



# An equal path to progression

An employer's guide to uplifting Black and South Asian women in the workplace

Totaljobs



**THE**   
**DIVERSITY TRUST**  
INFLUENCING SOCIAL CHANGE

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# Language use and terminology in this report

## Language use

There are several terms that are used to describe someone's ethnicity in the UK. To describe people who are not white, *BAME* (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) or *BME* (Black and minority ethnic) are commonly used. *POC* (People of Colour) and *WOC* (Women of Colour) are also used, although this is more common in the US.

These terms often appear in government statistics, the media and academic publications. Throughout this report, we have chosen to not use the terms *WOC*, *POC*, *BME* or *BAME*, except when referencing an existing publication which uses this term. This is to avoid the assumption that ethnic minorities or non-white groups are homogenous, or all face the same challenges.

Similarly, we avoid the use of the word 'Other' to describe a person's ethnic group, to ensure we are not alienating or excluding an ethnic identity or person. However, we may use this term when referring to previous research conducted by organisations, or when speaking about *othering*.

This research focuses on the experiences of Black and South Asian women, and in our data analysis, we have been conscious of recognising the diverse lived experiences within different ethnic groups. Where we have grouped the experiences of Black and South Asian women in the following chapters, this is because our analysis showed they reported similar experiences, with a discrepancy of five percentage points or lower.

We have received responses from women of African, Caribbean or another Black background, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepalese, Bhutanese and women of mixed Black and/or South Asian heritage in our survey. We also hosted focus groups in collaboration with The Diversity Trust. In this report, where relevant we also highlight the opinions and experiences of Black and South Asian men, white men and white women, for comparison purposes.

Throughout this report, we have made the decision to capitalise the *B* in Black and *S A* in South Asian, this is to show respect for these ethnicities. To use a lowercase *b* would remove nuances of ethnicity and culture, as this was historically stripped. This report does not capitalise *white* when referring to this ethnic group, due to the capitalisation of *white* in this context historically being associated with white supremacy, alongside wider nuances around cultural identity.

### Learn more about this:

[Why we capitalize Black \(and not white\),](#)  
Columbia Journalism Review

[No, you really shouldn't capitalize the w in white,](#)  
Refinery 29

# Terminology

Language relating to diversity, equity and inclusion evolves and changes as time goes on. This list defines the words used throughout the report, and what they mean in this context.

**Microaggressions:** A comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalised group.

**Code-switching:** Originally used in linguistics, in the context of diversity, equity and inclusion, this relates to an individual adjusting their style of speech, language, appearance, or behaviour.

**Gaslighting:** Psychological manipulation of a person, usually over an extended period of time, that causes the victim to question the validity of their own thoughts, perception of reality, or memories. Racial gaslighting can be used to dismiss feelings and experiences eg. 'Racism doesn't exist anymore'.

**Racism:** A belief that ethnicity and race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular ethnicity or race.

**Individual racism:** A person holding racist values, expressing racist beliefs, or racist behaviour.

**Institutional racism:** The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be found in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance and stereotyping.

**Systematic/structural racism:** Laws, institutional practices, customs, and guiding ideas combine to harm racially minoritised people in ways not experienced by their white counterparts. This can determine who gets hired, trained, promoted, retained, demoted and fired.

**Overt racism:** Intentional or obvious harmful attitudes or behaviours towards a minority or group because of their race, ethnicity or heritage.

**Covert racism:** A form of racial discrimination that may not be immediately clear or is subtle.

**Heritage:** Refers to a person's full range of inherited traditions, and culture.

**Misogynoir:** The specific hatred, dislike, distrust, and prejudice directed toward Black women in particular, where both ethnicity and gender play roles in discrimination and bias.

**Othering:** A phenomenon where some individuals (usually people in minority groups) are defined and labelled as not fitting in with the 'typical' norms.

**Black (ethnicity):** This study has included opinions from people who define themselves as Black, specifically from African, Caribbean, and British heritages, and belonging to the African diaspora. The term Black reflects a shared sense of identity and community.

**South Asian (ethnicity):** This study has included opinions from people of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepalese and Bhutanese heritage. South Asian ethnic groups are a grouping of the diverse populations of South Asia, including the nations of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, the Maldives and Sri Lanka.

