

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: The experience of minority ethnic and migrant people in Northern Ireland, HC 159

Tuesday 1 February 2022

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 1 February 2022.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Simon Hoare (Chair); Scott Benton; Mr Gregory Campbell; Stephen Farry; Sir Robert Goodwill; Ian Paisley.

Questions 181 - 223

Witness

I: Kenneth Fraser, Head, Racial Equality Unit, The Executive Office.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– Kenneth Fraser, Head, Racial Equality Unit, The Executive Office – [MEM0033](#)



Examination of witness

Witness: Kenneth Fraser.

Q181 **Chair:** Good morning, colleagues, and welcome to this session in our ongoing inquiry with regard to the experiences of minority ethnic and migrant people in Northern Ireland. We have had a few apologies from colleagues this morning. Mary Kelly Foy, Claire Hanna and Fay Jones are all off, as I understand it, on compassionate grounds, so their apologies are noted.

Our witness this morning is Ken Fraser. Mr Fraser, welcome and thank you for joining us. You are, as I understand it, the head of the Racial Equality Unit in the Executive Office at Stormont. You are speaking in a personal capacity, again as I understand it, and you have requested to make an opening statement. The floor is yours.

Kenneth Fraser: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman. I just wanted to convey to the Committee my enormous gratitude at them allowing me to appear before them and to give evidence on what is happening here. I make no bones about the fact that things are not going as well as they should do in respect of our work on racial equality and that corrective action needs to be taken as a matter of urgency.

I have provided the Committee and its members with what I suppose I could call a cheat sheet, which covers lots of the ground that they may be interested in. If they wish to ask anything on any of the stuff that I have put down there, I will be very happy to try to respond. If they want to contact me subsequently to ask any further questions that may occur to them in terms of *l'esprit de l'escalier*, I will be happy to provide written answers through the secretariat.

That is about it, but it is such an enormously important topic. It is crucial that we get it right and we have not been getting it right. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Q182 **Chair:** Thank you for that. We are grateful to you for it. Can I just ask for your confirmation on this—or not, as the case may be? As a Committee, we see you giving important evidence, albeit in a personal capacity. We are viewing the evidence and things that you tell us this morning as clearly being very separate from your recent claim with Stormont. Are you able to clarify that these are two very distinct and separate things?

Kenneth Fraser: Indeed so.

Q183 **Chair:** I am grateful to you for that. Maybe you could just set the scene for us, if you would be so kind. Could you tell us what your role is and what it is involved with in the Executive Office? How long have you been in post?

Kenneth Fraser: I have been in post for a very long time. Unusually for a civil servant, I have stuck in the same post now for getting on for 20 years. I am not from Northern Ireland originally. I was recruited to the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

post to provide expertise and experience on race issues. I turned up in 2002 to assume my post and have been working there ever since. Unlike usual civil servants, who you often find are jacks of all trades, I wanted to have a mastery of race issues and I found it a congenial job, so I have been there since then.

Q184 **Chair:** When you say you have been “stuck” in the job, that is not a pejorative analysis.

Kenneth Fraser: Sorry; no, absolutely not. There is nowhere that I would rather be and I have resisted any suggestion that I should move on. I do very much care for this. I have a lot of good friends in the minority ethnic sector and it is a most congenial post from my point of view.

Q185 **Chair:** Could you say a little about the team that you head up, in terms of size and bums on seats, and the financial resources that you have available to you?

Kenneth Fraser: I should clarify at this time that I have been on sick leave for one and a half years now, so I do not know what the current dispositions are in terms of staff, nor do I know what the current budget is. What I can say is that, while I was there and working, I was constantly complaining about lack of resource, both financial and in terms of staff. When I got fully staffed, there were about five people working for me right across race. As soon as something turned up that was deemed to be a ministerial priority, I would get staff removed from me. When NDNA came out, my unit was treated as though it was car-breaking for spares. People were removed from me and used to do work on NDNA, on the grounds that these were ministerial priorities.

Q186 **Chair:** In terms of the team that you had under you when you were not on sick leave, were they recruited from within the Northern Irish civil service or Northern Ireland local government? Was expertise brought in from GB or elsewhere? What was the pattern of recruitment?

Kenneth Fraser: The pattern of recruitment was simply that they recruited people from within the NICS. There was no particular expertise. Insofar as there was any expertise there, it was in my head and it was because I had set about gaining expertise. This was a constant problem for me. It is in no small measure down to that that you find me on sick leave at the moment. I was seeking to suggest that we needed real expertise on this. I made no bones that I would like to see a professionalisation of the people dealing with race. We do not have that. I had a new boss drafted in, who started out by finding it rather amusing that they knew nothing whatsoever about race. That is not a good place to be starting.

Q187 **Chair:** Referring back and reflecting upon your 20 years of public service, paint for us, if you will, a thumbnail sketch of the size of the issues you have been dealing with and of the increasing or growing diversity within the population that makes up Northern Ireland. Could you give us a little



scene-setter?

