

RACE IN PR

BAME lived experiences in the UK PR industry

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Avril Lee MCIPR
Chair, CIPR's
Diversity and
Inclusion Network

FOREWORD

To many, this research will not be a shock. It represents a continuation of their day-to-day experience: a lack of equal opportunities and fair treatment, microaggressions, and unconscious biases that eat away at an individual over time and lead to feelings of not 'fitting in' or being 'up to standard'. It points to black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) practitioners being unable to progress in the same way as their white counterparts, and feeling that there is an unequal playing field leading to a lack of fair and equal opportunities. It is important to note that while this research did not look at other areas of diversity – for example disability, sexuality, age, gender and social mobility – other studies and reported experiences do mirror much in this report as diversity in the workplace is a societal issue and not confined to the any single profession.

This research is a first by the UK public relations (PR) industry itself. It explores the impact this unacceptable situation has on individuals. It goes beyond the numbers and looks at the lived experiences, highlighting the realities to those who fail to recognise it as an issue, who ignore it or who only give it lip service.

Recent events and high-profile discussions have driven BAME issues within PR up the industry agenda and led to much public soul searching. However, action to improve these issues remains limited with minimal impact on cultural practices or policies. In this research, many of the lived experiences described by practitioners later in their career are a continuation of the same issues that younger BAME professionals are experiencing at the start of their professional lives. These continued negative experiences have left them feeling, at best, frustrated and, at worst, utterly exhausted and angry. Eventually, having been made to feel as if they are not good enough, unable to progress or to be their authentic self at work, many BAME practitioners choose to become independent consultants.

Too little is happening to change this situation – not one of those 17 individuals who took part in the research believes enough action is being taken by senior leaders to address these concerns or increase diversity. And yet, nearly all of them would recommend a career in PR. They are proud of their work and they love what they do. Talent and passion exist within and for the profession. The responsibility to change practices and cultures, to unleash that talent and create a fair and equal workplace for all rests with business leaders. Words, reviews, panel discussions and recommendations not implemented are not enough. Inaction is unacceptable. If PR leaders are not actively addressing these issues, then they are actively choosing to ignore them. Without those at the top changing the status quo, many below them will feel locked out, and our profession will be the poorer for it. It won't be easy, and it won't deliver "overnight success". It is a learning experience and requires belief and humility – but it is necessary and long overdue.



Alastair McCapra
CIPR
Chief Executive

INTRODUCTION

The fieldwork for this report was undertaken in the autumn of 2019. We hoped to publish the findings in the Spring of this year, but the COVID emergency interrupted our plans and delayed sharing them.

Our original intention was to open up a conversation about what happens to people with BAME backgrounds in our sector, and what we can do to effect change. As things have turned out, a much wider conversation has burst into life in recent weeks following the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. We find ourselves, unexpectedly, publishing our research amid a wave of protests and self-questioning that is surging all around the world.

This report is therefore no longer the start of a conversation. It is, however, a point of focus in a worldwide discussion, where we can recognise how much racist attitudes are thriving very close to home. They have a deeply damaging effect on many dedicated professionals who generally don't have a place to share their frustration and anger.

Now that this report has been published, what next?

If you are a CIPR member and you want to help change your own organisation – and indeed your relationships with your colleagues – I hope you will join our Diversity and Inclusion Group. We have had a Forum of members working on diversity issues since 2009, but it is time now to open it up to all members who want to drive change and contribute to its work.

If you are being side-lined, belittled or undermined, this is unacceptable and unprofessional behaviour. If people around you seem to regard it as normal, we certainly don't. CIPR members can use our Ethics Hotline so please call if you have concerns you want to raise. Members also have free access to a legal support helpline you can use if you need specific expert advice on what you can do. There is no need to just put up with it, and the CIPR has the power to sanction members who act in racist ways.

Diversity awareness, unconscious bias training and other initiatives have all had some impact on our sector, but evidently, not enough. Rather than grasping at more 'solutions' now, we have a real opportunity to listen, to reflect, and to work with each other to effect lasting change.

The CIPR will commit to working with groups of BAME professionals within the sector and with others to ensure that the experiences recounted here are not repeated in another report in a few years' time. Our role is to influence others, to support positive change and to take action against members who breach our code of conduct.



