



Racism in the Workplace

A virtual roundtable



Foreword

The Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter recognises that good employment is founded on workplace cultures that are fair and equitable to all. Racism has no place in our society and the importance of speaking out against racism in the workplace is critical.

The Good Employment Charter are working in close partnership with the GMCA Race Equality Panel. We are determined to confront this issue, so all can enjoy equitable access to good employment and opportunity to progress. This Roundtable discussion is the first step on our journey together.

Employers shouldn't lose this moment; a conversation with key stakeholders across GM took place recently. The conversation looked at the issues and actions employers can take to provide an inclusive environment for all.

Racism is organised and persistent, unlike 'prejudice'. From preferential treatment for people of a certain race, to the use of racist terminology, racial discrimination occurs when a person or employer alters its actions or behaviours to maintain racial advantage. The types of racism are Individual, Institutional/Systemic and Everyday racism.

Where employers can make change is at a systemic level - addressing points from the structural and social mechanics of their own organisations, to the role they play in the economy. There is also much work to be done on a personal level. White leaders and employees must learn to truly listen to their colleagues, see their own biases, histories, and daily actions in a new light.

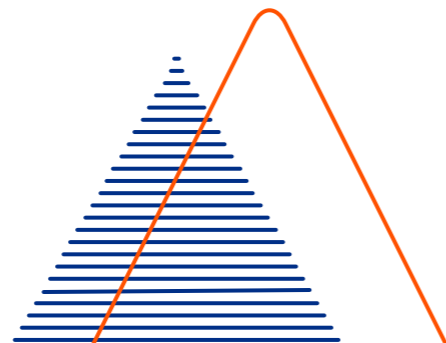
Most disturbing to me personally is the drip effect of racist behaviours. Individuals have no release for them. They are jaded after repeated rejections, confrontations, accusations or indeed acceptance of these behaviours. There is likely to be an ongoing mental health impact now recognised as trauma.

Employers must recognise that speaking out about race, diversity, and inclusion is also their responsibility, not just the duty of their Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic colleagues. As recent and historic events have shown, race discrimination and a lack of diversity within many organisations is very much a reality. And tackling this issue is not easy, it takes time and intent. Employers and managers must be prepared to act against racism and encourage others to speak up.

This document highlights how everyone can improve practice and address racism in the workplace. We are grateful to all who contributed to this important discussion.

Elizabeth Cameron, Chair, GMCA Race Equality Panel

Ian MacArthur, Director, GM Good Employment Charter



Introductions



John Herring (he/him), host:
Strategic Lead for Organisational Development and System Leadership, Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership, GM Good Employment Charter Board Member



Sharon Amesu (she/her):
Director, NW Business Leadership Team, GM Good Employment Charter Board Member



Kashif Ashraf (he/him):
Chair and co-founder of Asian Business Leaders



Elizabeth Cameron (she/her):
Chair, GMCA Race Equality Panel



Jackie Driver OBE:
Strategic lead, Manchester Health and Care Commissioning team



Jax Effiong (she/her):
Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, GMCA/GM Fire and Rescue Service



Neil Martin (he/him):
Inquiry analyst, Equalities and Human Rights Commission



Prof. Julia Rouse (she/her):
Centre for Decent Work and Productivity, Manchester Metropolitan University

Why is inclusivity and anti-racism important in employment?

People from different ethnicities have varying experiences of work. Experiences that are centred around interpersonal, institutional, and systemic racism.

“Black and Third World people are expected to educate white people as to our humanity. Women are expected to educate men. Lesbians and gay men are expected to educate the heterosexual world. The oppressors maintain their position and evade responsibility for their own actions.” – Audrey Lorde



“The conversation around race and equality takes time, but it requires intention. The same way we found a way with Zoom etc to make our businesses work online, so too, we can and must find a way to drive equality and equity.”

Sharon

Sharon starts the conversation by saying, ‘We’re at a really critical point in our collective awareness of the impact of COVID-19. It exposed pre-existing inequalities across our nation. They became clearer and more acute under this lockdown period. It cannot be the case that we live in a modern society, where there is such stark inequality and inequity for a significant portion of our population. There is no justification for this.’

The social justice case has always been compelling. There are many businesses across our region who are adamant that their workers could not work at home and they needed to be in the office, then COVID-19 hit. They realised that they had to do a U turn on that mindset and adjust to the world of online spaces, like Zoom.