Kenneth Fraser: Yes, certainly. When I joined in 2002, there was a relatively small, relatively stable minority ethnic population. With greater economic development, with peace consolidating itself in Northern Ireland, and with it being recognised as a place where there were economic opportunities, the minority ethnic population expanded fairly substantially, particularly with the joining of the A2 and the A5 back in the mid-2000s. We started getting a very much bigger and more diverse community to deal with. To an extent, we were playing catch-up on this. We did not have any legislation dealing specifically with race issues until 1997.

Chair: We will come on to the legislation bit in due course.

Kenneth Fraser: I kept trying to build expertise and capacity, and just to build numbers in terms of our ability to deal with this, but it did not happen. We made a start with the publication in 2005 of the racial equality strategy, which I drafted. It set out key things that we had to do. Most of these key things still have not been done, like ethnic monitoring or revamping the legislation to deal with current circumstances. Most of the things have not been done. The real difficulty is getting people to do the things that they would not be doing otherwise and that would make a proper advance on this. Until we get ethnic monitoring in place, we will not have a yardstick to judge whether or not we are succeeding anywhere. We will not know whether we are gaining anything.

Q188 **Chair:** I have two more scene-setter questions. Did you request, in your desire to grow the team, both qualitatively and quantitatively, for experts from, let us say, urban local government in England—Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol or Liverpool, which are areas with a long-established history of racial diversity—and, if you did, what was the response? Where was the logjam? Was it the Minister who you reported into or was it the Treasury and the cheque-signer?

Kenneth Fraser: My difficulty has always been with managers rather than Ministers. Ministers understand it and get it, but sometimes bosses do not get it quite so readily. They have competing priorities in these things. I deem myself to be a reasonable source of expertise. I spent most of my adult life in Brixton, Peckham and Tooting, with people who know inner-city south London.

Chair: Yes, indeed, a good training ground.

Kenneth Fraser: Yes. What we felt we needed then was to impart some sort of structured approach to getting people up to speed on it. We needed to grow our own expertise. There was an extent to which we could import it but we needed to be able to grow it ourselves. We worked with academics to try to get up to speed on that. I made good contacts with lots of academics across the piece.

Q189 **Chair:** That is helpful. Just to state the blindingly obvious—and you may



HOUSE OF COMMONS

or may not be able to answer this—you have told us that you have been on sick leave for coming up to two years; could it be that things have dramatically changed in those two years? Do you have any inkling of that, or has the status quo just been maintained?

Kenneth Fraser: My inkling is that pressure has told, to a certain extent, and extra people have been recruited, so I understand. I have to say that, having seen the draft refugee integration strategy, it is a poor piece of work. It is misleading and there are flaws to it. It is not good. There is a lot of stuff coming through that is not particularly good.

Just yesterday, I was checking out the TEO website, which has been advertising Northern Ireland Civil Service cultural competence webinars.

Chair: That sounds rather Orwellian.

Kenneth Fraser: In actual fact, it is presenting a lot of different minority ethnic groups, ethnicities or nationalities, but presenting them solely as cultural artefacts. It is people doing Indian dancing, Polish papercutting or South American whatever. It is not treating people as people who can contribute in terms of ideas, economic power and things like that. It is saris and samosas, basically.

Chair: That is a phrase that is going to stick with me.

Kenneth Fraser: It is not original.

Chair: You need not have told me that. You could have claimed the authentic authorship of that phrase and I would be none the wiser, but thank you nonetheless.

Q190 **Stephen Farry:** Good morning, Mr Fraser. I just want to follow up with a range of questions in relation to the racial equality unit and the various racial equality strategies. First of all, could you outline in a bit more detail the role you have had as the head of the racial equality unit within the Department, first of all in drafting and, secondly, in implementing the different racial equality strategies during your term in office?

Kenneth Fraser: Yes. "Term in office" sounds very grand; it is earning a buck or earning a penny. It was my responsibility, first and foremost, to draft and pull together a strategy. I have written two strategies now. The first one was very welcomed and the second less so. I was trying to use the strategy as a primer for other civil servants as to what racism meant, how racism occurred and things like that. Sadly, they decided that they preferred a short strategy rather than a full one, when the second strategy was published in 2015.

My job then was also to try to implement the racial equality strategies. To an extent, it was experimental. We sought to find out how best to go about doing this, whether it was producing a plan and what the plan might look like, but you can see the difficulty. We probably averaged about four people over that period of time, including myself. Our remit then was to spread racial equality not just through Stormont but through



the six counties, so right across Northern Ireland. You cannot do that with that number of staff, quite honestly.

There is an extent to which jobs in places like TEO require you to do set pieces like drafting strategies, etc, and there is an extent to which there is also feeding the machine, which means catering to what MLAs ask you to do, etc, and doing all these different things that you need to in order to keep the Department accountable and readily responsive. With three or four people, you cannot do these things. With the best will in the world, you cannot cover the area that you should be covering.

