effective Ethnic Minority Staff Networks

Summary Report, 18 May 2023

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About CEMVO Scotland

CEMVO Scotland is a national intermediary organisation and a long-standing strategic partner to the Scottish Government's Directorate for Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights. We aim to build the capacity of the ethnic minority voluntary sector and its communities. We have an established network of ethnic minority (EM) and public and third sector organisations throughout Scotland to which we deliver a wide range of capacity-building support programmes. Our current programmes of work include:

- Providing social enterprise development support to EM groups and social entrepreneurs
- Providing race equality and human rights mainstreaming support to Public, Statutory and Third Sector organisations
- Increasing EM representation on Public Boards
- Supporting the Scottish Minority Ethnic Women's Network (SMEWN) for peer support and influencing social policy
- Developing and supporting an EM Environmental Network to engage in climate change policy.
- Providing employability support to EM young people

Through all our areas of work we continually engage extensively with the EM sector and gather evidence on the needs and concerns affecting EM communities which help to inform our response to the development of national and local policies and public consultations.

The Race for Human Rights programme (R4HR) funded through the Scottish Government's Directorate for Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights and administered by Inspiring Scotland is designed to help public services increasingly embed equality and human rights in their strategic planning and day-to-day functions. We provide a platform to utilise the experience of people with protected characteristics to inform the policy and practice of public bodies. Sequentially, the programme supports diverse individuals and communities to increase their participation in public life. For organisations looking to better understand how to integrate equality and human rights into their work, we offer the following services:

- Consultancy support for mainstream organisations
- Mediate engagement with EM communities
- Training and webinars
- Learning workshops

This session was part of a series of workshops CEMVO Scotland has delivered in partnership with the Scottish Government. This journey began following the Scottish Government's Public Sector Leadership Summit in March 2021, which unveiled a pledge to take forward the recommendations from the Scottish Parliament Equality & Human Rights Committee's recommendations from its inquiry into race equality, employment, and skills.

CEMVO Scotland have since co-delivered the National Conference on Race Employment, which took place online in December 2021 and the Data Collection workshop in April 2022.

Introduction

This collaborative event between the Scottish Government's Fair Work and Labour Market Strategy Division (FWLMSD) and CEMVO Scotland's Race for Human Rights (R4HR) programme was an online workshop to share effective approaches to developing ethnic minority (EM) staff networks.

The purpose of this workshop was to learn more about the value of staff networks as a way of supporting minority ethnic staff in the workplace. This was achieved by:

- Sharing learning about effective approaches to establishing and maintaining staff networks.
- Understanding the different roles that senior leaders and human resource (HR) managers can play in implementing and improving practice.
- Exploring ways to address common practical challenges in setting up, supporting, and maintaining an effective staff network for ethnic minority staff.

CEMVO Scotland's R4HR programme supports the Scottish Governments ambition for Scotland's public sector to have *"improved capacity to tackle racial inequality and meet the needs of minority ethnic people"* (Race Equality Framework, 2016-2030; p. 22), by engaging with senior public body leaders to promote race equality and diversity issues.

The Scottish Government's FWLMSD has continued to engage with the public sector, and since then, has published its Anti-Racist Employment Strategy and refreshed Fair Work Action Plan.

The Anti-Racist Employment Strategy seeks to respond to the scale and prevalence of institutional racism, supporting and encouraging employers across the economy to embed an anti-racism approach to employment practice. The strategy includes:

- Practical advice and case studies
- Ways employers can evaluate and improve their current practices across recruitment, retention, and progression of minority ethnic staff.
- Ways employers can support minority ethnic staff by taking an anti-racism and intersectional approach and building an inclusive workplace culture.

The strategy also includes actions for the Scottish Government to advance the agenda to address racial inequality. These are included in the Fair Work Action Plan, which takes an intersectional and joined-up approach to addressing workplace inequalities for women, racialised minorities, over 50s workers and disabled people.

This all supports the Scottish Government's ambition to become a Fair Work Nation by 2025, with actions that include:

- The development of an anti-racism workplace training framework
- Updating the Fair Work First criteria for public sector grant funding to encourage action to address inequality for racialised minority staff.
- The development of a resource hub to support organisations to deliver Fair Work
- Work to facilitate better networking, peer support and the sharing and learning of practice across senior leaders and operational staff.