Elizabeth Bananuka
Founder
BME PR Pros,
The Blueprint

bme pr pros

Sometimes You Just Have to Create Your Own Platform

The
Blueprint

The CIPR research is heart-breaking but unsurprising. We are a sector full of people that want to talk about diversity but don't ever want to discuss or engage with racism or racial inequality. That don't ever want to ask why in 2020 an industry with so many agencies and organisations based in cities as ethnically diverse as London, Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham, can be 92% white and why the number of ethnic minorities has declined over the years. I fully expect whole swathes of our sector not to engage with the contents of this report or to reflect on the working cultures of their own environments because that would take real work and a genuine commitment to racial diversity. However, for those that want to do something about diversity, I created The Blueprint.



Melissa Lawrence
Chief Executive
Taylor Bennett
Foundation

TAYLOR BENNETT
FOUNDATION

I want to applaud the CIPR for commissioning this report. It provides a unique insight into the lived experiences of people from a black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) background working in PR and, although difficult to read in some places, it highlights the real issues happening in the industry, which gives us the opportunity to change the narrative and make a start on solving these very real issues.

One thing that is clear from this report is that the industry needs to make urgent changes to its recruitment practices. These changes must be driven from the top down and will require investment and resources to make a real difference. Through Taylor Bennett Foundation programmes we often see an instant impact with our graduates, they go through our programmes and genuinely have their lives changed. We have seen this for more than a decade, but we want to do more, working in partnership with industry partners. The PR industry must be prepared to invest, commit and be in it for the long haul.



**Amanda Fone &
Adrian Walcott**
**Co Founders of
BAME2020**

Amanda is also
founder and CEO of
f1 recruitment and
Adrian is co-founder
and MD of Brands
with Values



For many years we have been hearing similar stories to the ones you are about to read in this CIPR report. At our events ‘Let’s be bold about the subject of Race’, brave BAME professionals talk openly about their love of our sector but their lack of belief in being able to ‘develop their careers inside it’. Recently we have had CEO’s of some of the leading PR agencies, and comms directors of leading brands stand up in front of packed rooms of white and BAME professionals opening up about their frustrations and vulnerabilities on the HOW to make change happen inside their businesses. They understand why change is needed but lack a road map to create that change.

We know that keeping BAME talent in our sector is crucial. There has been progress and success in bringing in great talent at entry level. But then we watch it fall out within 5 to 8 years, as the CIPR report evidences.

Crucial to disrupting the current status quo is to establish greater governance around an organisation’s ability to create cultures of inclusion. Using values-based frameworks that enable leaders to measure, manage and monitor the inclusive culture of their business will lead to much greater accountability.

If ever there was a year to make change happen, and for leaders to step up to the table and take responsibility, it is 2020.

METHODOLOGY

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) commissioned Jungle Green, a market research agency, to conduct this research with support from the Taylor Bennet Foundation, BME PR Pros and BAME 2020 to find participants willing to be interviewed.

Seventeen qualitative in-depth interviews with UK based BAME practitioners, across five ethnic backgrounds, either face to face or over the phone, were conducted during October and November 2019. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes.

The respondents comprised two-thirds female and one-third male, with roughly one-third each working in PR agencies, in-house and as independent practitioners. While the age of respondents ranged from 22 to over 50, across a variety of junior and senior roles, the findings were worryingly consistent.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The CIPR commissioned this research to assess the lived experiences of BAME professionals working within UK public relations. The objective is to explore these experiences in depth and seek an understanding of why BAME, and possibly wider diversity, has remained an issue within communications for many years. Although it covers the entire practitioner journey – from entering the profession to breakthrough moments – we have focused on the long-term experiences of BAME practitioners through their PR career. The stories and experiences told in their own words, should shock the profession, even if they come as no surprise to those affected.

It highlights that calling for fairer recruitment policies without first addressing the dysfunction, and occasionally overt racism, within the profession would see us fail in our mission to see a more diverse, reflective and sustainable industry, and do nothing to address the concerns of the individuals working in the profession today.