Q191 **Stephen Farry:** Just to confirm, are you telling us that the current strategy that is in place is a weaker version of the first draft that you originally submitted?

Kenneth Fraser: I believe it is a lesser version, because, for instance, it has no evidence in it. There is not an evidence section in it. I wanted an evidence section to go in it, because, along with ethnic monitoring, that is what you get purchase on other people with.

Q192 **Stephen Farry:** To clarify, you say you understand it to be a weaker version. Did you do the final draft of the strategy or was that a different team?

Kenneth Fraser: I finished it up to a certain level and it was then cut back by my boss. The evidence section in particular was removed by him, because he thought that Ministers might take exception to it, because it suggested that Protestants might be less prone to being positive towards minority ethnic people than Catholics would be.

Q193 **Stephen Farry:** In terms of the current strategy as it stands, has sufficient progress been made in implementing what is in the strategy, albeit a weaker version?

Kenneth Fraser: Absolutely not. To my certain knowledge, we have had, since 2011, guidance for implementing ethnic monitoring across Stormont. Nothing has been done with that. You may imagine that doing something like that will require quite a lot of people to go out and advise and help different Departments as to what we are looking for and how they can go about achieving it. Again, with three or four people, you cannot do that.

It is worth bearing in mind that a lot of what government does is protecting the status quo. A lot of what we had to do in these circumstances was to challenge the way things were done already, and it makes clear in the strategy that this is one of the things that we have to be clear on. Racial equality and good race relations present a particular set of issues for the NICS, so we are required to rethink all aspects of how we deliver services. The thrust of racial equality is about challenge, change, updating and making our arrangements fit new circumstances, more enlightened attitudes and a radically changed demography. That is what we are trying to do.



You do not make many friends when you turn up and say, "Listen, you have been getting it all wrong previously. This is how you have to do it". You need backing from your bosses. You need the people to go out. You need to be able to explain why these things need to be changed. You need to have literacy in order to do this sort of thing. Frequently, it is much easier to say, "Yes, the status quo is fine", and what I constantly got from my bosses was that the status quo was fine and, "Why are we not doing it the way we have always done it?"

Q194 **Stephen Farry:** When I was a Minister, I did not like the very strict hierarchical structures in Departments. I always liked to deal directly with the grade 7s who were often doing most of the work. Have you had any chance to raise your concerns with other, more senior officials or, indeed, directly with Ministers in your Department, or was it always filtered through your director?

Kenneth Fraser: I have tried to raise the issues with my immediate line managers. I have tried to raise them with special advisers. I have whistleblown, but the whistleblowing has not achieved anything yet. It has not, as far as I can see, reached its conclusion, but I doubt whether anything will happen. I have been to the Northern Ireland Audit Office. I have been to the commissioners. I have been to the Equality Commission on all of this. Understandably, the Equality Commission does not want to bite the hand that feeds it. In terms of the others, you require racial literacy to understand why racial literacy is so important. If you do not have that, you just dismiss it out of hand. Thus far, my problem is having things dismissed out of hand.

Q195 **Stephen Farry:** Just going back to the policy issues, given that the current strategy runs to 2025, what would you highlight within it as being the key areas that need more emphasis at present compared to what is currently being placed into them?

Kenneth Fraser: The key areas that need to be dealt with are those that I identified back in 2005. The key areas are legislation, ethnic monitoring and literacy. People need to be able to understand why all these things are happening. They will not be committed to ethnic monitoring unless they understand the issues around literacy. They will not be able to grasp what is going on unless they understand the issues around literacy.

You asked me, if I may, Mr Farry, about whether I reported these to my boss. Part of the problem that led to me being on sick leave at the moment is something that appeared on an internal NICS website.

Stephen Farry: Perhaps, Mr Fraser, we should not go into too much detail around internal issues in the Department.

Kenneth Fraser: No. It was a "getting to know you" for grade 3s. It asked, "If you could meet anyone in the world, dead or alive, who would it be and why?" A gentleman wrote, "Nelson Mandela, a visionary leader with a fantastic sense of rhythm and great shirts". That is racist



HOUSE OF COMMONS

stereotyping, so I said, "No, you cannot say that", and that opened up a whole world of pain.

Stephen Farry: I am just conscious that we need to be slightly cautious about attributing anything to any individuals in the civil service.

Chair: Mr Farry, you are right. Have you finished your questions?

Q196 **Stephen Farry:** I have one final question. Taking you back to solid policy areas, could you briefly explain to us why the monitoring issue is so pivotal, in your estimation?

Kenneth Fraser: Because you need to know how many people are receiving the services that you are giving out. If you find, for instance, that no Indian or Chinese people are availing of your services, you need to know why. There is something that is wrong or that is not meeting the needs that they have and should legitimately be provided. Only then can we see whether we are providing services, etc, on an equal basis.