# State of play

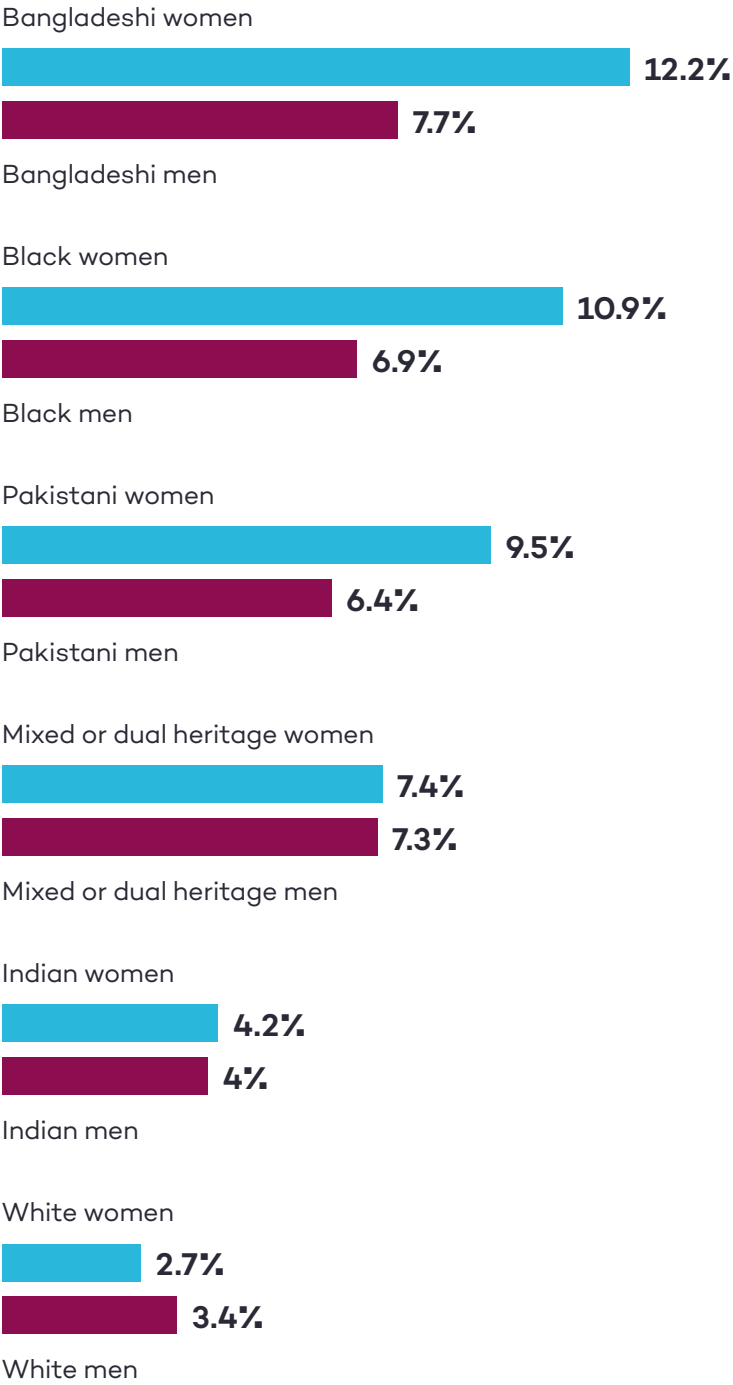


As of the recent [ONS estimated data \(2019\)](#), the white British ethnic group make up the largest percentage of the population (**78.4%**) and people who identified themselves as from another white background make up **5.8%**. The Asian population or those who identify as Asian or Asian British are **8%** of the British population. Black, African, Caribbean, and Black British people make up **3.5%** of the population and people who identify as having multiple ethnicities make up **1.8%**.

Although in the above there is a breakdown of the entire population of England and Wales, the population breakdowns change depending on the location. In London most of the population is made up of those who identify as white British **43.4%**, followed by people who identified as another white background (**14.6%**), then Black African (**8%**) and Indian (**7%**).

An individual's ethnic background has an unfortunate impact on the career progression and opportunities available to them throughout their career journey and personal life. A number of factors are at play, starting from access to role models and aspirations before entering the world of work, to career pathways and progression opportunities. These factors can have a significant influence on a person's professional success, as well as their mental health and wellbeing. [Women from 'BAME' backgrounds began the pandemic with one of the lowest rates of employment \(62.5%\) and the highest rate of unemployment at 8.8%, compared with 4.5% for white people and 8.5% for Black, Asian and minority ethnic people overall.](#)

## Of the ethnicity data available, the unemployment rate is:



Source: [ONS, published May 2022 for the period Jan-Mar 2022.](#)



# Executive summary

Totaljobs and The Diversity Trust conducted research on the work experiences and barriers to progression faced by Black and South Asian women in the United Kingdom. **Studies** show that Black and South Asian women continue to have significantly low representation in senior roles, with racial and gendered discrimination being experienced across sectors.

The research aim was to understand workplace experiences and barriers to progression of Black and South Asian women in the UK. This focus was based on evidence from studies on the experiences of Black and minority ethnic people in general, and women more specifically, both in society and the workplace, combined with a desire to offer evidence-based recommendations to employers who are reviewing organisational culture, policies and practices to remove structural biases.

We know that structural (racial and gendered) inequalities exist in most facets of society (**education, poverty, health to name a few**) which, when viewed holistically, sheds a distressing light on the experiences of these women.

**Some of the key points validated both by survey data and the lived experiences shared by women in focus groups as part of this project are given below.**

- Discrimination experienced by Black and South Asian women in the workplace is alarmingly high and has significant long-term impact on their wellbeing. There is an urgent need for data-led and collaborative inclusion strategies supported by SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-based) actions.
- The issue of gaslighting persists across organisations creating additional barriers for women in the workplace. Their lived experience of discrimination is denied by statements such as, 'racism doesn't exist in our organisation' as quoted by one of the focus group participants.
- Issues exist throughout the employee lifecycle with participants sharing experiences of discrimination during interviews, barriers to progression and terminating contracts, due to discrimination and harassment.
- Lack of representation of Black and South Asian women in senior leadership roles in the UK workplace is reflected by the data gathered in this project, where women managers felt their identity impacted their opportunities.
- Examining intersections of identities highlighted important issues, such as disability discrimination, care and parenting responsibilities and age discrimination.

**The recommendations to employers outlined in this report are underpinned by:**

- Acknowledgement that racial and gendered inequalities exist in their organisation and society.
- Leadership and accountability from senior management to create real institutional change, with the appropriate level of financial investment. Some organisations have assigned strategic responsibility to a member of the executive board as a key deliverable, created a senior role to oversee this work and/or created governance structures reporting to the executive board.

- Co-creation of strategy and initiatives with Black and South Asian women. It is imperative that this work is not done behind closed doors without the richness of diverse voices and expertise shaping it. Working with employee resource groups is a key example of this.
- Understanding that people identifying as Women of Colour are not homogenous in their experiences and outcomes. Intersections of identity have a significant impact on this as well. This complexity needs to be acknowledged in the way data is analysed and solutions are created.

”

The findings in this study are significant, highlighting some of the structural and institutional barriers that Black and South Asian women face to succeeding in their chosen career. Despite this, the women we surveyed and spoke to expressed confidence in themselves and a desire for employers to examine their structural and implicit biases for them to have improved chances to succeed and experience less harm in the workplace. There is sufficient evidence of the need for change, the impetus is now on employers and colleagues to act.”

**Tinashe Verhaeghe,**  
**Race and Ethnicity Consultant, The Diversity Trust**



# Key findings

This research, in partnership with The Diversity Trust, explores how a person’s ethnicity impacts their working life, including aspirations pre-employment, access to opportunities, career progression and overall wellbeing.

This guide shares insight into the progression barriers of Black and South Asian women and provides businesses with solution-based advice on how they can boost opportunity, explore diverse talent pools and ensure they have a safe and collaborative environment for all employees.





# Looking to the future: aspirations

A person's education and upbringing can potentially set out a pathway for their career progression and set them up for future success. While ethnicity is not the only element that will impact an individual's success, gender and ethnicity combined can offer challenges, and impact pre-employment experiences.

