

## BLACK FURTHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP GROUP

5<sup>th</sup> August 2020

### Open letter to address systemic racism in further education

*Open letter to: Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson, Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. Gavin Williamson MP, Secretary of State for Education, funders of further education colleges; regulatory bodies & further education membership bodies.*

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We, the undersigned, are a group of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) senior leaders, and allies, who work or have an interest in the UK further education (FE) sector.

The recent #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM) global protest following the brutal murder of George Floyd compels us all to revisit how we address the pervasive racism that continues to taint and damage our society. The openness, solidarity and resolve stirred by #BLM is unprecedented and starkly exposes the lack of progress made in race equality since *'The Stephen Lawrence Enquiry'*. Against a background of raised concerns about neglect in healthcare, impunity of policing, cruelty of immigration systems – and in education, the erasure of history, it is only right for us to assess how we are performing in FE. Only by doing so, can we collectively address the barriers that our students, staff and communities face. The personal, economic and social costs of racial inequality are just too great to ignore.

At a time of elevated advocacy for FE, failure to recognise the insidious nature of racism undermines the sector's ability to fully engage with all its constituent communities. The supporting data and our lived experiences present an uncomfortable truth, that too many BAME students and staff have for far too long encountered a hostile environment and a system that places a *'knee on our neck'*. It is self-evident that we will not accept this moving into the future.

Sadly, the real achievements of the ground breaking work of the *'Commission for Black Staff in Further Education'* (2002), backed by the Network for Black Professionals and the sector, and the Black Leadership Initiative have not been sustained due to lack of support and political will. Indeed, the FE sector has gone backwards over the last few years in terms of the numbers of Black Principals, leaders, middle tier managers, teaching staff and governors. There is no longer any systematic monitoring, training or positive action in place to address this. Critically, there remain significant attainment gaps for black students when compared with their peers. Alongside this, the lack of a structured approach to measuring the extent of the issues faced by BAME communities inhibits progress. There is no baseline data on ethnicity profiles across all levels of sectoral leadership. There is no analysis of student and staff referrals to disciplinary processes. There is no evaluation of the extent of the barriers faced by black students and staff in accessing job and career progression opportunities.

The need to act is urgent. Anti-racism must be a central tenet of the new FE White Paper. It must be enshrined into changes to post-16 and post-18 education and funding, building on the recommendations arising from the Augar Review. It must be explicit within the blueprint emerging from the Independent Commission on the *'College of the Future'*.

We believe FE is vital to the Government's economic recovery plan, but until the issues outlined in this letter are understood and addressed, the vision for a 'levelling up' of society will remain an aspiration. Furthermore, the adverse impact of Covid-19 on BAME communities threatens to exacerbate pre-existing inequalities. Never has there been such a need for a clear strategy and investment in skills development and training to narrow the gap.

This is a particularly critical juncture for FE and it is also a crucial moment for us, both as black people directly and deeply affected by these issues and as people who can positively impact on the future of all students. We stand ready to play our full part, as leaders, as expert

practitioners and as role models to enable the FE system to 'step up' to its responsibility for addressing racial inequality. Unless we collectively confront the issue of race equality in FE, we will not realise a new vision for *'people, productivity and place'*.

We seek to work *in partnership* with sector colleagues to address these challenges. The critical task of re-skilling the workforce and supporting competitiveness must harness the full potential of black and white communities to enable social and economic resilience. Towards that end, this **call for action** comprises the following **10 proposals**:

### **Curriculum**

- 1. A radical revision of FE curricula and qualifications to reflect contemporary British values, incorporating the importance of colonial history and its influence on society, historically and now; the impact of racism on black and white communities; the contributions made by black people to society.**

### **Culture**

- 2. All teacher training, professional development and leadership programmes to include, as a central component, the consideration of racial equality; and for teacher training, the inclusion of anti-racist pedagogy.**
- 3. All Colleges to annually publish student performance, staff and governor profile data by ethnicity, including actions to address identified gaps.**
- 4. All regulatory bodies, funders and membership groups to publish workforce, leadership and governance profile data by ethnicity, including actions to address gaps.**
- 5. All sectoral committees, boards or advisory groups established to address racism and inequalities to be led by and made up of those with real insight of these issues, or expertise in these areas.**

