Community Briefing Paper

Co-designing a new anti-racism body in Scotland with adversely racialised communities

How communities are helping to shape the new Anti-Racism Observatory for Scotland

September 2023

Contents

How to read this report

Important documents and information

To make it easy for readers to find certain important documents and information, we have put in electronic links to them where we first talk about them.

The words we have used

We have tried to make our language clear and easy to understand. However, we may still have used some words or phrases that readers have not seen before or do not understand. Where we think we have done this we have explained them, either in the text where the words appear or in a footnote on the same page.

Introduction

What this briefing is about

1) A summary of what marginalised communities[1] think about our ambitious plan to create an anti-racism[2] body in Scotland.

2) How their views are being used to inform what the new body will do.

Context

Background to the Anti-Racism Observatory in Scotland (AROS)

A series of major events in 2020—the murder of African American George Floyd, the Black Lives Matter anti-racism movement and the COVID-19 pandemic—brought racism and its impact on people's lives to the greater attention of countries and governments across the world.

That same year, the Scottish Government set up the [Expert Reference Group (ERG) on COVID-19 and Ethnicity](#). Its purpose was to 1) get a true picture of the impact of COVID-19 on minority ethnic and migrant communities in Scotland, and 2) advise the government on what it might do to reduce health inequality[3].

The ERG went on to make a series of recommendations, which the Scottish Government accepted. One of these was to set up a new anti-racism body, the Anti-Racism Observatory in Scotland (AROS). This recognised the need for a long-term approach to anti-racism in Scotland's public institutions[4]. Particular areas the ERG singled out for improvement included:

— The quality of "race"[5] and ethnicity data being recorded.

— Removing structural racism[6] from the way public institutions make policy[7].

— How public institutions are held to account for their work on anti-racism.

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[1] Communities made to feel less or not important, making it hard for them to get basic services or the same life chances as others.

[2] Removing the systems, structures, policies and practices that stop resources and power being shared fairly and justly across racialised groups.

[3] Unfair and needless differences in health between different groups in society

[4] Organisations run by the government and funded by our taxes, e.g. the NHS, the police, education.

[5] Please see ["A final note on our wording"](#) at the end of this document.

[6] When a society's laws, rules and policies treat people unfairly because of their "race" or ethnicity.

[7] A set of ideas or ways of doing things, e.g. a law, rule or process, put in place by a government or organisation.

A wide range of policies have been implemented in the last twenty or so years to bring about "race" equality. Yet, racial inequity[8] or unfairness in Scotland persists. Thus, the goal of the new body is to rid Scotland's public institutions of structural racism and, by doing so, bring about real and lasting change. Although the AROS is a new step for Scotland, it builds on work done elsewhere and internationally to design similar anti-racism bodies.

Background to the research

In April 2022, Ministers formed the Anti-Racism Interim Governance Group (AIGG). It was made up of community leaders and leaders of organisations, young people, policy and governance[9] experts and academics. All had an interest in, and lived experience of, anti-racism, racism or both. One of the AIGG's main purposes was to decide how best to co-create the new body[10].

Co-production[11], led by adversely racialised[12] communities themselves, is key to how the AROS will be both created and run. For that reason, in September 2022, the AIGG hired two community researchers to talk to people in these communities in Scotland. Their task was to tell them about the new body and ask them how it could best work for them.

Specifically, the aims of the research were to:

— Find out what people with lived experience of racism think the AROS should do and how they might want to be involved with it.

— Learn more about the diversity of adversely racialised communities in Scotland, including what other parts of their identities (e.g. gender, age, disability, and so on) might be further marginalising them.

This approach echoes that of the Scottish Approach to Service Design. Its vision is that the people of Scotland are "supported and empowered to actively participate in the definition, design and delivery of their public services (from policy making to live service improvement)". In other words, everyone in Scotland should be involved in shaping our public services.

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[8] Unfair, unjust, avoidable or remediable (i.e. can be removed) differences between people grouped by "race".

[9] In brief, how an organisation is directed and controlled .

[10] Its other purpose was to look at how public bodies, including the Scottish Government, are held to account for what they say they will do to tackle racism in their organisations.

[11] Here, working with adversely racialised communities as equal partners.

[12] Please see "A final note on our wording" at the end of this document.

The research

What we did

With the help of community leaders, young people and members of the AIGG, we co-designed a survey and a series of listening tour sessions. We then invited various community and third-sector organisations[13], including national and local "race" equality organisations, to take part. We asked them to invite other individuals and organisations in their networks to do so, too. To reach yet more people, we also shared a link to the survey publicly (online). We also put out a video and flyers explaining the AROS, the survey and why this work was different from what has been done before.

You can read more about what we did in our [full community research report](#).

What we found and how this will shape the AROS's work

A total of 531 people from across Scotland took part in this extensive community research. Most of the responses were from individuals, although some participants said they were answering on behalf of organisations. The table below summarises the findings and how they map onto our recommendations for the AROS.

Co-production[14]

What communities told us

Institutions not involving them but exploiting their knowledge and time

Communities said they want to be included and involved in the AROS's work. They also want to be paid for their involvement. More generally, they want the AROS to be open about what opportunities there are to work with it and how that work will be paid for.

What the AROS will do

Co-produce anti-racism with communities

We will make sure that community members are involved in every aspect of our work. And we will make sure that everyone is paid for their involvement. To that end, we will work with communities to draw up clear guidance on how staff will be appointed and how much they will be paid. We will produce similar guidance for community members who work with us.

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[13] Charities, social enterprises, community groups and voluntary organisations.

[14] Coming together as equal partners to build or create something.