Growing up, the feeling of being supported and encouraged can shape your experiences throughout school and lead to a greater confidence in entering the world of work. A third (**34%**) of Black and South Asian women were discouraged from pursuing a certain career by a member of staff during their education and only **13%** of South Asian Women and **24%** of Black women received consistent and helpful career advice and guidance, which they perceived as both 'practical and inspiring'. This is also low for white men (**24%**) and women (**13%**).

**34%**

of Black and South Asian women were discouraged from pursuing a certain career by a member of staff during their education



Work experience has become increasingly desirable for employers looking to hire entry level talent. Interestingly, this is more apparent for Black and South Asian women, as **76%** have participated in work experience, compared to **67%** of white men and **64%** of white women. This adds to the notion that Black and South Asian women alike were expected to be more experienced or even overqualified for a role before given the opportunity to participate in full time work. That being said, participating in work experience can require privilege, especially considering work experience is often unpaid. For the **24%** who did not take part in work experience, **75%** of Black and South Asian women said this is because the opportunities weren't available to them and **16%** said they couldn't afford to take part.

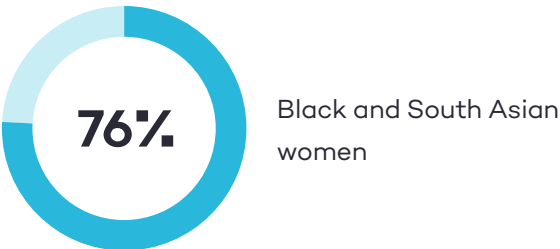
Role models can influence and motivate people to pursue their interests and can help overcome challenges. Before entering employment, half of Black and South Asian women felt they could look up to women from the same ethnic background as them working in their preferred career. On the other hand, **42%** of Black and South Asian women say they did not have female role models of their ethnicity either in their personal lives, wider society, or the media, who have worked in their desired field. Not having a relatable role model in your desired industry can change a person's career trajectory.



I chose science as a subject, I was interested in law but didn't see any Black lawyers so that's why I didn't choose that career path. We need people in (our) own community to impact you."

**Black Jamaican woman, medicine**

Participation in work experience



# Case study: The Us Group



When you show and inspire a young woman to understand she is more than her current situation, this doesn't only give her the power to change the trajectory of her own life, but this will eventually affect the communities around her."

**Victoria Azubuike,**  
**Founder and CEO,**  
**The Us Group**

## Case study



The Us Group aims to provide educational opportunities and employment access

to talented young women from diverse and socio-disadvantaged backgrounds. We aim to create platforms and forums for organisations looking to connect with talent and increase their brand awareness among the next generation of female leaders. Since 2016, we have worked with 1500+ young women from socio-disadvantaged backgrounds through educational events, mentorship programmes and 1-2-1 consultations in the United Kingdom & Republic of Ireland.

At The Us Group, we believe it is essential for employers to build strategies to attract talent in their early years. From a business perspective, working directly with early-year talent provides the ability to build authentic and well-established pipelines of great candidates who can join the organisation in the future. From a social corporate perspective, when organisations support early-level talent in skill development and confidence building, they can familiarise themselves with the ways of workings in such environments, which means they're able to thrive when they join the workforce. This is why we believe our work is essential, and why we are keen to support organisations to engage with junior talent.

**Statistics** show by 2025, Gen Z will make up about **27%** of the workforce and are now looking to join companies that have purposes beyond profits and understand their needs.

The Us Group aims to provide a platform for organisations looking to engage with great women through permanent placement and bespoke events. In the past, we have worked with the likes of Google, The Mayor of London team and Linklaters to deliver unique events, and more recently Totaljobs Group and Stepstone Group to offer great opportunities for young women.

# Means of access: climbing the ladder

Breaking into the industry of your dreams can be difficult. Certain privileges can help people get their foot in the door ahead of others, meanwhile there are barriers that may prevent or delay the opportunity to land a role. Challenges can begin from the start of the job search and continue throughout the interview stages.

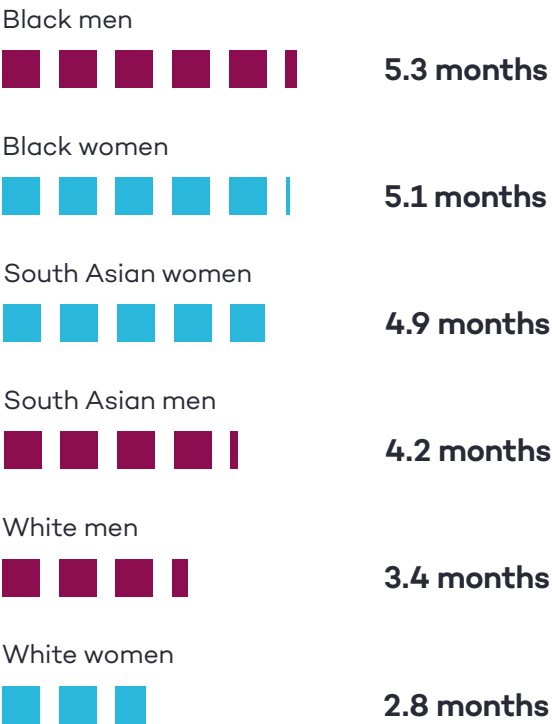
## The search: finding the right role

**62%** of Black women and **43%** of South Asian women mention they have been discriminated against during the application process based on their ethnicity, while **21%** say this was due to their gender and **18%** say their age contributed. Over a third (**37%**) of Black women and **25%** of South Asian women believe that their ethnicity has resulted in at least one job application not progressing. This is a clear challenge for Black and South Asian women when applying for roles, and many have taken action in an attempt to avoid bias. In fact, almost a fifth (**18%**) of Black women and South Asian women have adapted their name on their CV with the aim to improve their chances of their application being successful.

Challenges at application stage are further illustrated when looking at the time it took Black and South Asian women to secure their first job. For Black women, it took on average 5.1 months, similarly it took South Asian women 4.9 months, South Asian men 4.2 months and with the longest amount of time, it took Black men 5.3 months. Shockingly, white people see results much quicker, with white women securing their first role in 2.8 months, and white men 3.4 months, highlighting over a month's difference, this shows clear signs of bias from the application stage, where gender and ethnicity are factors.



## Time taken to secure first job out of education







**59%**

of Black and South Asian women have been made to feel uncomfortable, patronised, or intimidated due to their ethnicity during an interview

## First impressions: interviewing

Once Black and South Asian women have managed to break through the barriers at application stage, unfortunately it's not smooth sailing from there. At this stage, some candidates have felt uncomfortable due to their ethnicity and/or gender.