The workshop was partially recorded, and links to the segments are included at the end of the written section of the report. Please note that these are view only and not downloadable. Microsoft Office restrictions may also apply.

> You can view the video clip for this section here: Developing Effective Ethnic Minority Staff Networks – CEMVO Scotland

What learning was shared?

CEMVO Scotland's R4HR consultancy sessions have identified the top three issues in developing and maintaining staff networks. These are:

1. Not enough ethnic minority staff (either in the organisation or part of a network)
2. Senior leadership involvement
3. Accountability

Therefore, the theme throughout the workshop was connected to CEMVO Scotland's R4HR programme:

- The principles CEMVO Scotland promote.
- Developing staff networks and the models of how these are implemented.
- Case studies, understanding challenges and good approaches and applying a human rights-based approach.

Feedback from the previous session (data collection workshop) indicated a preference of shared learning through case studies. By structuring the workshop in this way, presenters were able to highlight flexible approaches taken in their respective organisations to overcome specific challenges around staff networks. Our guest speakers were:

- Priscilla Marongwe (Equality and Inclusion Network Coordinator, NHS Education Scotland)
- Sandra Deslandes-Clark (Director, SEMPER Scotland, Police Scotland)
- Chris Kimber (Equality and Diversity Advisor, NHS Lanarkshire).

Each presenter shared how the Networks are supported in their organisation, what role the Network has in the accountability process, how leadership was involved, and how they progress this channel of support and effective communication. These are presented as case studies below.

After an explorative question and answer session, breakout rooms were created as safe spaces for attendees, strategically split with those in their peer groups. This segment was designed as an active learning opportunity with solution-focused discussions. By encouraging participants to discuss how they can implement some of these principles, we noted an increase in shared learning and peer support.

Case studies

Priscilla Marongwe (Equality and Inclusion Network Coordinator, NHS Education Scotland)

NHS Education Scotland (NES) has been on a journey of anti-racism. They developed the 'Underrepresented Ethnic Minority Staff Network' – the name was decided by the members, with an emphasis on the 'underrepresented' term. Priscilla then explained the structure of Network:

- Created as a safe space for learning from each other - this is crucial for everyone because it is unfair to assume that as an ethnic minority, they know everything that is related to equality.
- There must be clear aims, such as:
  - To provide peer support
  - To have a collective voice communicating with management.
  - Operate within terms of reference
- Support, commitment and value:
  - at the top
  - operational
- Giving staff time for network activities
- Environment:
  - safe
  - peer support time

- action plan
- allies
- intersectionality
- Awareness raising
  - self
  - wider organisation
  - networking

> You can view the video clip for this section here: [Developing Effective Ethnic Minority Staff Networks – CEMVO Scotland](#)

Sandra Deslandes-Clark (Director, SEMPER Scotland, Police Scotland)

SEMPER Scotland is the primary staff association that exists to support and represent all minority ethnic employees on issues of race equality, and to ensure that the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) and The Police Service of Scotland (Police Scotland) uphold the principles and practices of racial equality.

Sandra shared notable achievements of SEMPER that influenced Police Scotland's workforce policies such as:

- The overhaul and proprietary review of the Standard Entry Test for Police Officers.
- HMICS Thematic Inspections to involve SEMPER Scotland.
- Recommendations officially included in Dame Elish's Independent Review of Complaints Handling, Investigations and Misconduct Issues in Policing.
- Ground-breaking initiative involving Minority Ethnic officers seconded to Probationer Training as Tutors.
- Introduction of the popular 'Truth to Power' Sessions that led to Police Scotland Action Plans.

Some tips that were shared were:

- Elect the right people to lead.
- Align your objectives to the Equality Outcomes of your organisation.
- Create alliances nationally and internationally.
- Clear governance and Executive commitment.

> You can view the video clip for this section here: [Developing Effective Ethnic Minority Staff Networks – CEMVO Scotland](#)

Chris Kimber (Equality and Diversity Advisor, NHS Lanarkshire (NHSL))

NHS Lanarkshire Ethnic Minority Employee Network (EMEN) was set up in response to disproportionately high COVID-19 mortality rates among minority ethnic communities. Initiated by the Interim Chief Executive in June 2020, an activity to address ethnicity data and risk assessments for EM staff was undertaken. This highlighted disparities between ethnicity data previously recorded and what they captured. During this time, there was further communication highlighting the need for staff networks, with priority given to EM staff.

