

RACE FOR



EQUALITY



Challenging racism in the *NHS*

Recruitment, career progression and race – a briefing for reps

In UNISON equality comes from the heart. For us challenging discrimination and winning equality are fundamental to everything we do. As the UK's biggest health union, we understand that from its birth the NHS has called on staff from across the world to come and work in it. And to this day the NHS relies heavily on Black staff whether they are British or have moved here to work. The NHS is there to serve everyone in every community with respect, dignity and fairness. And those are values that should apply to everyone employed in it too.

The Chief People Officer for the NHS in England has noted that:

“Black and minority ethnic (BME) staff constitute almost a fifth of the total NHS workforce, yet the experiences they often face do not correspond with the values upon which the NHS proudly stands. It cannot be right that some of our hardworking staff are still more likely than their colleagues to face unfair treatment and discrimination in the workplace.”¹

What the data tells us

The latest Workforce Race and Equality Standard (WRES) report notes the following:

- The proportion of BME² staff in very senior manager (VSM) positions increased from 5.4% in 2016 to 10.3% in 2022. This is still significantly lower than the proportion of BME staff (24%) in NHS trusts.
- White applicants were 1.54 times relatively more likely to be appointed from shortlisting compared to BME applicants
- 44% of BME staff believed that their trust provides equal opportunities for career progression or promotion. This is lower than the response in 2018 (47.5%). In contrast 59% of white staff believe that their trust provides equal opportunities for career progression or promotion.

The report also notes:

“The evidence from each WRES report over the years has shown that our black and minority ethnic staff members are less well represented at

senior levels, have measurably worse day to day experiences of life in NHS organisations, and have more obstacles to progressing in their careers”.

Although WRES data relates to England, there is no reason to believe that the picture would be any different in the other UK nations.

There are geographical differences in the data, for example the East of England performs worst on recruitment with white applicants being 1.96 times more likely to be appointed from shortlisting compared to Black applicants. There are also variations by the type of NHS trusts – with acute providers faring worst. So it is important to find out the full picture for your employer.

Actions for branches

Finding out

- If you work in a trust in **England** check out the WRES data:
 - For shortlisting comparators, you can look at the [2016 data](#)³, [2017 data](#)⁴, [2018 data](#)⁵, [2019 data](#)⁶, [2020 data](#)⁷, [2021 data](#)⁸ and [2022 data](#)⁹. Go to the 'shortlisting to Appt' tab, find your employer for each year and see whether the rates have changed.
- If you work for other types of employer or in **Scotland, Cymru/Wales** or **Northern Ireland** ask your employer to supply data on shortlisting, appointments and career progression broken down by ethnicity. Ask for the data over the last three years so that you can see if there are any trends.
- Does the composition of the workforce where you work reflect the local population? Are Black staff employed at all band levels or are they disproportionately represented in lower bands?
- Where are job vacancies advertised?
- Talk with your members about their experiences to get a clear understanding of what is happening locally – are Black workers given the same

3 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/wres-2016-Unify-data.xlsx>

4 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/workforce-race-equality-standard-2017-Unify-data.xlsx>

5 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/workforce-race-equality-standard-2018-SDCS-data.xlsx>

6 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/wres-2019-sdcs-data.xlsx>

7 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/WRES-2020-raw-data.xlsx>

8 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Workforce-Race-Equality-Standard-report-2021-.pdf>

9 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Workforce-Race-Equality-Standard-2022-supporting-data-200323.xlsx>

1 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/closing-the-ethnicity-gap.pdf>

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

- training and career development opportunities?
- How are training opportunities advertised to staff?
 - How are promotions, secondments or acting up opportunities made known to staff? Is it open access or does it depend on who you know?
 - How much access do Black staff get to informal mentoring and shadowing opportunities?
 - Are you aware of any Black workers applying for promotions or training/professional development opportunities but consistently being turned down?

Give members a voice

- Set up focus groups for Black workers to discuss their experiences in more depth and bring out the stories behind the data. For example are there barriers to getting training opportunities, funding/ access to courses? In England, discuss the employer's WRES action plan and get views about where there are gaps that need to be addressed.
- You could also run a confidential survey – or set up a mailbox where people can give anonymous feed-back on the barriers they face in pursuing career development.
- Ask that Black workers be given the opportunity to meet with senior managers and leaders, for example, drop-in sessions with board members. Your role will be critical to ensure your employer provides the reassurances needed to make staff feel safe to take part and speak openly.

Negotiate with your employer

- **Targets:** encourage your employer to set board-led targets on areas for improvement – these could be likelihood of Black staff being appointed from short-listing; representation of Black staff in senior bands; or proportion of Black staff reporting positive views about their career development.
- **Ask them to take steps to ensure job adverts reach underrepresented groups,** for example advertise via the Black staff network, local community and faith groups etc.
- **Panel diversity:** minimum standards on diversity of selection panels – ask for monitoring of panels and negotiate with your employer to ensure diversity on both shortlisting and interviewing panels. This is likely to require them to commit to putting Black staff through recruitment and selection training to ensure there is a large enough pool to draw from.
- **Fair selection processes:** negotiate to ensure fairness during the recruitment process. Steps could include:
 - removing personal details such as name, gender and date of birth to anonymise applications

- using 'horizontal' scoring, where all of the application forms are scored for one section (eg qualifications), before the next section is considered
- redesigning skills tests and assessment tasks to ensure they are relevant to the job requirements. This would include looking at the potential for bias, assumptions, or areas which may disadvantage speakers of other languages
- ensuring written feedback is given to every unsuccessful applicant and that these are regularly reviewed and quality assured.

- **Positive action – training:** ask employers to encourage the take up of training opportunities by Black staff, for example make Black staff aware of training opportunities, provide support to Black staff to complete applications for training, introduce mentoring or coaching during the training period.
- **Positive action – promotions:** discuss what positive action can be taken to ensure applications from Black staff for promotion opportunities – for example coaching on filling out application forms, interview skills coaching, supported feedback when they are not successful and targeted support to apply again.

Ethnic minority staff network – improving access to CPD

In [this case study](#) you can see how one trust has increased the take up of continuing professional development among Black staff by empowering the ethnic minority staff network to act as a professional network. This has resulted in Black staff being more likely to take up opportunities than white staff. Key features include: recording and monitoring; network ambassadors and champions who offer support with applications as well as coaching/mentoring; and a place for a network representative on the CPD panel which considers applications for funding.

Leadership programmes

Encourage the employer to develop leadership programmes targeting Black staff which embed practical skills and develop confidence in aspiring to senior positions.

Leading better care, leading across difference

In [this case study \(scroll down to case study number four\)](#) you can read about a Leadership programme for Black Nurses, Midwives and managers described by a member of UNISON's National Black Members Committee who talks about her work on the programme and the impact she sees for staff who go through it.

- Is there a specific policy for career progression and does it set out how equity for those with protected characteristics will be achieved? If not then negotiate one – look out for more UNISON guidance on recruitment and career progression coming out later this year.

Finally, let us know

- The UNISON health group is keen to hear from branches about their experiences. Have you been able to implement any of the suggested actions? Has the recruitment rate and career progression rate for Black staff reduced/increased? What are Black staff are telling you about their experiences? Please email us at health@unison.co.uk