DIVERSITY IN DECLINE

The CIPR has been actively addressing a broad range of diversity issues for some time. This research was prompted by the Institute's 'State of the Profession' report which, over five years, found that ethnic diversity within the PR industry has apparently declined from 11% in 2015 to 8% in 2019, despite considerable industry initiatives to address this challenge. 92% of the profession come from a white British background. Referring to that survey, the Chair of CIPR's Diversity and Inclusion Forum, Avril Lee, took a tough line against the lack of action the profession has taken to address this decline: "The PR industry agrees that diversity is important for attracting the best talent to bring fresh thinking, creativity and insights into new audiences, but our actions speak louder than our words. And our actions are building a profession of white private-school alumni; we are less diverse than we've been for the past five years."

The clear message that came out of these interviews was the lived experiences of the frustration felt working within PR. It may be the case that not enough is being done to recruit BAME PR professionals, but it is as much the practices within the workplace that are damaging the profession through a lack of retention that is contributing to the poor diversity numbers. It is this challenge that has received less attention in the debate on how to address diversity within the profession. Without addressing it, and focusing solely on recruitment, we risk encouraging those to enter a profession that may ultimately discriminate against them.

INSUFFICIENT ACTION

This is highlighted by the fact that none of the participants felt that sufficient action was being taken to increase diversity in the PR profession, despite the majority of them saying they would "readily recommend" a career in PR and feel "proud" to work in the profession. Alarmingly, only one of those asked feels that practitioners of all ethnicities are treated equally.

The research found several consistent themes in the experiences raised by those interviewed, which this report will explore further:

- Racism
- Inflexible and non-inclusive culture
- Lack of equal opportunities and progression
- Unconscious bias
- Becoming an independent practitioner to achieve career aspirations

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

The research also highlighted the relationship between socio-economic status and race, with an individual's social background and economic status correlating with their perceived opportunity to build relationships and get ahead within the industry. BAME practitioners felt their white colleagues were, in part, more successful due to

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the connections their parents and family had, as well as their education. This impacts practitioners from the very start of their career, with many internships and junior roles being found through 'knowing the right people' and, being low paid or unpaid positions, often only open to those who can fund themselves. These experiences lead to feelings of inadequacy, of not belonging and an internalised fear of being a fraud. For many, this idea is instilled from the outset of their career.

LEAVING TO BECOME INDEPENDENT

Another insight from the research was that, as a result of negative experiences, many BAME individuals decided to work as independent practitioners; becoming independent was seen to offer a solution to challenges in the workplace and an opportunity to channel a common entrepreneurial spirit within BAME communities. For some, this shift to independent working is the ultimate expression of success, but it represents a loss to the PR industry as it further reduces diversity and senior BAME role models, making cultural change even harder.

The public relations profession – one that prides itself on its ability to build relationships and bring the outside world into an organisation – has long claimed to understand the case for increased diversity within the workforce. There is a general agreement and recognised research to show that diverse teams are more successful, with evidence that they improve business performance.

LACK OF REAL ACTION

This research points to exhaustion of 'talking the talk' and not 'walking the walk'. Efforts to address a lack of diversity are increasingly common – panel discussions and events, sharing evidence on the business value of diversity, companies supporting diversity initiatives via social media and declared support – but ineffective at changing the diversity of the industry. Ironically, several individuals told how, having raised the issue, it was suggested to them that they could take on the 'challenge' and find solutions for their workplace, or they were put forward as company representatives in token attempts to appear inclusive. Some told of how they were often the one and only BAME employee in an organisation and, as a result, would often cynically be invited to be (or simply used as) the face of the organisation for public facing materials. Others would be asked directly to contribute to their organisation's diversity policies, despite having no authority or experience in doing so, simply because of their ethnicity.



I was always scared to make a mistake and look foolish. Then we got a new CEO who was BAME. I finally felt I had someone I could relate to and talk to openly and honestly and who would understand me. We are still in touch and he has shown great interest in me. Having a role model like that, encouraging you all the way, really gives you confidence to believe that you are doing a good job.



With research showing diversity rates that significantly fail to reflect the society the PR industry serves, this report should act as a wake-up call to senior leaders within the profession. This issue has afflicted the industry for decades and now is the time to act decisively for change. There is a responsibility for the wider profession to add their voices in calling for action: to call for a change in how teams, departments and organisations operate. But the ultimate responsibility rests with senior leadership to be the change in our profession.