Q197 **Ian Paisley:** Thank you, sir, for your evidence. I should declare that I was a Minister in the Department when you were in post in 2007, just for the record, although I do not think that our paths ever crossed at that point.

The Executive Office is telling us that progress is being made and that they are now directing resources more than ever towards dealing with ethnic minorities. The ethnic minority fund was established to create a strategy for Traveller groups and Roma, and for racial equality champions in each Department. Is it just stuck in the mud or is it showing roots of hope, that it is growing and that there is an opportunity for this to develop in terms of Executive Office support, or are you completely sceptical about the policy and the approach?

Kenneth Fraser: I am worried that it does not perceive the need to have the expertise. I am worried that it is trying to make it up as it goes along. If you get expertise, you can make sure that stuff is right from the very beginning. It is clear from the refugee integration strategy that it does not have the expertise or that they are not deploying the expertise there. I would love to go back to work. I am in a position to be able to go back to work, but I am doubtful as to whether I would get the welcome that I should do going back there.

Ian Paisley: Maybe after today, that is less likely. Who knows?

Kenneth Fraser: It is entirely plausible. My view is that we are not giving minority ethnic people the service that they deserve. It is not comfortable for me to come on here. It is not comfortable for me to be off, but I feel that they are being cheated by people who are not doing what they are paid to do.

Q198 **Ian Paisley:** On that point, it is very brave of you to put your head above the parapet. A lot of people just do not do that, so we should put that on record.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

There is now a large indigenous population of ethnic Chinese in Northern Ireland. That was the case throughout the 1970s and 1980s. They are very well integrated and very much part and parcel of Northern Ireland and its identity. Have they been given a fair deal or have they just been allowed to get on with it?

Kenneth Fraser: There is an extent to which they have been allowed to get on with it. I am pleased and proud that we have paid money towards getting the Chinese Welfare Association and its building up and running, which has proved to be a very valuable commodity.

Chair: We visited a couple of weeks ago as a Committee, and it was very encouraging to see.

Kenneth Fraser: Good. I am glad that you have seen that, because things are being put in place. We have worked hard at doing this over a certain period of time. Occupational segregation is still an issue. I say this at the risk of being shot down again. I did not get on well in front of the committee in Stormont, but there is still a great degree of occupational segregation, where it is supposed that Chinese people will work in takeaways or restaurants. We need to make sure that, if they do that, it is because that is what they want to do and not for want of other opportunities for them to use their talents.

Q199 **Ian Paisley:** I must say that many of the Chinese people who I know are accountants, in the business community or hoteliers, right across the entire section of the community, and not stereotyped by that. Indeed, I know at least two Chinese people who have been so proficient in business that they have received MBEs from Her Majesty the Queen, which is very encouraging.

Just finally, there is an increase in people from Hong Kong coming to the United Kingdom. Something like over 70,000 of them have come in under BNO status in the last year and a half or two years. Government have set aside several million pounds to the Executive to help welcome new Chinese BNO status people to Northern Ireland. Had you any dealings with that or the helping of setting up that fund? Do you know if it is being spent or allocated, is it just sitting there in a pot, or is it being disbursed everywhere else?

Chair: It probably post-dates Mr Fraser's sick leave.

Kenneth Fraser: Yes, it does. One should manage to accommodate a certain number of people without any difficulty, as long as we make sure that it is not at the expense of people who are already here, because that would set up a conflictual situation.

Q200 **Scott Benton:** Good morning, Mr Fraser. Thank you for joining us. In your answer to previous questions from the Chair around budgetary issues and issues relating to the staff at your disposal, you expressed a number of concerns that you do not necessarily have either the finances or the team you would like in order to implement some of the strategies and to do some of the work you would like to do. Can you elaborate upon



HOUSE OF COMMONS

those concerns in more detail, if you would not mind, both in terms of the budget and in terms of the number of staff at your disposal, and whether or not that is enough to discharge your duties? I appreciate that you have not been in active duty for a couple of years, but if you could speak from your experience where it was two years ago, that may be helpful.

Kenneth Fraser: We would need a Bill team to do the legislation. We would need a team to do ethnic monitoring, and I would hope that team responsible for implementing ethnic monitoring would have the necessary number of statisticians and the necessary number of people, so that they can do that in a way that is most appropriate for each Department and covers the issues that need to be covered.

We would also need to be spreading race literacy as far as we possibly could, so we need to be able to get people out to do the training that is required. We need to get people out to do the refugee integration strategy. I would envisage that, however that comes back and whatever it looks like when we get the results back from the consultation, it will require a certain amount of work.

We need to be assured that the resources in terms of staff and finance are kept stable, so that we can do the planning that is necessary for this. We have something called the minority ethnic development fund and, all too frequently, we would not hear whether we were getting any money for the minority ethnic development fund until after April. We were being told that, for the money that was to be distributed from 1 April onwards, we would not know whether we had any to do that, so people were living in circumstances where they were dependent for their wages on the minority ethnic development fund, the people who were supporting different communities, but they would not know whether they would have the money to pay their mortgage up until the very last moment.

