



The Equality Network & BEMIS

This is a proposal for a one year assessment and development project, to promote greater recognition within the Scottish equalities environment of the needs of Black and Minority Ethnic people, who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender. The project is intended to inform future joint work between the Equality Network (a leading LGBT equality rights and equality organisation in Scotland) and [BEMIS, the Black and Ethnic Minority Information Service](#) (a leading BME rights and equality Scottish organisation), but will also provide learning to other stakeholder organisations that are committed to reducing multiple discrimination, including the ECHR and Scottish Government Equality Unit.

The Equality Network's Approach to Cross-Strand Work

At the Equality Network we are committed to reflecting the diversity of our communities and therefore partnership with other equality strands has been central to our work. We have undertaken partnership projects to identify the needs of older LGBT people and disabled LGBT people, to promote Islam awareness within the LGBT sector and LGBT awareness amongst Black and Minority Ethnic community groups. We have promoted cross-strand work and co-operation through the Equalities Coordinating Group (ECG) alongside the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Disability Rights Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality, Age Concern Scotland and the Interfaith Council. We were part of the Steering Group for the development of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and we believe our close working relationship with the previous commissions will continue with the new commissions of the ECHR and the Scottish Commission for Human Rights (SCHR). This wide range of activities means we are seen a leading organisation in promoting cross-strand approaches to equality in Scotland. Our national conference "Crossing the Strands: Equality for All 2007", with the programme featuring workshops on all seven officially recognised equality strands, highlighted the importance of cross strand work in the context of the new EHRC. When the Equality Network's main programme "Your Scotland" was externally evaluated in 2007 we were commended for our commitment to diversity. The report found "a fresh approach to cross-stand work" that has "become well ingrained into the work of Equality Network", concluding that the organisation "offers a welcome – and all too uncommon - reflection of Scotland's diversity."

We therefore welcome current developments within the equality and rights environment in Scotland; moving from an equal opportunities approach that has typically been

dominated by strand-specific activity operating as distinct “silos” to a diversity approach where there is greater recognition of the intersectionality of strands and a greater emphasis on cross-strand or horizontal approaches to promoting equality. We see the creation of the EHRC as significantly contributing to this trend, and support the commitment to promoting cross-strand work through its grant programme.

We do however feel that universal rights and values are best achieved through attention to the particular forms that discrimination takes and the specific realities of people lives; while a generic approach to diversity and discrimination can mask the persistence of hidden bias and inequalities. We therefore believe that to bring about a significant reduction in the experience of multiple discrimination overall there must focussed work on specific intersections of equality strands, which is informed by an honest appraisal of current capacity within the equalities’ sector and the historical basis for future work, and the asking of hard questions why certain groups with intersectional identities and/or facing multiple discrimination have been and continue to be poorly served.

In other words, some strands, such as race and religion, or gender and sexual orientation, have historically been “natural bedfellows” and there is already a well-established history of partnership and dialogue, and a robust community infrastructure to develop further work. Other intersections however, have proved more sensitive, complex or problematic and for whatever reasons, there has been a history of marginalisation and under-exploration of their needs within equality discourse and practice. We strongly believe that focussed activity is needed to close these equality gaps, and we further believe that the overall approach to addressing multiple-discrimination can only be strengthened by close but careful scrutiny of these more contentious areas.

The Needs of Black and Ethnic Minority People who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender

At the Equality Network we have long recognised that far more has to be done to address the intersectionality of race and sexual orientation and gender identity, which has been an under-explored and under-addressed area in Scottish equality discourse and practice. We were therefore delighted when BEMIS approached us to explore future and sustained partnership work. The senior management of both our organisations have committed to seek funding for a medium to long-term joint project in order to bring about a step-change in how both LGBT and BME community organisations, as well as generic equality and rights bodies, include, support and represent BME LGBT people.

Work to address BME LGBT issues in Scotland, however, proceeds from a very low base and we are well aware that without careful thinking and assessment of the current state of play within the Scottish equalities environment, the potential for this work not to meet expectations or needs is significant. This proposal is therefore not to fund our intended joint work, but to fund a one year preparatory project to provide a better knowledge base to meet our long term goals. Specifically the project will assess the level of recognition and understanding of the needs of BME LGBT people within national Scottish equality

and rights organisations and their approach to promoting cross race/ sexual orientation/gender identity work.