**75%** of Black women and South Asian women have changed their demeanour to appear more 'approachable and friendly' during a job interview, in an attempt to counteract negative stereotypes. A focus group participant of South Asian heritage from the charity sector shared her experience of securing 30 interviews, but struggled to progress further while wearing more cultural dress and loose hijab. Although at first, she was not sure her clothing affected her progression, when she stopped wearing her hijab, she landed a job very quickly, which reinstated her earlier doubt.

**75%** of Black women and **65%** of South Asian women have also felt the need to "tone down" certain turns of phrase or mannerisms at interview stage. This method of assimilation is known as code-switching. During the interview stage **59%** of Black and South Asian women were made to feel uncomfortable, patronised or intimidated due to their ethnicity. This prompts a need to code-switch.

This need to code-switch is further exacerbated by the lack of representation in interview panels. **62%** of Black women and **43%** of South Asian women have not been interviewed by someone with the same ethnic background as them, while only **21%** of Black and South Asian women say this is the case when it comes to gender. Meanwhile, for white men, only **7%** say they were not interviewed by someone with the same ethnicity as them and **10%** say they weren't interviewed by someone with the same gender as them.

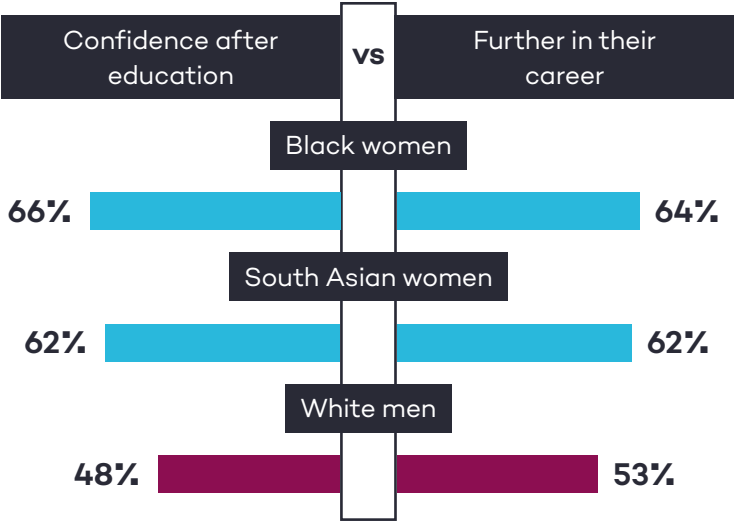
# Progression and opportunity: a rocky path

Once Black and South Asian women have gone through the barriers associated with pre-employment, those who were successful begin the journey of starting their career. Throughout their careers they face both obstacles and successes when it comes to company culture, relationships, managerial involvement, and wellbeing.

Positively, **65%** of Black and South Asian women feel have they have someone they can talk to about pay and progression. **46%** of Black and South Asian women say this person is within their organisation, while less than a quarter (**22%**) say this person is not a colleague. Interestingly, **57%** of white women and **61%** of white men say they have someone they can seek advice from. This suggests that Black and South Asian women can rely on advice and support outside of the workplace, inferring a strong sense of community and knowledge sharing within their social and familial groups.

Another inspiring finding for Black and South Asian women showed that **66%** of Black women and **62%** of South Asian women believed they could achieve anything in their future career after completing education, which is notably higher than white men (**46%**) and white women (**38%**). Although confidence in their career trajectory further down the line remains high overall, for Black women, confidence falls slightly, while it stagnates for South Asian women as their career progresses. When compared to white men (**53%**) and white women (**43%**), it's clear their confidence increases as they progress. This highlights that workplaces cater to the ambitions of white people, as we see confidence thrive in the right environment, while Black and South Asian women are having to fight harder for the same opportunities. Interestingly though, confidence doesn't drop significantly for Black and South Asian women, despite the barriers and challenges faced - this speaks to their resilience.

## The climb to confidence looks different depending on who you are



I think progression will be harder as an ethnic minority woman. However, I feel personally strong, and I think my diversity of experience has made me resilient."

**South Asian British woman, banking and finance**

Encouragingly, three fifths (**59%**) of Black and South Asian women overall agree that their employer supports their career goals and ambitions. This is similar when it comes to white men (**59%**) and women (**57%**). Of those that said they didn't feel supported (**9%**), the majority (**65%**) of Black and South Asian women say their ethnic background limits the support they receive from their employer.





# Stepping up: navigating managerial roles

64%

of Black and South Asian women who are managers state their ethnicity impacted their progression

30%

of Black and South Asian women felt they needed to work harder to reach their managerial position than others

There is significantly low representation of Black and South Asian women in elevated levels of seniority and managerial positions. A [study by the Black Women in Leadership Network](#) stated that **33%** of Black women have resigned from a professional position due to racially related unfair treatment in the workplace. Unfortunately, this rises to **52%** for those in a senior executive position. Half (**48%**) of Black and South Asian women believe their ethnicity impacted their progression into a position of leadership, **27%** of Black women and **20%** of South Asian women said their gender also impacted this.

**30%** of Black and South Asian women felt they needed to work harder to reach their position than others, however when they do land a managerial position, they experience further challenges. A quarter of Black and South Asian women feel pressure to act a certain way at managerial level, with a further **20%** feeling pressure to act as a role model. The reality of this became apparent when a multiple ethnicity Black British woman working in the third sector shared that she decided to start a role in politics, knowing she would not go far but wanted to show people that this was a career path open to women who shared her ethnic background.



You can be seen as someone who is representing the whole race with your actions, as someone who is an expert on everything Black. We have burdens that our white colleagues won't face."

**Black Caribbean British woman, public health**

This quote highlights the importance of creating the right environment for Black and South Asian women, allowing them to feel connected, welcome, and supported throughout their career path, without putting pressure on other Black or South Asian women to act as a “spokesperson” for people who share their ethnicity and the pressure that demands.

They’re also having to work harder and with little recognition. **19%** feel their work is held to a higher standard than other managers, with one focus group participant sharing her experience of progressing into a role focused on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and feeling that colleagues judged this promotion was based on her ethnicity and not merit. This is a shared experience as a participant from a South Asian British background stated:



Just being qualified for a job is no longer enough for *POC* and especially *WOC*, we have to jump through so many more hoops for the same roles. One time a colleague snickered at me and said ‘you’re a diversity hire’ – I have a double Masters and have co-founded my own digital health start-up but apparently that wasn’t enough.”