Q201 **Scott Benton:** In addition to the racial equality unit, the Department also has a racial equality legislation team and a newly established racial equality migration branch. Does the establishment of some of these different units demonstrate that the Executive Office is, indeed, now beginning to take these issues more seriously and to accord to them the importance that people would expect? Is that a fair comment?

Kenneth Fraser: It is fair to say that, clearly, it has been stung by people complaining that things are taking way too long to be put in place. If it was guaranteeing that these members of staff would be there for some length of time in the future and if that was the guaranteed complement, I would welcome that, but, as I said, we have had people before and we have started to think that we can plan properly, and then people have been lifted from us.

Q202 **Scott Benton:** Constituents sometimes write to me when they see, for example, adverts on the internet for the NHS, education services or councils in relation to racial equality officers, heads of inclusion and diversity and so forth, often on six-figure salaries to the taxpayer. The



total cost UK-wide to the taxpayer of those positions would no doubt be in the tens if not hundreds of millions of pounds. That is not necessarily detracting from the importance of these issues, but some people would argue that it is a legitimate question to raise about where scarce public resources are sometimes allocated and the extent to which they achieve frontline objectives and delivery of public services. Is that a valid point?

Kenneth Fraser: If people are asking these questions, we have probably not properly explained what is going on and the extent to which we are reliant upon minority ethnic people to provide the services that we have. Not only are they consumers of services but they are providers of services. I damaged my hip recently, following a fall, and I was taken to hospital. Most, if not all, people who dealt with me were of foreign extraction. The surgeon was Egyptian and the nurses were Filipino, etc. We need to make it clear that these people are contributing to our society.

As for six figures, if you could pass me any of the adverts that you see on this, I would be delighted, because it is not like that in Stormont.

Scott Benton: I will gladly do so. They are often in various media outlets, so I will be sure to do that.

Q203 **Chair:** Mr Fraser, the Executive Office has told us that its Together: Building a United Community strategy on good relations “has encompassed the increasing diversity of our community in Northern Ireland”, and yet we have heard from some others that, in actual fact, trying to get a handle on the core data is very tricky, because figures are very often amalgamated with those from Scotland. I would welcome your thoughts on that as a point.

Kenneth Fraser: It is covered in my paper but I will mention it. It says, “TBUC prefigures the second racial equality strategy as follows”, and, “It is driven forward within the delivery architecture established under the strategy”. It goes on to say, “Chapter 6 will explain how it is going to be done”, and this figures together TBUC and the racial equality strategy.

When you turn to chapter 6, there is nothing at all about how it will ensure that it makes a difference to the lives of members of minority ethnic communities. The sole mention of race or racism is a trivial mention. The answer here is no, it is not working. There should be synergies here but there are not synergies here, and the minority ethnic sector appreciates this.

In 2016, it was decided that the Stormont Departments should be reorganised. It was decided that TBUC should stay with TEO and that the Department for Communities should get race. I pointed out to them that you cannot divide up Government functions according to whether they are for white people or for black people. They had not worked this one out. This is a thing where, barring me, they did not have expertise. I said that the last time anyone divided things up in this way would have been in early 1960s South Africa. You cannot do that. They got as far as



HOUSE OF COMMONS

having Peter Robinson announce it but, fortunately, they changed it before it became concrete. It is an example of where things go badly wrong if you do not have the expertise available.

Q204 **Chair:** Reverting to your “saris and samosas” comment, we have, as a Committee, heard in evidence a feeling from the communities that we are inquiring into that very often they feel that things are done to them rather than with or for them.

Kenneth Fraser: Yes.

Q205 **Chair:** Some have pointed to—and colleagues have questioned—whether that is, in any way, due to the understandable imperative to balance the green and the orange, forgetting that there is a growing segment of new people in Northern Ireland who align themselves with neither tradition, and also a lack of political engagement, leading, therefore, to a very quiet—if, indeed, audible—political voice. Your thoughts on that set of assumptions would be appreciated.

Kenneth Fraser: I have long been an advocate of doing some sort of consideration as to whether the balance between the amount of money that is given for green and orange and that given for black and white is right. It may well be that the balance is right, but I honestly believe that no one has done this. When it comes to green and orange, things can be magicked up very quickly. “Ministerial priority”, says such-and-such boss. They know that this is the way to get appreciated by their Ministers.

There is that difficulty there, where we do not know the balance properly. There is also the difficulty with minority ethnic groups that some are exceedingly reluctant to make a noise in a way that green and orange would not necessarily be. They do not wish to be seen to be demanding things or whatever.

Q206 **Chair:** To what do you ascribe that? Is it a fear of drawing attention to them?

