

RACE FOR EQUALITY

Challenging racism in the *NHS*

This action plan is for UNISON health branch activists to plan branch action to campaign and negotiate for race equality in the workplace.

Why is this an issue?

More than 70 years after it was founded the NHS continues to rely on staff from all round the world, and generations of Black staff have made the NHS what it is today. Yet many Black staff in the NHS still face the injustice of racism and inequality at work every day.

NHS staff are there to help everyone in every community and treat them with respect, dignity and fairness. UNISON believes they should expect the same treatment in return.

UNISON will not stand by while Black staff in the NHS continue to face the injustice of racism and inequality at work. Racial discrimination is not only wrong – it is against the law. It wastes talent, damages staff, hurts patients, and holds the NHS back.

What is UNISON trying to do?

UNISON wants to help staff recognise and challenge racism in the workplace. We aim to support staff – and help them support each other – as we work together to take on racism and deliver an NHS that respects and values all staff.

The health group has been working with the National Black Members Committee to identify some of the key experiences of racism in the NHS that members are most concerned about.

Racism in numbers¹

1. 21% of the workforce are Black² but only 10% of senior managers are Black
2. White applicants are 1.61 times more likely to be appointed from shortlisting than Black applicants
3. Black staff are 1.16 times more likely to enter formal disciplinary processes
4. 29% of Black staff experienced harassment, bullying or abuse from staff in last 12 months,

¹ These figures are from the NHS Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) 2020 for England – this data is not collected in the same way in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland but there is no reason to suggest the pattern would be significantly different in any country.

² The WRES data uses Black and Minority Ethnic (BME). UNISON uses the broad political and inclusive term Black

compared with 24% of white staff

5. Only 71% of Black staff believe their employer provides equal opportunities for career progression/promotion, compared with 87% of white staff

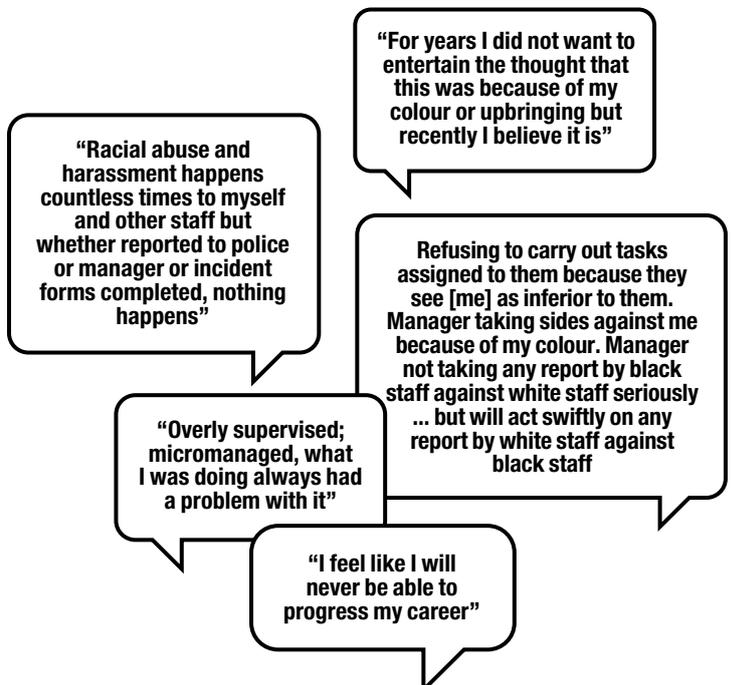
Racism in action

The Health Service Group and the National Black Members Committee have conducted some focus group work with Black members in the health service and these discussions have identified some common themes in how racism is operating:

- Career progression:
 - repeatedly not getting shortlisted or appointed to promotions
 - not being informed about informal development opportunities
 - getting unfavourable references.
- Harassment and abuse – which can come from other staff, patients or the public
- Negative labelling
- Denial of identity, diversity and the impact of racism including claims of ‘colour blindness’ from managers and colleagues
- Poor response from employers to reporting of racist incidents
- Disproportionate use of formal policies and procedures including disciplinary, capability, performance management, and fitness to practice referrals.

Racism the human impact

Here is what some staff say about how racism affects them at work. Others don’t speak out at all:



What should branches do?

Find out more

1. Understand the workforce race equality monitoring data for your employer. The full results for all NHS trusts in England can be found on the NHS England website under Workforce Race Equality Standard 2020 [here](#).