We’re familiar with reports and particularly, the BITC report, which states that if we were to capitalize on the income that can be generated from people of colour in this country, we would add up to £24 billion per annum to our GDP. In a time where we need to be building back better, surely the time calls for us to also build back inclusively.

The final point for me is the potential of the people who are in our organisations, the added value that they will bring, the perspectives that they will hold, that will enrich the quality of our decision making. Now more than ever, we really need to be harnessing our talent and bringing laser focus to race equality in our businesses.’

Julia adds, ‘I work in a university where the staff don’t look like the students. And that really matters to our service provision. I have a doctoral student working in the NHS, who realised that the local hospital doesn’t employ local people. Therefore, there is a cost saving issue around getting people from ethnic communities into good work.’

“You must have people working in your team that bring you knowledge and value.”

Julia

Elizabeth agrees with her colleagues and takes an employee stand, ‘We’re presented with human beings, everybody deserves the same opportunities and rights. There’s a separatist attitude towards one community. We all come in the same way, in the same door, but this one is going to be excluded immediately, probably left to hang on the doorstep, wouldn’t have the key to get in, when they get in, they’re going to be in the different room - that is the experience of black and brown people where racism occurs.’



“Racism manifests itself in very poor mental health from members of those communities. But also, a level of trauma that often isn’t even recognized. Trauma which could have a negative impact in the workplace and society.”

Elizabeth

What I call the post traumatic slave syndrome, is this idea that somebody else should get that right above me and I mustn’t see myself above a certain role, and generations will reiterate that story. The cultural language of communication, just at the basics, isn’t understood. We have this situation where people are seen as an ‘aggressive black woman’ whenever they speak up. A good manager would recognise and tap into racism in the workplace and the effects this has on mental health.’

Many argue that this is not new information, but how do we learn and make change? Jackie supports the conversation and continues to discuss the business case. ‘It reminds me of the Gil Scott-Heron song, Pieces of a Man - If you’re not allowing the workplace to be an equitable environment.

All sectors are different, but there’s even more of an imperative for public sector organisations to address this. We’re perpetuating this continuation of the historical legacies of racial inequality with public money. We’re doing it in health, housing, and education, all the social determinants of health. And that’s completely unacceptable.

“Having a rich mix of people in our workforce helps employers understand the needs of what other people are looking at. Acknowledging cultural celebrations such as Eid and Diwali instantly make you feel connected to the brand. Which then leaves employees feeling empowered and proud to educate you on their culture.”

Kashif

A significant number of national, regional, and local inquiries into race inequalities already exist, spelling out clearly the disparities people are facing, including our recent GM Inequalities report in 2020. We must now concentrate efforts on addressing those

recommendations, not create any more pledges. Rolling up sleeves and getting on with the work to dismantle institutional discrimination is the starting point.’

Kashif takes a private sector view and says, ‘There’s a couple of factors. One being employment and potentially missing out on talent. Not everybody in the BAME community knows there’s a variety of jobs out there. When I started off as a careers advisor in the 90s, I interviewed many young South Asians who wanted to be doctors, lawyers, and engineers. They didn’t seem to think of other professional jobs that are out there.’

Neil says, ‘The Commission is the equalities regulator, we have a role to influence and enforce compliance with the Equality Act and Public Sector Equality Duty. We’re currently running an inquiry into racial inequality in health and social care, focusing on the lower paid workforce because of the high number of ethnic minority workers in these roles.

As the Commission’s recent inquiry found, racial harassment goes on at universities, that continues through into employment and wider society.’

Jax commented on the reputation for employers, ‘It can be a real struggle to turnaround our reputation. If we’ve got an extremely negative racist reputation, then people are not going

to access our services, are they? For e.g. What does a firefighter look like? That’s my challenge every day.

There’s a massive lack of employment opportunities for our wonderful young people across Greater Manchester, if that reputation is perpetuated.

Culture is such a big word. But we can break that down. What can we do to provide an inclusive culture within our own organizations? It’s about collaboration and pulling together across Greater Manchester.

There are a lot of good intentions. I hear all the right words; we signed a race pledge in 2018. So what? That for me is the big question. But we’ve got to listen to our communities, and we’ve got to act, because people are not accessing our services.’

“...if we were to capitalize on the income that can be generated from people of colour in this country, we would add up to £24 billion per annum to our GDP.”