The results from the questionnaire showed that 63% of the respondents rated their experience of working for NHSL as excellent/good; 80% felt they were treated fairly & consistently and 36% experienced racism. Of those who did experience racism:

- 76% experienced racism from colleagues/team members
- 80% from Patients or their Carers
- 71% did not report the incident

Following a series of activities, the following were noted as contributions to the Network's success:

- Commitment from Board and Senior Management Team.
- Highly motivated and well-connected Equality and Diversity Manager
- Equality and Diversity Advisor post created to support and develop staff networks
- Engaged and motivated Executive Committees (OD Half Day development session)
- Action Plan to highlight successes and plan future direction
- Regular newsletters
- Active recruitment (regarding diverse workforce within the organisation).

You can view the video clip for this section here: Developing Effective Ethnic Minority Staff Networks – CEMVO Scotland

Question and Answer session

A section dedicated to Q&A followed from the case studies. To provide a safe space for attendees, the recording was paused, and a summary of the questions and answers are below.

Question:

Does the NHS Lanarkshire EMEN staff network include employees of the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) who are not employed by the council and NHS? The context of this question was to highlight those members of staff who are not directly employed by local authorities and NHS boards and may be subjected to pay and conditions which are not as good as public bodies.

Answer from Chris Kimber:

Employee Networks are for NHS Lanarkshire only, but the Network is open to HSCP staff as well. There is limited support if you are employed through social care and local authorities (LA), but there are internal communications that take place between the Employee Director and leaders in HSCP.

Regarding responsibilities, NHS Lanarkshire identifies itself as an 'anchor' institution, which holds the responsibilities to improve [conditions] for a lot of the people we employ indirectly through NHS Lanarkshire and the culture, which they are part of.

Anchor organisation means that they don't move and have some of the power to change and address some of the inequalities of the communities in which we serve. The Active Bystander and cultural bullying activities will be offered to HSCP staff as well.

A further comment from the participant noted that shaping actions are easier when there is membership involvement, and equally easier to ignore issues because of the lack of engagement. They drew comparison to NHS Tayside, who have included employees of social care and local authorities in their conversations. They highlighted if there was a possibility of the non-NHS staff in Lanarkshire being supported in the same way.

Chris followed up by confirming that the second staff survey was completed, with far-reaching repercussions regarding underlying cultures behaviours, and how NHS Lanarkshire respond to bullying harassment racism and multiple levels of discrimination. This resource went out to health and social care and GP partners as well, which has highlighted several key actions to take back to the board.

Question:

How do you encourage staff participation?

Summarised response from Priscilla Marongwe:

- Word of mouth.
- Be savvy about what you are offering and how it fits in with the staff members.
  - There will be staff members who are more active that may not attend meetings etc. Perhaps, offering different options may encourage participation to suit their needs i.e., events, meetings, workshops.
- Acknowledge the barriers with hybrid working, such as the removal of interaction.
- Another tip was to send an all staff e-mail a day before a Network meeting to capture some people who either have recently joined the organisation or they are now at the stage where they feel they want to join the Network.
- To support raising the profile and publicising the Network, Priscilla shared that in NES they have developed a weekly bulletin from different leaders on different topics.
- Share information about staff networks during the induction process.

Question:

How do you start the conversation about setting up a network?

This is a question that often is asked by local authorities, which can start from the conversation around data, such as reaching the people concerned. Sometimes, it is about framing a conversation in a way that removes assumptions that may offend, such as assuming that the Network is only for somebody that needs support. Especially if these are white colleagues who feel less empowered to have that conversation.

Answer from Priscilla Marongwe:

Using the people, you have there, setting the environment and getting the right message across are all key factors in this conversation.

Allies are a good source to begin the dialogue and raise awareness of the issues that need to be addressed. This would come across differently than someone from an ethnic minority background.

One of the challenges ethnic minorities have been consultation exhaustion; colleagues referring to them as though they know everything about race equality and anti-racism. Ethnic minorities have a right to help in other ways and not what is assumed of them.

Sending the right message is crucial, that it is not just for ethnic minorities to 'to carry the banner'.

Breakout Room Summary

The aim of the breakout rooms was to encourage participants to reflect on how they can implement some approaches that have been mentioned in the presentations. These discussions were solution-focused, including lessons learned and opportunities that arose, steering away from issues that they face internally, e.g., a challenge might be low numbers of ethnic minority staff, so the discussion could be steered to cross sectoral networks.