This data gets updated annually. In other types of employer – and in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – ask for equality monitoring reports and board papers.

2. Reach out to Black members in your workplace and gather their experiences. Think about the best way to do this – Some of the things you could do include: organise a meeting, do a walk-around, set up a mailbox, run a survey or organise drop-in sessions.

Improve your skills and training

3. Talk to your regional education officer about organising training for your activists to develop skills in having conversations about racism, supporting members and challenging racism in all its forms. All reps in your branch need to be confident in identifying racism and organising members to challenge it. Some regions run courses delivered by organisations such as Hope Not Hate or Show Racism the Red Card which can be a great way of thinking about how you can tackle and prevent racism in the workplace.

Involve and organise

4. Work with your branch Black members' officer to plan your strategy.

5. Think about how you can create regular forums or spaces where Black staff can discuss what's happening, find out more about UNISON and plan how they want to be involved in supporting each other to tackle racism in the workplace.

6. Identify members who you can support to be more active – work to ensure that Black staff are fully represented in branch structures and staff side negotiating bodies.

7. Use the Race for Equality campaign leaflet to start wider conversations in the workplace about what all members can do together to stamp out this problem. Everyone needs to be involved not just Black members

– everyone can be part of recognising racist behaviour, challenging it when they witness it and supporting people who are subjected to it.

8. Think about how well prepared you are as a branch to deal with situations where one of your members engages in racist behaviour. Know where to get advice about the union's rules and how they apply to all members.

9. Work with your Black members to decide the issue(s) you want to tackle. It could be disproportionate use of disciplinary or performance management. It could be Black staff not getting a fair chance at training or career progression opportunities. Or it could be racial harassment or bullying.

10. Plan a campaign that targets the people with the power to change things. Can you gather testimony or organise a listening event where senior leaders get to hear members' stories? Can you raise it with board members? Could you work with the employer to gather more evidence?

11. Identify the measures you want the employer to take. These could include systems to vet disciplinary referrals, positive action schemes to support Black staff to access promotions, training for line managers on dealing with racism and promoting equality. Are there key policies that need to be updated? Are changes to recruitment and selection processes needed?

You will find resources to help you do all the above at unison.org.uk/raceforequality

Keep in touch!

Racism in the NHS is a long-standing and deep-seated problem which will take time to overcome. We want our Race for Equality campaign to grow and to last as long as it takes. We are keen to hear from branches about your experiences. What issues are you uncovering? What actions have you taken that are working? What are you struggling with? Do keep in touch and let us know your experiences and your comments. We will share your stories – check out our webpage to see what other branches are doing.

► Contact us at: health@unison.co.uk

Appendix – resources to help with your plan

We have some [Race for Equality webpages](#) that have information that will help you with your work locally.

Here's a round-up of some key help and information you will find in the resources section:

Start the conversation

Order copies of our Race for Equality campaign leaflet [here](#) and campaign resources. We have produced these to help our reps and branches stamp out racism in the NHS.

Black staff are an integral part of the NHS that we all champion and defend but many don't feel able to speak out or feel ignored when they do. Use the leaflet to start conversations and give our campaign a visual profile in your workplaces.

Explore the NHS Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES)

The WRES is a rich source of data based on nine key indicators of racial disparity covering areas like career progression, representation in senior management and board positions, harassment and disciplinary processes. You can make comparisons over time and also between employers, and you can read some case studies and action plans from individual employers. Explore it [here](#)

You've identified the issue(s) you want to tackle – what next?

Once you've started raising the profile of the campaign in workplaces you may want to select one or two key topics to focus on. To help we've created some topic guides containing hints and advice on how to find out more about the issue, giving members a voice and ideas for your negotiating checklist for when you approach the employer.

So you want to tackle racism within disciplinary processes?

Black staff are disproportionately likely to be put through formal disciplinary processes. Download our handy guide for tips and advice on how to find out more about the issues, give members a voice and what you should be asking your employer to do to improve the situation.

So you want to tackle racism in recruitment and career progression?

Black staff are disadvantaged when it comes to career progression and when applying for promotion opportunities. Download our handy guide for tips and advice on how to find out more about the issues, give members a voice and what you should be asking your employer to do to improve the situation.

So you want to tackle racial harassment?

Black staff are more likely than white staff to report harassment, bullying or abuse from colleagues. Download our handy guide for tips and advice on how to find out more about the issues, give members a voice and what you should be asking your employer to do to improve the situation.

All these guides can be found in the resources section of our [webpage](#)