Sharon

How do we improve the current narrative and how can we work with this as employers to unify workforces?

Many employers feel a sense of discomfort or find this topic difficult to work with. For example, the act of 'Taking the Knee' during football. Many employees may support this, and some may even boo, but how an employer recognises and acts is what makes the difference. But how can organisations navigate and build a narrative that's welcoming to people?

Julia addresses this question and says, 'We've come to the point where talking about race is impolite. We're living in a colour-blind world, and people thought that was the non-racist way to behave. They thought that what I must never do is acknowledge

anything about your skin colour, or your culture, and then we'll be alright, without realising that they essentially created a white organization for everybody to fit into. So how do you create a space where you can talk about race as a team? I think you can do this in small groups.

"We came up with a contract and the contract was, I will try not to give offence, I will try not to take offence and we will repair offence."

Julia



And through those three principles, we as a group will be able to talk about race at work. And change won't happen overnight, but this is a step in the right direction.

I've thought about: can I lead this as a white leader? Or a white ally? I must look at my own everyday racist thoughts and use those teachable moments, quite honestly, that I have those thoughts. They slip from my racist upbringing, in my culture, into my consciousness. And of course, I try to do work on that. But I am not free from this system. And I think as white allies, we do have to admit that. And I think minority ethnic people also must think about that, because we all have different thoughts about each other. The more effective action to address is the small narrative, that's what I'm beginning to think.'

We need to see clear leadership, personal responsibility, and accountability. Sharon continues to say, 'We don't want reactive responses to issues heightened in the media. Working with Julia in the past, as a white ally, she can ask me my opinion and learn so that she can understand when she's in a vulnerable space.

I leaned in as a black woman and said, Julia, when you ask me that question, I know that the place that you're coming from is genuine intent. I position myself and say, I choose not to be offended because I know the place that you're coming from. Julia has to be coming from that place, a place of curiosity and inquiry and wanting to understand almost like the humble scholar, as opposed to the omniscient white saviour.

It will take leaders with power and influence to be initiating and voicing the narrative. There is space for the broader narrative to change, but where we're really going to have that space of vulnerability, of the radical candour, and truth telling, it will be in those smaller, intimate groups.

"We need to admit within ourselves what actually goes on, and that we may hold prejudice."

Sharon

I was raised in Manchester during the 1970s and 80s, when there was stark animosity between the black communities and authority figures. There's a lot of unlearning, relearning, re-evaluating, having a metacognitive approach to the way in which I engage in the world for me to be embracing inclusivity. Our white leaders need to do the same. Allyship requires us as leaders to think about how, in an ongoing lifelong learning way, we can

use the power and privilege that we have to create opportunities for others.'

Jackie continues the conversation, 'In the 70s and 80s, the leaders of today have all been brought up in a flawed education system that led them to believe in white privilege. It often strikes me when a lot of my white colleagues tell me that racism doesn't affect them. Of course it affects all of us in society.

We must resist the urge to put this in the 'hard to do' box. Working together, we need to agree on a common code of practice that protects the right of all employees and prospective employees to flourish in the workplace. That means removing outdated, outmoded practices and cultures that serve to define who our leaders should be, what they will look like and how they will lead.

With employers, because they're immersed in this white privilege, you've got to start with the why and you've got to get them to understand. I remember the McPherson report commented on public services and institutional discrimination, and it only ever hits the criminal justice system, it was meant and targeted at all public institutions. There's work to do there to get our public services to respond to that, rather than reinventing the wheel.'

Elizabeth supports the views discussed and continues to comment, 'There was a lot of animosity between people of the African Caribbean community, I think they're there again.

You see Asians and ethnic minority people coming through, but you will not see African Caribbean males or females wanting to join the police force. There is still basic mistrust there. You cannot have a disconnect and mix messages around the support or lack of racism such as Taking the Knee.

I was at an EDI call, and shared my thoughts on white privilege. Many of the workers quite honestly hadn't embraced that as a concept. One of the white gentlemen volunteered the fact that he was relieved to have this conversation because people assume that he has the same feelings about talking openly about racism as everybody else, that he doesn't agree with Black Lives Matter, that he thinks all this about football has been nonsense. He's the very opposite.'

This is hard work for employers. Relying on a statement that ticks the boxes is not enough. This requires real intention, effort, and thought.