Capacity[15]

What communities told us

A lack of skills

Communities feel it is important for public institutions to understand their experiences. They want the AROS to help train institutions to be better at this. Communities also want to increase their own capacity so that they can take part in research and shape policy.

What the AROS will do

Build the capacity of institutions and communities

We will work with experts to provide training, skills and learning opportunities, as well as guidance on research and analysis. Community members and staff in public institutions may also have the chance to learn through work placements[16] with the AROS and the Scottish Government.

Accountability[17]

What communities told us

The need to hold institutions to account

Communities are frustrated that research evidence rarely seems to lead to change. Often, they said, it is not possible to tell what was done as a result of research; if what was done worked; or if anyone had checked if it had worked.

In a different but similar vein, respondents said that a lack of follow-up was the most common barrier they faced when reporting racism to an institution.

What the AROS will do

Hold our public institutions to account

The Anti-Racism Interim Governance Group has already begun work on this. It is developing a way of tracking how the Scottish Government is responding to its Immediate Priorities Plan—its "race" equality work plan. In the future, we hope that communities will use this process to hold all our public institutions to account for their work on anti-racism.

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[15] Skills and ability.
[16] Temporary jobs to give people work experience.
[17] Making sure a person or organisation does what they say they will do.

Information

What communities told us

The need to bring information together

Communities said they are tired of being researched. What they want is for everything that has already been done to be brought together in one place. They especially want the work they have been involved in previously to be included so that it, too, can be shared more easily.

What the AROS will do

Build a digital anti-racism library

We will create a free and interactive digital library. Here, everyone will be able to find information and research on racism and anti-racism. The library will contain data and evidence that communities themselves have produced, as well as that from public institutions.

Best practice

What communities told us

Wanting best practice to be used so that their voices are heard

Communities want the AROS to help identify and share best practice to make sure their voices are heard. That includes creating safe spaces where they can explore and share their views and experiences.

What the AROS will do

Improve data and research

We will support research that identifies best practice. We will also carry out research ourselves that safely involves and listens to people with lived experience. In all of this, rather than asking communities to re-live the personal racism they have experienced we will focus on structural racism.

Communication

What communities told us

Poor communication and misunderstanding

Communities told us that a lot of public institutions still do not understand what terms like racialisation mean or how complex racism is. Often, they said, institutions do not respect or even believe their experiences.

What the AROS will do

Communicate clearly and openly

We will work to improve public institutions' understanding of racism and its impact on communities. This will include producing helpful information and resources. We will also learn from local, national and international best practice on how to talk effectively about racism and anti-racism more generally.

Advocacy[18]

What communities told us

Lack of trust and representation

Communities were concerned by public institutions' lack of trust in them and lack of action for them.

What the AROS will do

Be an advocate and speak up for adversely racialised communities

We will call for everyone to be able to take part in our work, fairly and equally. That includes individuals and academics from marginalised communities. We will also give them the support they need to be able to. In this way, the voices of communities will shape every aspect of our work.

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[18] Helping people to express their views or stand up for their rights.

Conclusions

This research was not about individuals' personal experiences of racism. It was about communities joining us in creating and sharing knowledge on how to tackle structural racism[19]. And it was about inviting communities to help shape the new body, the Anti-Racism Observatory for Scotland, that will oversee this work. As such, it marks the first step in a unique opportunity to co-create, with communities, a more inclusive[20] and anti-racist way of working.

Crucially, making sure that anti-racism informs all our work meant that how we did our research was just as important as what we learnt from it. We will continue to make sure that there is no systemic racism[21] in either how we set up the AROS or how it is then run.

From this position, we will continue to work with communities to understand and remove the systems and processes that cause racial inequity in Scotland's public institutions. And we will continue to co-create ways for communities to hold those same institutions to account for their action on anti-racism.

Next steps

We are holding a community event in November 2023, where we will share what we have learnt from this research. We will also talk about the new way of holding public institutions to account that we are co-designing with communities.

Finally, work is underway to choose the organisation that will host the AROS until it becomes fully independent.

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19 When a society's laws, rules and policies result in people being treated unfairly because of their "race" or ethnicity.

20 Where everyone who wants to or should be involved, can be.

[21] Racism that is built into our systems and our society.

A final note on our wording

There are several words that we use a lot and which we would like to explain here:

— "Race": It is widely understood that "race" is not a biological fact but a political idea that we, as a society, have invented[22]. When differences between groups are understood in terms of differences in appearance (e.g. skin colour) or other biological features, they are said to be racialised[23,24,25,26]. All groups in society can be said to be racialised in some way. But certain groups, such as communities of colour, are racialised with the aim of making them out to be somehow less worthy or important. For this reason, we refer to these groups or communities in this report as being adversely racialised or racially minoritised.

— Community: We recognise that this word is too broad to do justice to the diversity of Scotland's people. We use it here as a shorthand way of talking about communities of colour, as well as those who face racism generally, living in Scotland.

[22] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2023). *Using population descriptors in genetics and genomics research: A new framework for an evolving field.* Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/26902

[23] Miles, R. & Brown, M. (2003). *Racism.* Second ed. London: Routledge.

[24] St Louis, B. (2005). Racialization in the "zone of ambiguity". In M. Karim & S. John (eds.), *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice* (pp. 29−50). Oxford University Press.

[25] Banton, M. (2005). Historical and contemporary modes of racialization. In K. Murji, & J. Solomos (Eds.), *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice* (pp. 51−68). Oxford University Press

[26] Erel, U., Murji, K. & Nahaboo, Z. (2016). Understanding the contemporary race-migration nexus. *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 39(8), pp. 1339−1360.