Kenneth Fraser: There are cultural issues. There are practical issues. For instance, if you are an asylum seeker, you will not want to stick your head above the parapet like me. There are these issues there. The longer-term solution and approach is to see representatives in the political parties, and political parties opening themselves up to recruiting. I have tried to improve our communications with minority ethnic people. I have tried through the racial equality subgroup and thought that that was a bit of a winner. The problem is that you have to keep renewing these things, because they can become stale and solidified in some way.

Again, it is down to issues. If I could spend my time going out and talking to people, and finding out what their problems were and conveying them backwards, and encouraging them to meet people and encouraging Ministers etc, to meet them, that would be far better than what happens just now.



Q207 **Chair:** In GB, we would always say that the role of local government is very important, particularly as a way of feeding into Members of Parliament, Ministers, officials and advisers. What is the locus between your office, local government and other providers in, for example, education or health?

Kenneth Fraser: In practice, on the black and white side, we have not managed to do very much at all. With three, four or even 10 people, it would still be very difficult. We have managed to link up rather better with them through the work that we have done on resettling Syrian refugees, for instance. There are possibilities to be achieved through the different councils—some are more proactive than others—but we would need to be able to have the people to go along and talk to them about that, and we simply have not had that possibility.

Q208 **Chair:** It would be fair to say that it certainly seems to us, from what we have heard in different bits of evidence, that many people see this is a very Belfast-centric issue and forget that it is something that affects the whole of Northern Ireland.

Kenneth Fraser: I am sure we will see increasing numbers of minority ethnic people spreading out to different parts of the north, so we need to get that right.

Q209 **Chair:** Just to very briefly clarify the relationship between Stormont and local government, would you characterise it as being top-down or as local government feeding into strategies as they evolve, providing information, making requests for funding and suggesting initiatives? How does the dynamic work?

Kenneth Fraser: There is a much closer relationship, to be fair, on TBUC. We would not be funding local government. We try to work with it when we can, but it has not occurred that often. It is a missed opportunity, quite frankly.

Chair: We were certainly picking up that trend of analysis.

Q210 **Scott Benton:** Mr Fraser, earlier on, in relation to racial literacy, I think you remarked—and forgive me if I did not quite take this quote down correctly—that you need racial literacy to understand why racial literacy is so important. Can you outline your concerns about the level of racial literacy in Northern Ireland? What steps should the Executive be taking to improve this?

Kenneth Fraser: We need to have people carefully appreciate how racism may occur, what racism looks like and how we can go about tackling that. The capacity to do that is pretty underexploited. I am trying to think of ways that we can do this properly. We set up a contract with a group from Leicester to train the racial equality champions who we had. I went off on annual leave and, when I came back, found out that the contract had been cancelled. It is just not good enough.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

We need to be able to make sure that there are people who have sound knowledge of what is going on and of what it is like for minority ethnic people being treated badly, so that they can address these issues. If I went to talk to people in any Department in Stormont about microaggressions or white privilege, or any of these things that we have got used to talking about, I am not certain that they would know what I was talking about. It is a grave difficulty.

While we do not have that expertise, if we do not look carefully at everything through that perspective, we run the risk of finding ourselves making the same mistakes that were made in England in the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, or in Scotland in the 1990s or 2000s. It is a very complicated and difficult issue. It is an academic issue, and that is why I want to see it professionalised. People are making it up as they go along. They are saying, "I do not see colour". You may not see colour but everyone else does. You have to try to draw these out.

If you are in London, for instance, you know about Windrush, New Cross and Stephen Lawrence, but you would not necessarily know about it if you know about it simply from a Northern Ireland perspective.

Q211 Scott Benton: In the USA, some people who have suggested that racial literacy needs to be improved have voiced their support for critical race theory being taught in schools. In the press this weekend, I noticed that Brighton and Hove Council is liaising with its local education authority to see if this is something that could be taught, in some way or another, in schools within that particular area in England. Anecdotally, I have had some feedback from my constituents on such a proposal, and the vast majority of people in Blackpool would find such a concept to be somewhat patronising and certainly not required in schools in Brighton and Hove. Could you expand on the next generation within Northern Ireland, and whether or not you would consider critical race theory being taught in schools to have some advantages, or whether or not you would share some of my concerns regarding rolling that out?

Kenneth Fraser: You say the vast majority of your constituents. I am wondering if these are the vast majority of your black constituents or the vast majority of your white constituents, or both. I would not want to embrace or endorse critical race theory, but I would certainly wish that people would examine these issues.

There is a very interesting document, which I can certainly let members know about, from Runnymede Trust. It is about what you should be doing about schooling and race literacy. It is very valuable and I will happily drop an email to your secretariat.

Chair: That would be helpful, thank you.

Q212 Sir Robert Goodwill: Good morning, Mr Fraser. In oral evidence to us, the Executive Office said that internal training and development has been identified as one of the key areas for immediate progress. What kind of



training and development is needed to support staff?