Advice for employers



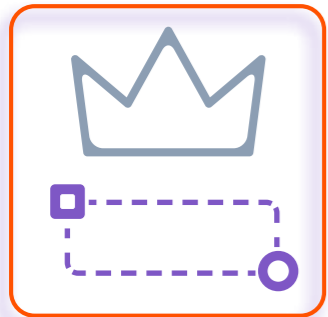
Create cultural conditions



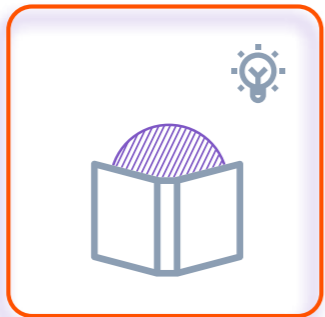
Have the intention to listen



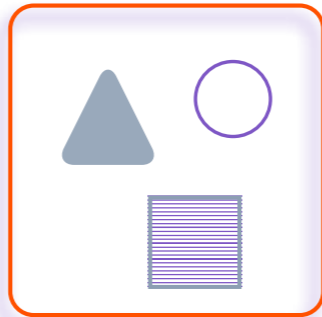
Invest in diversity and inclusion



Have change champions



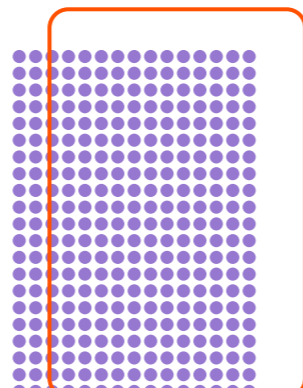
Be willing to educate yourself



Celebrate employee differences



Build a movement of anti-racists, including white allies



What action can employers take to change Racism in the Workplace?

Kashif suggests, ‘Using your networks can help you build diversity and utilise their influence. I also find case studies are something that people relate to. It adds credibility to the work an employer is doing to address racism.’

Jax also says, ‘We’ve got to keep talking about this stuff, but we need a budget. If we want to engage with fantastic speakers like some of the people on this Roundtable today, we need to pay people for their time. It’s not the fluffy stuff, it’s the real stuff that matters to individuals in organisations.’

We need to support all our employees, especially our fantastic third sector organisations. And we can raise them up, give them a platform, give them a voice, and listen to our local communities.

“We haven’t got one identity; we’ve got multiple identities. Some of them are extremely oppressive. And those microaggressions are with us every day.”

Jax

I think it’s important to listen to lived stories. We need diversity, so where’s our programs around diverse leadership? We also need our staff networks to work collaboratively.’

Many employers often find there is a difference between investment in this compared to investment in sales or risk management. The gains and the benefits have parity with investing in those other areas.

We don’t need programs, we need movements, adds Julia. ‘We need those programs to unearth all the people that we were talking about.’

“..you will find that there are lots of hidden anti-racists out there, whose anti-racism can be activated.”

Julia

Here are some of the mechanisms we have adopted in housing. We’ve created a mentoring and sponsoring relationship. But we also use that as a reciprocal mentoring relationship to unearth what is racist in this place. Then we created a group of change champions who have a certain level of power including mentors, mentees, and a group of change champions as a movement, who have then taken that message to senior leaders. This only works if senior leaders are ready to listen to you.’

Jackie adds, ‘Racism in the workplace doesn’t need to change, it needs eradicating. It is a pernicious, injurious and detrimental culture that reduces our ability to provide decent services to everyone and harms our workforce.’

Sharon supports her colleagues and comments, ‘I’m doing some work with Liverpool, and the investment is there because they see the place of primacy of this agenda. We need to continue to see financial investment and sponsorship, which is then seen across our organisations. This agenda is a priority, in the same way as other areas of our business.’

Elizabeth ends by saying, ‘Organisations have the ability to do something, I think money has a great deal to do with it. But the person who’s prepared to release it will be influenced by what the senior leadership says. The intention for sure is there.’



In summary, combating racial discrimination in the workplace is a difficult task. This takes a lot of time and effort. Racism is present in organisations, but good employers will act on the change needed to make their workplace an inclusive and safe environment. To improve racial diversity in our workplaces and eliminate racism, employers need to start having the right conversations and have the intention to change. Understanding what your employees need, but also knowing when to step in yourself, is the right direction to be heading in.



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