**South Asian British woman,  
pharma-tech**

In addition, only a quarter of Black and South Asian women feel respected, and only **19%** feel supported by other members of their managerial or leadership team. This brings to light that many workplaces are failing to serve the needs of Black and South Asian women or provide an environment where they can thrive without having to overcome additional barriers, as well as seeing a lack of workplace support. Employers must ensure treatment is fair towards all managers, this in turn sets the precedent for the entire company.

Unfortunately, as the rocky path of progression continues, new elements start to affect Black and South Asian women. Although ethnicity and gender are barriers, women are also feeling their age is seen as a limiting factor impacting their opportunities. During our research, women commented on the challenges they face securing roles as they grow older. There was consensus that women from ethnic minority backgrounds do not get the same opportunities as their white counterparts, in addition, they felt growing older brings its own challenges as the opportunities get few and far between. As they age, they are no longer getting shortlisted, causing their career to prematurely end, or prompting some women to change career paths.



## Workplace barriers: discrimination

Discrimination is defined as unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, sex, disability or other protected characteristics. Discrimination is one of the most difficult challenges within the workplace. Covert racism is as harmful as overt racism. It can exacerbate stress and lead to serious mental and physical health issues.

Shockingly, four fifths of Black and South Asian women (**79%**) have faced discrimination in the workplace. Sadly, less than a fifth of those who have faced a type of discrimination (**17%**) have reported it, with only **8%** of these respondents saying this led to a positive or constructive outcome. This tiny percentage of positive or constructive outcomes means that many of the women who experience discrimination feel there is not much point in reporting.

This is certainly a common theme, **29%** of Black and South Asian women feel unable to report an incident because they don't feel comfortable doing so. A quarter of Black and South Asian women who have faced discrimination have not reported this because they lack confidence in a resolution and **16%** do not believe their business would take the report seriously. Worryingly, **14%** believe they, as the person reporting the incident, would be penalised for doing so, and **12%** weren't aware of the process to follow. These experiences highlight the importance of having clear reporting policies and educating all staff on how these processes work.

Discrimination can come in many forms, one of the most common, especially in a workplace setting or professional environment, is microaggressions. Both Black and South Asian women had similar experiences when it comes to discrimination and microaggressions. The most frequent incidents both have experienced include having their name often mis-spelt or mispronounced (**31%**), colleagues telling them they are 'surprisingly well-spoken' (**22%**), being subjected to assumptions based on racial or gender stereotypes (**22%**), jokes and banter related to their ethnicity or background (**21%**), and their work being more heavily scrutinised or micromanaged (**20%**).

Discrimination is a threat to staff retention, company culture and most importantly the mental wellbeing of the victim. Discrimination can also impact the progression journey of the victim, affecting their confidence and mental health.



I had to resign for a second time from a position where I have been treated inappropriately and differently to my white male colleagues.”

**South Asian British woman,  
banking and finance**

Many of the women who participated in our focus group felt that their ethnicity has had a negative impact on their careers. One shared that a combination of microaggressions and discrimination affected her self-esteem and confidence, which prevented her from putting herself forward for new roles.

Experiences that are discriminatory in the workplace have an impactful, lasting effect that requires healing. One focus group participant shared that she had recently left an employer after experiencing discrimination and was healing from the experience. Participants also shared that self-doubt had permeated into their personal lives and wellbeing, as a result of discrimination.

## An internal battle: mental health and wellbeing

**62%**

of Black and South Asian women have suffered with poor mental wellbeing at work

Almost two thirds (**62%**) of Black and South Asian women say their wellbeing has suffered at work. Positively though, of those that have struggled with their wellbeing at work, three in ten (**29%**) of Black and South Asian woman have received good levels of support, including paid time off, access to a counsellor and reduced workload from their employer. **31%** also say they have felt comfortable reaching out to their employer. Despite this, one in eight (**13%**) say they have reached out for support but have not received it.

Code-switching is a common method women from Black and South Asian backgrounds have used to 'fit in' or gain acceptance from their colleagues and employers, however it can have an impact on the mental health and wellbeing of an individual. Code-switching for long periods of time can leave a person feeling exhausted and leave them with a sense of abandonment of their culture or heritage. **70%** of Black women and **64%** of South Asian women have felt the need to code-switch throughout their career. More specifically, **31%** of Black and South Asian women feel pressured to act differently in a work setting, **24%** have changed their tone of voice, **23%** the language they use, and **12%** changed their name.

The pressure to code-switch has had an enormous impact, leading Black and South Asian women to feel uncomfortable (**29%**), undervalued (**29%**), tired (**19%**), invisible (**17%**), defeated or anxious (**17%**) and hyper visible (**13%**). A South Asian woman in the pharma-tech sector felt code-switching granted her privileges in the workplace: "the more I talk like them and behave like them, the easier it's been for me".



//

**Chandra Arthur, Founder and CEO of Friendish, explained the impact code-switching has, in her TEDx talk.**

"The cost of code-switching on society is huge, because it means that those of us who belong to minority groups spend a lot more time learning the language of cultural compatibility and less time doing the things that matter to us."

[Click here to watch](#)



Networks are a safe place for people from similar communities and backgrounds to host events, meetings, and advocate for change. A third of Black and South Asian women are part of an employee-led network, although only **12%** of these are funded by their employer. In addition, **12%** are not endorsed by their organisation and a further **12%** are part of an external network. Over a third of women (**37%**) say they are not currently part of a network but would be part of one if it was made available to them. Over half (**55%**) of Black and South Asian women believe networks can help make the workplace more inclusive.

A key finding from our focus groups was Black and South Asian women valued having a forum with other women from a similar ethnic background to talk to about their experiences. They had the opportunity to learn for themselves and to inform their practice. There was a strong sense of support both verbally and digitally as people shared personal stories which further created a safe space to share with other women who have had similar experiences. Some participants highlighted that getting support from affinity groups or the Black, Asian and minority ethnic community may help in discussing career progression.

Black and South Asian women report working harder, for longer hours than their peers in the same roles, likewise, stereotyping and microaggressions are common. Both factors combined have a detrimental impact on their wellbeing, career opportunities and add further challenges to those that face obstacles in everyday society. Employers offering wellbeing support and coming from a place of understanding can reduce the pressure felt by these women.