That is not to say that there is no basis from which to work. There has, for example, been a certain level of dialogue, co-ordination and friendly relations between BME and LGBT organisations at a national level, for example through the Equalities Coordinating Group, and at a locality level, for example through the Glasgow Equalities Hub. There have also been a limited number of specific initiatives, for example, in 2000 Positive Action in Housing and PHACE Scotland developed joint sexual orientation and race equality training as part of the pan-European Altering Attitudes project, while in 2006 the organisation “meem” developed a Islam awareness training course specifically for LGBT community organisations, supported by the equality Network and the Edinburgh mosque. In 2006-7 the Equality Network ran a specific BME LGBT Forum with project assistance from the NAZ project. Unfortunately as an entirely white staff group we lacked the credibility to run the Forum effectively and had no core funding to pay the NAZ project or other specialist service to take on the work directly. Relaunching and building the Forum is therefore the third project objective within this grant application.

There has however, been no sustained or dedicated activity within Scotland promoting the rights and equality of BME LGBT people, providing support or a safe social space or assessing their needs, aspirations and experiences.

Promoting Awareness and Leadership

The lack of attention to the needs of BME LGBT people compared to say, LGBT people who are disabled, is surprising given that research findings, although scarce, consistently show that BME LGBT people are at risk of facing significant social and personal costs as a result of their experience of homophobia, transphobia and racism.

For example in a UK literature review carried out by the Department of Health¹ they found that research indicated that; BME LGB people were more likely to experience homophobic violence and abuse and that BME lesbians had higher rates of smoking and problematic alcohol use. UK studies² have concluded that particular attention should be paid to the HIV prevention and sexual health promotion needs of BME men who have sex with men; that Afro-Caribbean men were more likely to have been diagnosed with HIV than other gay men and were significantly more likely to have had an STI in the last year, and that Asian men were found to have significantly more sexual partners and more casual partners.

The Department of Health review also strongly refuted the widespread contention that BME people are less likely to be LGBT. This view is also supported by Scottish surveys.

¹ Department of Health/ Dr. Julie Fish (2007) *Briefing 12: Lesbian Gay and Bisexual (LGB) people from Black and ethnic minority communities*

² Ford Hickson et al (2001) *“Time for More: Findings from the National Gay Men’s Sex Survey 2000”* Sigma Research.

Ford Hickson et al (1999) *“Evidence for Change: Findings from the National Gay Men’s Sex Survey 1998”* Sigma Research.

In cohorts of LGBT people where ethnicity has been monitored, the proportion of BME men and women closely mirror local demographics. For example in a study of LGBT youth in Glasgow, 7% were from ethnic minority groups.³ While research carried out by the Scottish Transgender Alliance in 2007, not yet published, 4% of respondents were from BME communities.

We are concerned that in Scotland, not only has there been a lack of dedicated activity but there has not been the leadership at a national level to encourage or inform such activity. The relationship between race and sexual orientation has too often been obscured, while transgender identity within BME communities is almost entirely unaddressed. For example, the following is too typical of the caution that surrounds LGBT identity within Scottish national discourse on race

*We should also consider the needs of minority ethnic communities with reference to rural areas, both living in and access to as well as the issue of multiple discrimination. By multiple discrimination we refer to the diverse needs of minority ethnic people as women, older people, disabled people, members of particular faith groups **and so on**... The issues relevant to people from minority ethnic groups in Scotland will also overlap with Gypsies/Travellers, refugees and asylum seekers as well as faith groups.⁴*

Therefore, the central objective of this project application is promote recognition and acknowledgement of BME LGBT issues by national equality bodies, in order to provide the necessary basis for partnership and dedicated activity at a local level.

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³ Nicky Coia et al (2002) Something to Tell You: A Health Needs Assessment of Young Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual People in Glasgow. Greater Glasgow Health Board.

⁴ Scottish Government *Mainstreaming Equality Home: Minority Ethnic*
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/mainstreaming/Default.aspx?pageid=403&maincat=14&showdetails=true>