Four questions were designed to encourage active learning and discussions. Below are the questions and a summary of responses.

Question 1. *From today's case studies, are there any approaches to staff networks that you could implement within your own organisation?*

Response:

The main themes that arose from the discussions were:

Senior leader buy-in:

- Case studies highlighted the effectiveness of **a strong leadership approach**.
- **Messaging from senior management** – it was discussed the need for it to be more than just about networks. There needs to be messaging around what the organisation is doing, its approach to addressing institutional racism, data etc., not just about a staff network. Repeated messaging will help in reaffirming the organisation's commitment and senior leadership engagement on this agenda.
- Difficulty in keeping members engaged – it was discussed the value of **leadership involvement and multiple channels of communication**.

Internal communication:

- **Communication through staff emails** focussed on how change and impact can be made in the organisation, to allow for the wider staff to see the importance of networks.

Dedicated resources:

- Reference to SEMPER's achievements via '**Truth to Power'** and the '**Reverse Mentoring Programme'.**
- The **staff network model**: combination of being a support network and safe space for staff with an allyship element.
- **Messaging to allies** that they are change agents.
- The purpose of the network to be clearly established.
- Defining what a network should. This includes addressing an anti-racism forum/network that can be wider and all for colleagues.
- **A dedicated post/resource** (as mentioned by NHS Lanarkshire presentation) to support networks.
- Having a **corporate message** that **staff have time to be involved** in a network is a strong support signal for staff. Difficulty in getting members to join up – it was discussed the benefit of taking a **goal-orientated, interest convergence approach to encourage buy-in** among EM staff, making clear it benefits staff.

- Terminology and uncertainty over what terms to use – it was discussed the importance of ensuring everyone has the right to self-identify and **letting the terminology be guided by network staff.**

Question 2: *How do you balance the responsibility (in terms of duty of care) to your workers who are involved in a network, and find themselves in positions where they are providing pastoral support/care to members of the network who are coming to the network to share issues/experiences they have faced?*

Response:

The main themes that arose from this discussion were:

Support for lived experienced/allies:

- It was recognised that staff networks that include allies can be good model, but one that also balances the **support need for those lived experiences** to have protected space within the network time.
- **Signpost to support** is key, but manage expectations of **particular support**/action from the network.
- If someone raises an issue, then it must be dealt with, but this approach needs to be covered in the ToR for the network i.e., if we identify discrimination we will act and support those affected.
- There is scope to empower vulnerable people with **choices and options** to seek either internal support or external support.
- It was also discussed the need to **check/monitor** these issues to see if progress/resolution has been made.

Resources:

- Commitment to reflecting this in their **network Terms of Reference (ToR)**.
- Ensuring there is **time/resource** within the network for those with lived experience to have a safe supportive space.
- Acknowledgement that getting a balance between managers/employers and staff can be difficult.
- Standing agenda items would be useful to ensure all issues are covered.

Question 3: *What have you done or what more could you do in your role to ensure staff network for ethnic minority staff is effective?*

Response:

The main themes that arose from this discussion:

Resource:

- Employees are granted a limited time to work in the network, but this can be a challenge if extra time is required, therefore **flexibility** is essential. It was noted from a reverse mentoring programme, **assumptions** were made that people were getting support from networks and time away from their job, but this wasn't true.
- There is **little resource** or few staff working in equality.
- Having a specific **post** where managing staff networks is an integral part of the role, ensures the **resources are there** for them to run effectively.

- A lot of work needed to set up these networks: action plans, terms of reference and leadership input.
  - Action plans are not restricted to planned work, it can be about the progress you have made, linking back to identifying what specific resources you need.

Other points mentioned were:

- Members noted they were at the **beginning of their journey**.
- Participants felt more focus should be on the **main drivers** behind it.
- It is important to make the network bespoke to individual needs.
- Group members noted the benefits of the approaches taken by NHS Lanarkshire.
- It is important that those who have **interpersonal skills, lead these networks**, but it is not easy determining who is best suited for the role.