“[I was] told I was not enough and bullied by those in very powerful positions despite my efforts of reporting.”

**Black British woman,  
public sector**



### Mental health resources:

If you want to understand more about the impact racism and discrimination can have on mental health, or have been affected by any of the above, this information can help support you.

- [Racism and mental health](#)
- [Helplines for support with experiences of discrimination and hate crimes](#)
- [Mental health at work](#)
- [Workplace wellbeing support](#)
- [Workplace Wellbeing Index](#)
- [Mental health problems – an introduction](#)
- [How to manage stress](#)
- [LGBTQ+ mental health](#)

# How employers can uplift Black and South Asian women

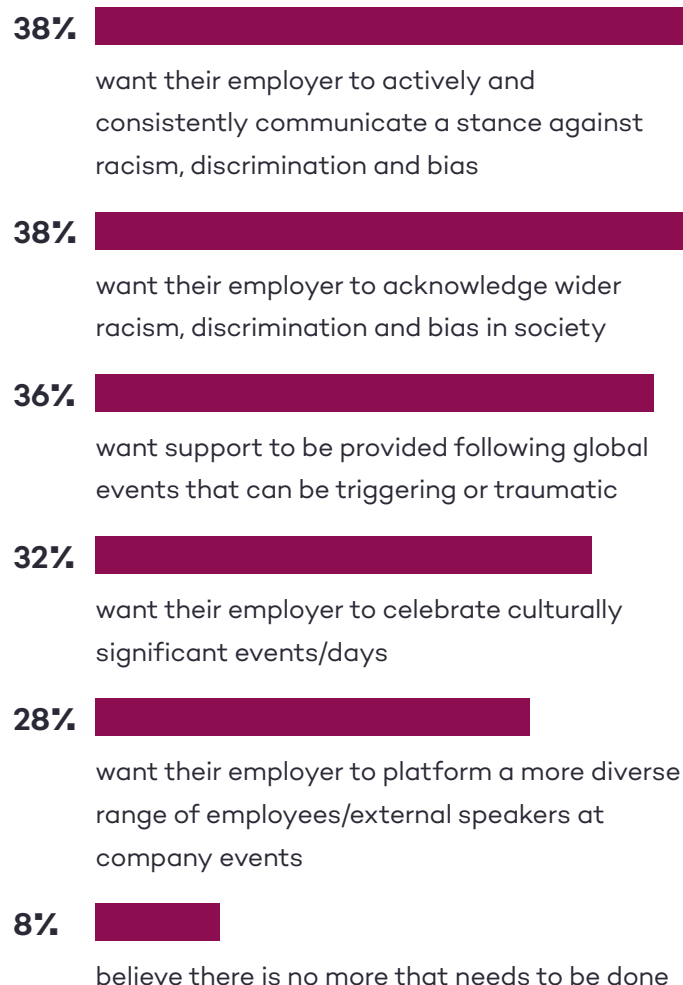
The impact that discrimination or bias can have on an individual can be detrimental to their progression path as well as their internal wellbeing journey. As an employer, it is crucial to combat bias around Black and South Asian women, from application stage, through to managerial and senior positions.

Empowering Black and South Asian women means creating safe spaces, defining clear equal progression paths, combating discrimination and prioritising their health and wellness. This can be achieved by making changes to your company culture, evolving your recruitment strategy, training staff, promoting anti-racism, and finally offering tailored wellbeing and networking options.

## A sense of belonging: adapt your culture

Adapt your work culture to ensure Black and South Asian women feel championed throughout their career. This includes clearly displaying zero tolerance for institutional, individual, and systematic racism, offering support at all stages, and showcasing cultural appreciation.

## Views of Black and South Asian women to foster inclusivity





## Knowledge is power: education and allyship

Education around ethnicity bias and discrimination should not fall into the responsibilities of those that have suffered through this. As a business, commit to ongoing education and training to create an environment where discriminatory behaviour is challenged, and diversity and inclusion is valued.

- Recognise that institutional racism plays a major role in creating obstacles to accessing roles and career progression and create a SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-based) action plan that addresses all areas impacted by institutional racism. This may include recruitment policies and practices, selection processes as well as reward, remuneration and recognition policies.
- Invest in inclusive workplace practices by training staff on unconscious bias, allyship and racism in the workplace. This may involve an external or internal team who are qualified and informed to teach staff about anti-racism and allyship, to give staff the power to support everyone.
- Celebrate Diversity through positive messages and events (**32%** of Black and South Asian women want their employer to recognise culturally significant events). For example, offer food from different cultures as catering options, and ensure all images of staff in the workplace or in external communications are representative.
- Take a firm position against discrimination. Code-switching is a common practice especially where there is no celebration of multiculturalism.





## Championing careers: progression pathways

Provide the right environment that translates the ambition and determination of Black and South Asian women into career success, by focusing on the following areas:

- Provide further opportunities for women to undertake paid work experience or upskill.
- Develop mentorship programmes or provide access to career coaches (**36%** of Black and South Asian women believe career counselling would be valuable).
- Develop leadership training programmes for Black and South Asian women that recognise the inequalities and lack of opportunities they are met with, in order to open up more varied routes of progression.
- Take the opportunity to platform marginalised women and recognise their contributions with the aim to further careers and boost confidence.
- Creating and allowing for employee-led networks to be set up can give Black and South Asian women a safe space to talk about their experiences. It also offers an opportunity for this community to think about ways the organisation can improve and be more inclusive for them.
- Review workload allocation to ensure improved wellbeing from manageable workload and equitable access to opportunities that lend well to progression. Rotation in roles, family friendly work practices and exposure to wider responsibility are often used as tools by organisations to develop employees for leadership positions.

## Creating opportunity: attract and recruit inclusively



Black and South Asian women want employers to make the application process more inclusive by taking the following actions:

- **43%** Include the company's approach to diversity, equity, inclusion in the job advert
- **37%** Showcase a diverse leadership team which reflects a range of lived experiences
- **36%** Provide access to career counselling
- **31%** Remove language like 'strong', 'native', 'energetic' from job advertisements
- **27%** Provide access to networking groups

### The job advert

- Employers should reference their approach and commitment to diversity, equality and inclusion in the job advert, in addition to making explicit reference to welcoming all applicants regardless of background, in line with the Equality Act.

