

## Taking action on race equality

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### Henicka Uddin, Acas area director, London region

Henicka joined Acas as an individual conciliator 16 years ago and is experienced in mediation, resolving workplace disputes and improving employment relations. Henicka currently leads the Acas London Good Practice Services team and is Acas's race champion.

I am very happy to announce that I have been appointed as race champion at Acas. This is a privilege but also a great responsibility – as the employment relations experts, we really need to practise what we preach!

For me, improving inclusivity and removing barriers that hinder ethnic minority staff needs 2 things. It needs individual and collective experiences – in other words, employee voice. And, secondly, it needs a workplace culture that is receptive and open to change and to continually improve.

This is the first in a series of reflections on what we have been doing over the last year and what we aim to achieve. I hope some of the lessons we have learned can help employers and employees alike build more equal and diverse workplaces.

### Why do we all need to take action?

If you're reading this blog then you probably care about race equality and, like me, realise that we need to take action because talking isn't enough. Talking without action leaves people feeling angry and frustrated.

It's a shame that we have to keep making the business case for positive change at work – for more equality, more awareness of mental health, and, often, just for treating people with dignity and respect.

Listen to your staff – they will tell you what needs to be done. And analyse your data from focus groups and surveys, for example on the results of recruitment panels and how ethnic minority applicants are faring.

We've all been listening to the voices calling for more action on race inequality, particularly prominent last summer, and reflecting on what more we could do. And the current coronavirus pandemic certainly reinforces the extra support ethnic minority colleagues need.

For example, a [recent poll from the TUC focusing on the impact of COVID-19 at work](#) found that almost a third (32%) of ethnic minority workers report having experienced 3 or more forms of unfair treatment compared to a quarter of white workers. In addition, almost a quarter (23%) of ethnic minority workers report experiencing abuse from other members of their workplace, compared to 16% of white workers.

## Where do you start?

Having listened and done your research (which should be ongoing – a single snapshot isn't enough), a good place to start is with a race action plan. We have just refreshed ours and it's broken down into 4 parts:

### 1. Representation

We are taking action to recruit more ethnic minority staff – for example, by ensuring we have trained ethnic minority colleagues sitting on recruitment panels. This helps give confidence to interviewees and ensure the right tone is set right from the beginning.

### 2. Behaviours

This isn't just about tackling blatant racism – though this is absolutely critical – but it can also be about encouraging the right behaviours in everyday settings. Try and ensure ethnic minority colleagues, for example, are given a voice in meetings. We have revised our anti-racism training and this will be rolled out this year.

### 3. Honesty

The management buzzwords for honesty are 'transparency' and 'accountability'. For me, this is about involving staff and keeping the momentum going. We are working hard to raise the profile of our Race Equality Network, which aims to empower staff to speak out, to influence and connect with one another.

### 4. Share

We want to give the best advice possible to workplaces, which means ongoing field research and maintaining close working relationships with key stakeholders like the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and Government Equalities Office (GEO).

## Quick wins and longer-term goals

One tip is to try and create an action plan that has a mixture of quick wins and longer-term goals. Of course, even better if you can launch an initiative with an eye on both these things.

For example, we have started an 'Insight Pairs' programme. This pairs up ethnic minority colleagues with members of the senior leadership team. So, a quick win by creating personal rapport and promoting awareness of what issues matter most. And, hopefully, with wider development, it will also help us achieve our longer-term target of much greater ethnic minority representation at senior level – something many workplaces are striving for.

## What it means to me

The days of having to apologise about wanting to see real change for equality are over. It may make some people feel a little uncomfortable, but that's where your awareness raising comes in. And, let's be honest, education is ongoing and necessary for all of us.

There is a lot of work to do. We've set ourselves an ambitious programme and at the end of the 3 years there will probably be more we can do. But that's the way it should be.

The ultimate vision for me is for race to no longer be a barrier and a disadvantage. Together we can affect positive change to create inclusive workplaces – but each one of us has a part to play in achieving this.

I look forward to keeping you all posted on our journey.