Question 4: *When developing a network which includes allyship, what steps could you take to ensure there is still a safe space for EM staff?*

Response:

The main points that arose from this discussion were:

- **Messaging** to allies that they are change agents is a powerful message.
  - **Responsibility** does not just lie with those with lived experience.
  - Allies can come to meetings and **be informed** of what is happening.
- The **purpose** of the network needs to be very clear:
  - If it is a network of mutual support for EM staff, then where do allies fit into that? Therefore establish that this is a **safe space for EM staff**.
  - If it is an anti-racist network, then why would only EM staff be involved in that – why is it their responsibility?
- To understand what the difference is, there is a need to **facilitate wider learning and sharing**.
- A learning point from SEMPER and a HR perspective was that there is a **duty of care** so it can be difficult within a legal context to maintain a safe space for networks to openly discuss the issues they face.
- Having an **executive leadership team** as an ally who is invested in the issues, and drives initiatives and networks is crucial.

Evaluation

The event was targeted at those who attended the previous engagement sessions. With 28 people registered, 61% attended on the day (17 people). The post-session evaluation that was completed by 82% of attendees via Microsoft Forms (14 people).

All the attendees rated the workshop Good, Very Good or Excellent, with 86% agreeing that the event provided them with an improved understanding of developing a more effective ethnic minority staff network within your organisation. The remaining selected 'somewhat'.

86% of attendees elaborated on their answers such as:

- "Utilise networking opportunities to link with other boards and organisations to improve networks".
- "We have a BAME network in place Pan Ayrshire. It's not well attended so I think there were good ideas about how we communicate about it and its purpose".
- "Enabled wider considerations of how to develop and communicate the purpose of networks, and how individuals can be supported. Also, role of senior leaders and their commitment to supporting the network."
- "Learned that we may need to get our aim of the groups before encouraging participation from others."

All who attended felt that there was learning from the workshop that they could seek to incorporate into their organisation/area(s) of work.

● Yes	14
● No	0
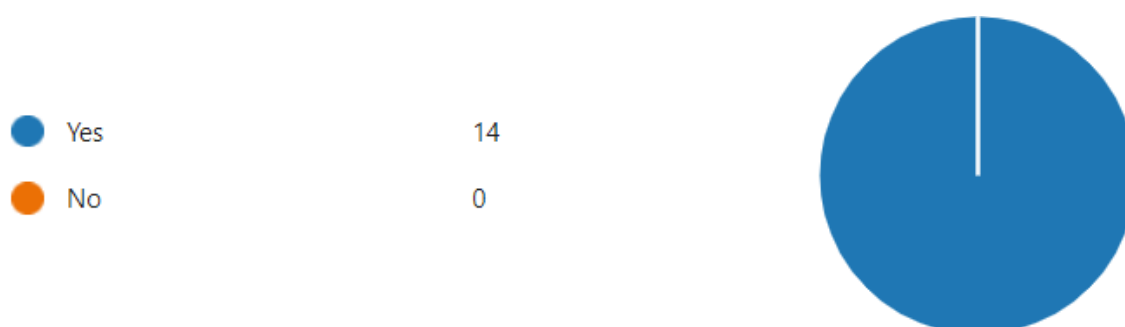
Further details were provided by 93% of respondents such as:

- "Considering the name and purpose of a group and how this is communicated".
- "Allies to leave our network early to allow for peer support".
- "Reverse mentoring and how can I corporate that"
- "Making time for networks, clear action planning for the group - purpose and reporting."
- "Seeking to establish a local network in Renfrewshire and would use the principles discussed today."
- "Importance of senior leadership buy in and identifying the right people to lead networks."

We asked participants to consider if there were any other areas of "good practice" that they would like to see our explored further through this collaboration. The following suggestions were provided:

- "Other innovation in public sector"
- "Effective recruiting of white minorities to networks rather than melanated skin"
- "Yes, I would like to see some practical examples of communications/emails used to invite staff to a new network".
- "It would be useful if CEMVO can 'distil' down all the areas of good practice which were discussed into some kind of bullet points/checklist which can be used when thinking about setting up a network".

Reflections

We would like to thank everyone who participated in this workshop, especially our guest speakers who shared their invaluable experiences and learning. Staff networks may not be applicable to all organisations, however, the importance of providing a safe psychological space to ethnic minority staff is important for their wellbeing, and to provide a channel of communication to embed the organisational culture, deliver equality outcomes and be a meaningful contributor in society.

CEMVO Scotland would like to thank the Scottish Government FWLMSD team in their support and assistance, to ensure a range of organisational leaders are involved.