### The application process

- Mitigate bias during recruitment and selection processes by putting processes in place to enable more inclusive and fair hiring.
- Commit to learning about positive action to mitigate bias and review processes regularly.

- Be transparent about the application stages and criteria from the start of the process.
- Provide applicants transparency over the process and criteria, allowing candidates to give feedback on their experience of the application process and anything that would make it more inclusive.
- Challenge and query all hiring decisions to assess if there is an element of bias. Ask questions like:
  1. Are you hiring for 'cultural fit'?
  2. Why is one person considered more capable than the other, if they have the same qualifications and level of experience?
  3. Why does one candidate have more potential - is that a valid judgement?

**With racially minoritised people's job searches taking longer to secure success, positioning opportunities in front of this audience can not only boost applications, but make the hiring process more equitable.**

**Consider how you can use technology to reach a more diverse audience and open up opportunity for all. For more information about Equality Boost, see page 26.**

### The interview & feedback

- Introduce diverse interview panels and an independent D&I challenger(s) into the process, who can help the business be accountable for consistent interview processes, standardised interview questions and unconscious bias training.
- Provide feedback to candidates that is based on their skills and constructive feedback on how to improve or refer them to other roles that may suit their skillset better, with the aim to support them in their jobseeking journey.



## A helping hand: supporting your staff

Black and South Asian women continue to have their experiences of racism and discrimination invalidated. With this in mind, the creation of “safe spaces” for communities, alongside explicit acknowledgment of the existence of racism and sexism in the workplace and active listening is essential for the overall wellbeing of Black and South Asian women, in addition to:

- Actively support and encourage affinity groups, employee resource groups and other such formal and informal support resources that exist to listen, discuss and resolve issues faced by Black and South Asian women.
- Where the opinions and expertise of Black and South Asian women are sought, recognise the time, resource and mental labour they have volunteered.
- Consider executive sponsorship of affinity or employee led resource groups, to reiterate the business’ commitment to positive change and to raise awareness of challenges highlighted by these networks.
- Provide access to support services and employee assistance programmes which have the intersectionality of mental health and ethnicity at their heart, and ensure the women who need this are aware of how to access.



## Support Black and South Asian women want from employers

Career counselling



Clear commitment to D&I at all levels with associated targets



Creation of safe spaces or networks for people with similar lived experiences



Transparent progression pathways to promotion



Transparent salary bands



Unconscious bias training made available to all employees



Actively highlight success stories of people from marginalised backgrounds



Hire a diversity manager



Mentorship programmes



## Put it in print: actions at HR policy level

### Tackling discrimination

Over a third (**37%**) of Black and South Asian women want acknowledgment when an incident occurs and its impact. Employers should then follow this up with a clear, transparent policy for safeguarding people who have been discriminated against and holding discriminatory behaviour accountable:

- Ensure staff are aware of how incidents can be reported and the support and safeguarding they will receive in response.
- Co-design solutions with Black and South Asian women to ensure barriers to reporting are overcome, which can provide productive solutions-based results.
- Provide coaching to support staff, particularly Black and South Asian women, on how to report experiences while protecting their wellbeing.
- Develop effective informal and formal reporting processes to encourage reporting, improve access to justice and support, as well as using the data to inform strategy.
- Take concerns and reports raised seriously, including providing wellbeing support that understands the debilitating impact of racial and/or gender discrimination. This includes providing access to support services, support groups and employee assistance programmes.

## Policies Black and South Asian women want employers to implement to combat discrimination

Clearly documented, consistently applied disciplinary consequences for the perpetrator



Receive wellbeing support as part of the reporting process



Transparent and clear processes for investigating grievances



A clear action-led process in place when reporting to senior staff



### Salary and reward

Introduce more transparency around pay and reward in your organisation, with the aim to reduce pay gaps and discrepancies, and build trust.

- Audit and benchmark staff pay and challenge pay awards as to whether there is any bias to ensure a fair and consistent process, dismantling institutional and systematic racism.
- Be transparent about pay and promotions processes, so that staff are clear on how decisions are made.
- Report pay structures for all employees and examine where disparities exist, e.g. through committing to publishing the company's Ethnicity Pay Gap alongside the Gender Pay Gap.

# Product solutions: prioritising inclusivity in your hiring

We don't just post roles; we can support the end-to-end hiring process of businesses looking for the next member of their team.

## Equality Boost

Our research found that it takes Black and South Asian women and men around 5 months to secure their first job after leaving education, in comparison it takes white men just over 3 months and white women under 3 months. This is further highlighted by the high unemployment rates of Black and South Asian people. Equality Boost is an innovative solution that provides practical ways to make diversity, equity, and inclusion possible and provide opportunities to these people where they may have been previously excluded, helping businesses diversify and widen their outreach along the way.

Harnessing a unique blend of data science, Equality Boost pinpoints when, where and how to reach the talent you need by demographic, location and interest information. This means you can serve the right ad to the right audience, diversifying your talent pool in the process.

**In five key steps, Totaljobs will work with you to:**

1. Identify your unique challenges and set clear objectives to create a bespoke package
2. Build an optimised campaign with end-to-end creative support
3. Target the people you need, led by our team of display experts
4. Monitor campaign progress and use learnings to improve impact over time
5. Showcase your investment into diversifying your talent pool by displaying the [Equality Boost Badge](#) on your job listings

**EQUALITY  
BOOST**



We'll display the [Equality Boost Badge](#) as part of your job listings on Totaljobs. A candidate can hover over the Badge to find out more about your company's commitment to diversifying your talent pool.



# Employer branding with Universum



A third (**34%**) of Black and South Asian women were discouraged from pursuing a certain career by a member of staff during their education. This messaging can make them feel like certain career paths are unrealistic or unachievable. Employers can counter this messaging by understanding the wants and needs of their potential candidates. In turn, employers can take the opportunity to centre the voices of current employees to understand their experiences.

Working with employer branding experts Universum, Totaljobs can provide insight and advice on the wants, needs and drivers of the modern workforce to help shape your EVP.

Universum is the most trusted global employer branding expert. We use out in-depth talent insights as a benchmark in building specialist branding solutions and remove the guesswork from talent attraction. With 30+ years of insights and experience across 40+ countries, we are the authority on measurable employer branding and can help you cement your position as a culturally sensitive, inclusive employer of choice.