Chair: Robert, I am so sorry to interrupt. I am going to crave your forgiveness. Mr Campbell wanted to come in after Scott's question, and I forgot. My apologies.

Q213 **Mr Campbell:** Mr Fraser, some time ago, in answer to a separate question, you said that your Department was working up a strategy or a report, and a senior civil servant had said to you that it would need to be changed because it would find some difficulty or lack of acceptance in the Protestant community. Do you remember saying that some time ago?

Kenneth Fraser: Indeed so, yes.

Q214 **Mr Campbell:** Did the irony of that comment strike that civil servant when you look at some of the very good and excellent work that is done by some of the ethnic minority centres where volunteers work and people come for assistance, many of which are based in loyalist areas?

Kenneth Fraser: I am not sure that this gentleman had a very refined sense of irony, but all I can do is endorse what you have said. If there is a problem here, it is a problem that needs to be discussed. If there is good practice here, it is something that we need to display and to spread further. I cannot disagree with you there. There is some excellent work being undertaken up in the Londonderry direction.

Q215 **Mr Campbell:** Mr Fraser, you are not at work at the moment, but if you were back, given what you have said over the past 45 minutes or thereabouts, and you had a blank sheet of paper and were asked to put on two or three subject areas to break the logjam that you seem to have a sense of frustration about, what would they be?

Kenneth Fraser: I would want to see a curriculum drafted up for approval for racial literacy. I would want to see something doing about ethnic monitoring and the establishment of a group of people to help with ethnic monitoring. I would want to see some work going on, on the ground, with different communities, to see how we could engage with them and deal with issues like refugees, asylum-seekers and community cohesion. These are the three things that I would like to see, and I would like to see that last one built on in particular. I would like to be able to engage with you on that.

Q216 **Sir Robert Goodwill:** I was asking a little about training and professional development within the civil service and also within local government in Northern Ireland. I wondered whether that should be targeted at the 98% of the workforce who are ethnic white, from whichever tradition, or whether we should look at fast-tracking and picking people who are already in the civil service, who you could bring through as exemplars to others who might wish to see that as a career path for them.

Kenneth Fraser: Indeed so. We have this thing called racial equality champions, and we had thought that these racial equality champions—



HOUSE OF COMMONS

one for each Department—might be the way forward. Unfortunately, if you put in place as racial equality champions people who have no racial literacy, you find yourself in a bit of difficulty. They are not going to be able to pull that further on. We need to establish some sort of curriculum that would make sense and find out who can deal with it, and we could then start establishing people who would be in a position to address this. Things like cultural competence webinars might then make more sense in that context, for instance.

We would need to ensure that we engaged with people from other jurisdictions within the UK at this stage, and with academics, to make sure that we had covered all our bases. If you start getting things wrong, Sir Robert, you are placing problems for the future. At times, it looks like we are going through all of the mistakes that were made in England, Scotland and Wales in the past and we are committing these again. We should be able to avoid that and to learn from their experience. If that means bringing people across, so be it. I would happily work with anyone who was able to do that.

Q217 Sir Robert Goodwill: I appreciate that you have been a little out of the loop for the last two years, but are you aware that progress has been made in terms of this internal training that was identified as lacking?

Kenneth Fraser: I would be interested to see it. I would be interested to know what it involved. As I said, what we have here are cultural competence webinars, which are not what are needed and not what minority ethnic people would recommend for them to be better included within Government spheres.

Q218 Sir Robert Goodwill: Finally, in your written evidence, you suggest that an enforcement mechanism is required to retain minority ethnic staff. Can you describe what that mechanism would include?

Kenneth Fraser: I would certainly want to see better than what is happening at the moment. Currently, the NICS declares itself to be anti-racist and that it is your duty to call people out if they do anything racist. The mechanism there is simply for people to take a case against whoever it is who they see doing this, so the Departments sit on their hands or stand watching, while it is left up to individuals to do this. That does not seem to me to be the way forward or to be an anti-racist approach.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development brought out comprehensive information as recently as last year about how you can go about tackling this issue. I have written to human resources people over and over again, saying, "Would you not think of trying this? Are you willing to see if your expert body is willing to help you devise the way forward on this one?" but I hear no reply.

Q219 Sir Robert Goodwill: Just following on from that briefly, do you feel that, in terms of initial recruitment, anonymised CVs might be helpful? We have seen quite extreme examples of where identical applications



have gone in, one from Mr Patel and Mr Smith, and they have been treated in different ways. Would that be one way forward?

Kenneth Fraser: There must be a number of ways in jurisdictions where this manifests itself as a greater problem because there are a larger number of minority ethnic people applying for those jobs. I would certainly be willing to look at that. It is something that you must do. It seems to me that Northern Ireland could be, with just a little bit of extra concentration, an exemplar of how we go about these things. That will benefit everyone, but it is not happening at the moment.