### **Climate**

- 6. College recruitment processes, including the deployment of recruitment companies, to proactively address imbalances in the diversity of leadership at all levels.**
- 7. Ofsted and other quality assurance bodies to evaluate the effectiveness of pedagogy and curriculum practice in promoting race equality, alongside strategies to address attainment gaps through college inspections reports and their own annual reports.**
- 8. The FE Commissioner's annual report, diagnostic assessments and structural reviews to include data on BAME leaders, managers and governors against the profile of college student populations and local demographics.**
- 9. FE regulatory bodies, development organisations and unions to collaborate with colleges to design and implement a common framework to share best practice in the advancement of racial literacy and justice across all modes of learning.**

### **Communications**

- 10. All organisations with an investment in FE (*whether statutory, regulatory, representative or commercial*) to ensure fair and positive treatment of BAME students, staff and communities, in terms of optics, content and impact.**

Yours sincerely  
List of signatories.

**The following list of signatories comprises current and former Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) senior leaders, staff and allies, who work or have an interest in, the UK further education (FE) sector:**

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## **Editorial Notes: [updated – 25/09/20]**

The [\*\*Macpherson Report \(1999\)\*\*](#) on *The Stephen Lawrence Enquiry* resulted in the 'Commission for Black Staff in FE' being established, supported by all sector organisations.

The Commission set out a comprehensive set of recommendations for the FE sector through its report "[\*\*Challenging racism: further education leading the way\*\*](#)" (2002)

The [\*\*Foster Review \(2005\)\*\*](#) challenged colleges to do better on Race Equality. It also directly resulted in the formal recognition of Network for Black Managers (later the NBP) as the independent voice representing Black staff in the FE sector, and the role of the Black Leadership Initiative (BLI) in growing the talent pool of future Black leaders in the sector.

Black and minority ethnic (BAME) student representation in further education has continued to climb, and is currently at **30% (of 2.2 million students)** nationally (source: Association of Colleges data for 2019/20). This compares with an overall UK black and minority ethnic population of 14%. BAME representation amongst students and staff is typically much greater in cities and urban conurbations. For instance, some London colleges comprise in excess of 70% BAME learners and 35%+ BAME staff. In contrast, BAME student representation on Apprenticeships stands at only 11% according to latest government figures. There is unequal attainment amongst BAME students studying FE courses. For instance, the latest data confirms that Black and African Caribbean consistently underperform their peers.

Given the role that FE plays in delivering and feeding into university level courses, the findings of the [\*\*Universities UK Report 'BAME Student Attainment at UK Universities; Closing The Gap' \(2019\)\*\*](#) are important. The latest statistics show a 13% attainment gap for BAME students. BAME staff are poorly represented in both senior academic and university leadership roles.

The [\*\*World Skills UK Report 'Championing Difference for a Better Workforce' \(2020\)\*\*](#), confirmed that in 2018 90% of WorldSkills UK competitors were White, while only 8% were BAME. These differentials extend to judges (8%) and training managers (7%). The follow through of this means that there is next to no BAME representation on World Skills Team GB selection lists.

Black and minority ethnic representation in senior college leadership positions has decreased sharply, from 13% in 2017 to *circa* 5% now. There is no data for second tier and below because the sector decided some years ago that it too onerous to collect it. Nor is there data on ethnic representation on College corporations.

Most of the FE sector's national representative and regulatory organisations comprise 100% White leadership teams. For instance, the Association of Colleges, Education & Training Foundation and Society for Education and Training have always had 100% White leadership teams, and historically near non-existent Board level representation, with the exception of AoC's current (and laudable 7%). AoC has never had a minority ethnic President.

The FE Commissioner's senior team also has no BAME representation. Whilst Ofsted, which is responsible for inspecting colleges, reported that only 5% of all its inspectors (HMIs) were from BAME backgrounds in 2018.

Over the past five years, a number of hitherto successful and publicly recognised minority ethnic principals have been driven out of the sector by unsubstantiated public smears by sections of the sector press. All these cases were met by silence, most notably from 'the voices of the sector'.

Within this context, many BAME principals - including their White peers - prefer to keep a low profile in raising their concerns, so the BAME representative voice in FE, is further suppressed.

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