## In four key steps, Totaljobs will work with you to:

1. Understand what matters to professionals and students
2. Use our unique talent insights to better understand target candidates and make your message highly attractive to them
3. See how your recruitment marketing compared to your competitors
4. Attract the very best talent with expertly crafted messaging and strong visual identity



# Conclusion

Black and South Asian women face discrimination and bias throughout their career trajectory; at the application stage, at interview, throughout their path to progression and then face further pressures if they are successful in reaching management positions. These challenges can affect their overall wellbeing and implicit barriers mean they work harder for less recognition.

With this in mind, employers must ensure they are protecting the wellbeing of staff and strive to uplift Black and South Asian women throughout their career by committing to culture changes, eliminating and treating bias and discrimination, and creating policies that lead to an inclusive and fair environment for Black and South Asian women.

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A person's career journey should see their confidence building over time, as their employer supports their desire for growth, and ambition for career progression. However, our research shows that for Black and South Asian women, this confidence stagnates because many find themselves in workplaces that are not meeting their needs, whether that's in the form of unaddressed discrimination, the additional pressures that come with a lack of representation, or simply not feeling comfortable to be themselves.

It's vital that the actions taken by organisations to create a more diverse and inclusive working culture is embedded in the needs of Black and South Asian women. The findings are indeed sobering, which is why we have worked with The Diversity Trust to identify clear areas of focus for employers. The creation and funding of employee-led networks is one way employers can ensure the voices of Black and South Asian women are heard, while offering a safe space within the organisation where lived experiences can be shared.

Alongside looking internally at actions to create a workplace which is diverse, equitable and inclusive, employers can also consider the role their attraction and recruitment strategies play in opening up opportunity. Our research shows that it takes Black and South Asian women longer to see success when it comes to getting that first job offer. At Totaljobs, innovations such as Equality Boost allow the employers we work with to showcase their career opportunities to underrepresented groups, through an inclusive hiring solution which pinpoints when, where and how to reach more diverse talent pools."

**Jon Wilson,**  
**CEO at Totaljobs**



# Methodology

## Surveys

Surveys were conducted via Opinium Research, with field dates of 11th – 19th May 2022. One survey collected responses from a sample of 1,006 women of African, Caribbean or another Black background, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepalese, Bhutanese and women of mixed Black and/or South Asian heritage. Another survey collected responses from 2,000 UK workers, including 873 white men and 884 white women.

As mentioned in the opening chapters of this report, this research focuses on the experiences of Black and South Asian women, and in our data analysis, we have been conscious of recognising the diverse lived experiences within different ethnic groups. Where we have grouped the experiences of Black and South Asian women in this report, our analysis showed they reported similar experiences, with a discrepancy of 5 percentage points or lower.

## Focus groups

Twenty participants plus facilitators joined focus groups as part of this project. These focus groups were organised by The Diversity Trust, with a focus on the theme of visible and invisible barriers to career opportunities, progression and leadership for Black and South Asian women in the UK. A diverse range of sectors were represented, including public, private and charity sector companies. Two sessions were held, on 16th May 2022 and 20th May 2022.

## Further studies to refer to:

[The Colour of Power](#), Green Park, 2020

[Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities: The Report](#), March 2021

[Race in the workplace: The McGregor-Smith Review](#), Independent review by Baroness McGregor-Smith, 2017

[Broken Ladders: The myth of meritocracy for women of colour in the workplace](#), Runnymede Trust and The Fawcett Society, 2022

[Girls at risk of exclusion: Girls Speak briefing](#), Agenda, September 2021

[‘Black children over-policed in schools, report says’](#), BBC News, April 2022

[Tackling racial harassment: universities challenged](#), Equality and Human Rights Commission, Oct 2019

[Child poverty and education outcomes by ethnicity](#), ONS, Feb 2020

[The health of people from ethnic minority groups in England](#), The King’s Fund, 2021

[Ethnic inequalities in health-related quality of life among older adults in England: secondary analysis of a national cross-sectional survey](#), The Lancet, Jan 2021

[Saving Lives, Improving Mothers’ Care](#), MBRRACE-UK, 2021

# About Totaljobs and The Diversity Trust

## About Totaljobs

Part of the global recruitment technology company StepStone, Totaljobs is a UK based cutting-edge recruitment solutions partner whose goal it is to find the right job for everyone.

Through our consultative approach, we identify the hiring needs within businesses and help clients succeed by offering our support throughout their attraction, hiring and retention processes.

Totaljobs works with employers to attract and recruit the people businesses need to grow. We support a range of businesses with tailored solutions: if you need help with worldwide recruitment, we offer Totaljobs Global Hiring. For businesses struggling to define and execute their personal employer brand, we've got Universum. If your business needs to diversify talent pools and improve opportunity, Equality Boost is perfect for you. To ensure you are attracting the best entry level and graduate talent, Milkround is the solution you need. We are a recruitment solutions partner with a range of innovations that drive the hiring process, whatever the priorities and challenges of your business.

Our ambition is to build a happy and prosperous society by innovating the world of work. Our vision is to help everyone get the job that best suits their life and help employers secure the right people to enable their businesses to thrive, helping everyone prosper.

At our core is innovative tech with a human heart.

## About The Diversity Trust

The Diversity Trust CIC is a Community Interest Company established in 2012 in the UK. Our mission is to 'influence social change to achieve a fairer and safer society'. The Diversity Trust has undertaken large scale auditing, consultancy projects, research, training and strategic projects across the corporate, public, private, voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors across the UK as well as internationally. We are specialists in equity, equality, diversity, and inclusion.

As an equalities-led organisation, our Directors and Associates are members of protected characteristics including minority ethnic communities, LGBT, Disabled and Neurodivergent people. The Diversity Trust supports all marginalised communities in our society and is especially supportive of the LGBT and Trans movement. Our network of consultants brings rich, lived experiences that are critical to understanding the issues of bias and how it helps create structures of institutional and systemic discrimination e.g., racism in our society.

Our clients include individuals, businesses, and organisations across the corporate, public, and social purpose sectors. We have a wealth of knowledge and experience in policy development, project management, research, evaluation, and training. We are able to advise our client, and partner organisations, on employment and management, as well as service design, development and delivery.

For more information about us please visit [www.diversitytrust.org.uk](http://www.diversitytrust.org.uk)