Meg Hillier MP  
Public Accounts Committee,  
House of Commons,  
London  
SW1A 0AA

By email

10th April 2019

Dear Chair,


Prior to our formal response to the above report, the Committee has requested that the department write outlining the immediate action it has taken to promote the Windrush scheme more proactively, particularly outside of the UK and the Caribbean. It also requested that the Home Office clearly communicate the need for people to formalise their immigration status, and for an update on the number of people who have engaged with the Windrush scheme. This letter addresses these three points.

Promoting the Windrush Scheme outside of the UK and the Caribbean

The Home Office has implemented a comprehensive programme of activity to reach people of all nationalities. This has been a key priority in the department’s wider response to Windrush and it has sought actively to engage with as many of those who may have been affected as possible.

Over the last year, we have delivered 60 taskforce events, roadshows and focus groups across the UK reaching over 3,000 individuals, and we have commissioned a diverse network of over 100 Home Office volunteers to act as champions among their own faith and community groups. Since the PAC session in December 2018, we have delivered sessions in Reading, Peckham, Greenwich, Nottingham, and Birmingham, with the latter being attended by over 500 people. All events have been open to people of any nationality, and outreach since December has been actively promoted to people from communities well beyond the Caribbean.

In addition, we have proactively engaged over 270 stakeholder organisations including Hindu Council, City Sikhs and Interfaith Network UK, to raise awareness of the scheme
and encourage them to share our messages with their communities. Over 20k wallet cards providing details of the scheme have been distributed and paid-for targeted online advertising has reached 2.5m people. Our radio advert has been played on 10 radio stations including Asian audience stations in Leeds, Bradford, London and Glasgow. Print advertising has been published in the Voice and an interview with the Immigration Minister appeared in the British Asian publication Eastern Eye. We have also engaged British High Commissioners and provided them with digital materials to raise awareness with their communities.

Nonetheless, we recognise that coverage of the issue, and the title of the scheme itself, could still give rise to the impression that the issue affects Caribbean communities only. To counter this, we are embarking on a new phase of engagement and communication activity. This will include three months of intensive activity across the UK and overseas, linked to the launch of the Compensation scheme, which is open to eligible claimants of all nationalities.

In designing this programme, we have spoken to people from affected communities, both including and beyond the Caribbean, such as Nigerian, Pakistani and Jamaica, so that we could understand more about their concerns and how best to communicate on the issue.

Fifteen compensation scheme events will be held across the UK, and we will engage with local diaspora media to support them. These will run until June in locations such as Southampton, Leicester and Glasgow. We will also reach out to local stakeholders such as MPs offices, local authorities and community and religious organisations. To promote the launch more widely, press notices will be issued, articles will be offered to key diaspora publications and social media activity will be implemented. We are also exploring targeted paid media to promote the schemes.

To reach people potentially affected who are overseas, we are working closely with the Foreign & Commonwealth Office to reach local audiences globally. In February we wrote to FCO Directors and facilitated calls with staff covering India, Pakistan and Bangladesh to inform local conversations. A Diplomatic Telegram, that included a detailed briefing pack, was issued to all Posts on the day of the Windrush Compensation Scheme launch and the Immigration Minister has meet Commonwealth High Commissioners in London to brief them directly. Our briefing pack to posts includes a video for uploading on YouTube, and video assets which can be deployed on social media for example Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp.

Finally, we recognise that the use of the word ‘Windrush’ has led to some inaccurate perceptions about potential eligibility of the scheme. It has nonetheless received significant coverage already and to avoid confusion or the implication that the scheme has ended, we do not propose to rename it. However, we will ensure that when ‘Windrush scheme’ is used, where ever possible, a sub-heading is included that references its relevance to wider audiences, and in longer communications we will explain the wider eligibility clearly. This will support our renewed commitment to reach the widest possible audience through implementation of the engagement and communication plan.
Engagement with the scheme

The Committee requested an update on the numbers of people who have engaged with the scheme. As a result of the engagement activity and wider work, at 31 January 2019, over 2,400 people from a range of nationalities have been helped to get documentation to prove their existing right to be in the UK under the arrangements put in place prior to the establishment of the Windrush Scheme; and over 3,600 people from a range of nationalities have successfully applied to become British nationals through the scheme. Further information can be found in the Home Secretary’s regular update to the Home Affairs Select Committee on Windrush. These can be found at https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/correspondence-on-the-work-of-the-home-office-windrush. The next update, providing figures to the end of March will be sent to the Home Affairs Select Committee shortly.

Formalisation of immigration status outside of the Windrush scheme

The Committee has also asked us to report on activity we have undertaken to communicate more generally the need for people to formalise their immigration status. In addition to the Windrush Commonwealth community, who are covered by the activity reported above, we are undertaking significant outreach to EU citizens on this point. The UK’s departure from the EU provides an opportunity to encourage residents to formalise their immigration status. To make the most of this we have already launched a national awareness campaign, are holding monthly meetings with EU citizens’ representatives to understand their needs, and are planning a range of support for vulnerable groups such as the elderly, children and families, victims of domestic violence and those with limited English language ability. Published staff guidance for the EU Settlement Scheme signposts staff to the Windrush taskforce where an applicant may be eligible for a grant under the Windrush scheme. The Windrush scheme is open to eligible individuals of any nationality.

Kind Regards

[Signature]

Shona Dunn
Second Permanent Secretary