Q220 **Stephen Farry:** Just building on the last answer to Mr Goodwill about Northern Ireland having the potential to be an exemplar, that is something that we could do with innovation, given our size. As a Committee, we have heard from the Executive Office that it is now consulting on new race relations legislation. We also understand that a new refugee integration strategy is underway and has recognised and has plans to improve ethnic monitoring and data collection. Appreciating that you have been away from this for over a year, has the office, from what you understand is happening, turned a corner and is it now moving in the right direction on racial equality?

Kenneth Fraser: I am afraid not. I have written to the office as recently as a couple of weeks ago, saying that there is an issue with the refugee integration strategy and that there are real problems with it. There are misunderstandings in it and pieces missing from it. I have had no response from it. I will happily send you a copy.

Q221 **Stephen Farry:** We would certainly welcome that in writing, but just for the benefit of today and the verbal record, could you give some indications of your particular concerns with the refugee integration strategy?

Kenneth Fraser: I will certainly try to. We are talking about a refugee integration strategy where there is no mention of the prospect of changing the immigration legislation. It just ignores that, as though that was not happening.

Q222 **Stephen Farry:** I am a strong critic of UK immigration policy, just to be very clear in that regard, but is it perhaps a little unfair to the Executive, given that this is a reserved matter for the UK Government and Parliament as opposed to the Executive and Assembly? Is it unrealistic to expect them to fix UK immigration policy?

Kenneth Fraser: I am not saying that they can fix it, necessarily. It has long been recognised that UK immigration policy has a very strong impact on what happens within Northern Ireland. It will have a strong impact within Northern Ireland without any border there. How will that be dealt with? How do we deal with people crossing the border south to north? What is the enforcement legislation?



If you have enforcement where you say that people renting houses or providing services have to check that people are here legitimately, that has an impact not only on the services but on everyone who is seen to be potentially an asylum-seeker. That will have a very profound impact on minority ethnic people who are living in Northern Ireland.

We have done certain things already in Northern Ireland that show that we are different to what happens in GB. We have maintained the right to free legal advice and the right to certain services. We have a crisis fund to help people when they find themselves in difficulty. These reflect the circumstances in Northern Ireland. If you find yourself in hard times in one of the big cities in England or Scotland, you will find people who will be able to help you out there. If you find yourself in those same positions in Belfast, Derry or Enniskillen, for instance, you will not have people who will be able to help you to the same extent, because we do not have that infrastructure. There are all manner of things.

There are also issues around the Dublin convention, for instance. Now that we have Brexited, we do not have access to the Dublin convention, so what happens with people who cross the border, even inadvertently? There are all sorts of things that need to be sorted out.

Chair: We have heard evidence on that.

Kenneth Fraser: People frequently lobby us about, "Could you not do X, Y or Z?" The simple answer there is that they do not know sufficient about how our immigration system or our asylum system works for us to be able to point them in the correct direction. It makes much more sense that they should express themselves to the people who are directly responsible for whatever it is that they want to express themselves about.

I will try to avoid being controversial here, but people sometimes find it more convenient to go to an MLA to talk about their problems than they do to an MP—they will find an MLA more accessible than an MP—but the MLA will not be able to write to the Home Office and get an answer for them on these things, because it is MPs only, so you have that difficulty.

There are also issues where you have young children who are happily in the vastness of West Belfast and going to school there. This is a real case. People are moved by the people who have the contract for housing down to Tates Avenue. They have to go from Tates Avenue up the Falls Road in their Catholic school uniform. That is not something that I would want for my child.

Stephen Farry: We will certainly welcome any further written submission to elaborate on that.

Q223 **Chair:** As a final question, Mr Fraser, and as we move to the conclusion of our session this morning, the census figures are awaited, and a lot of policy authors are putting quite a lot of weight on that to see what the figures are showing. You will be aware that, too often, the political culture



HOUSE OF COMMONS

of identification is nationalist, unionist or other, and the use of the term “other”, by definition, suggests something that is different, alien or almost unclassifiable. Over your 20 years as a practitioner in this area, setting aside the politicians, the civil servants and the local government officers for the moment, does broader Northern Ireland society—members of the general public and the media at large—know that there is an existing and growing ethnic population in Northern Ireland in and around their neighbourhoods?

Kenneth Fraser: I believe that people are more aware of minority ethnic people than they have ever been in the past. I also believe that, if we get it right, we have a fundamentally welcoming, decent set of people who believe in integration and want to see this work. They want to see a working multicultural society. They are very kind and things like that. Frequently, what I got when I was at work was people phoning up, saying, “We have had such-and-such move into our area. How do I deal with them? What do I do about them?” It gladdens the heart a bit. I honestly believe that we can be an exemplar at all levels, but we need to expend our money to make sure that this happens.

Chair: Mr Fraser, on behalf of the Committee, can I thank you so very much indeed for joining us and for the detailed evidence that you have given to us in answer to our questions? We are very grateful to you. This has been hugely useful and informative to our process. Thank you very much indeed.