MORE REQUIRED OF SENIOR LEADERS

There is no doubt about the point senior leaders in our sector need to take from this report, as the research participants have been forthright and consistent in expressing their views and sharing their experience. They were asked for their view on the action taken across the profession to address the lack of diversity. Not one respondent was satisfied that sufficient action is being taken to increase diversity within PR, and only one participant felt that PR professionals of all ethnicities and backgrounds are treated equally in the industry.

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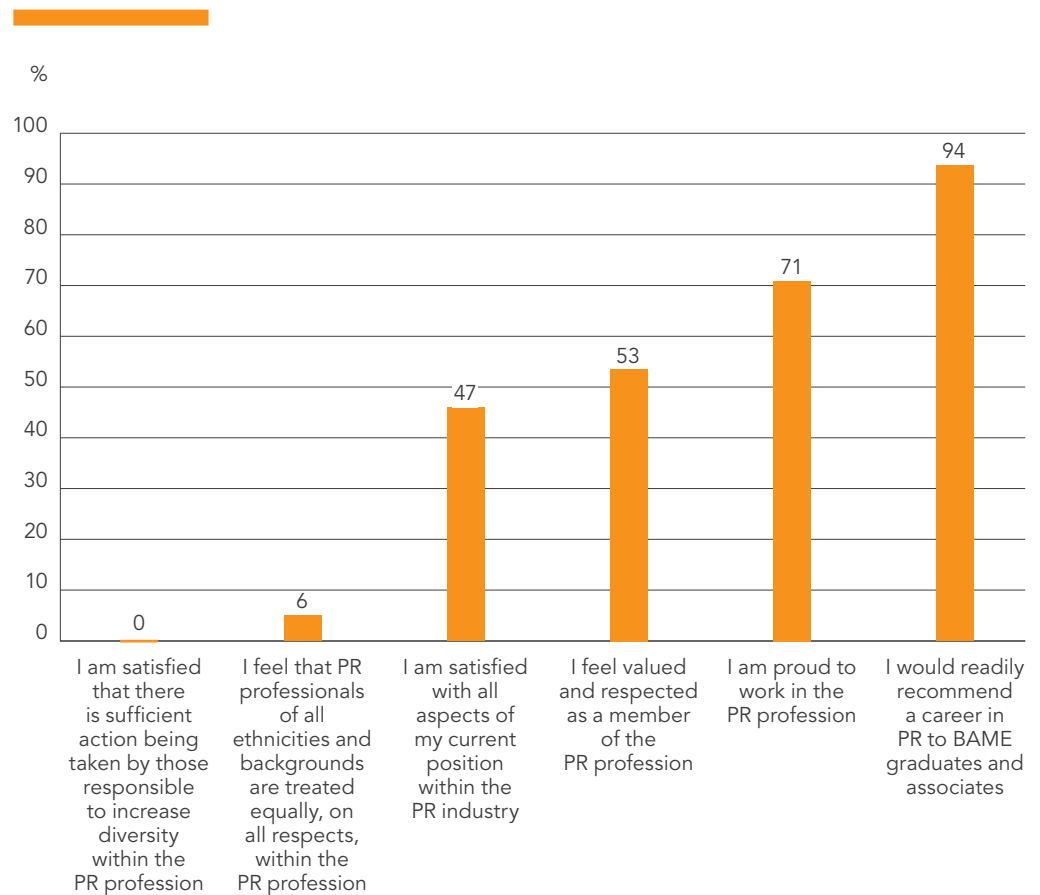
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VIEWS OF THE PROFESSION: INITIAL STATEMENTS

Participants were initially asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a number of summary statements.

Positively, when asked about their feelings towards the profession and a career in PR, 53% said they felt valued and respected as a member of the PR profession, while an overwhelming majority (94%) would recommend a career in PR and nearly three quarters (71%) are proud to work in the profession. It seems that despite negative experiences, our research interviewees see PR as a good career choice and a profession that its members can be proud to be part of.

PARTICIPANT VIEWS OF THE PROFESSION; SUMMARY STATEMENTS (N = 17)





When I was at this organisation, I experienced institutional racism for the first time. Racism is not just about using the ‘n’ word or saying, ‘go back to Africa’, its much less overt than that. I was left off of emails on a project that I was leading. Asked 10 times more questions because they somehow think you’re more likely to be wrong. They don’t trust what you say because you’re different. They don’t invite you to meetings. They invite BAME people to BAME events only, not to more traditionally British events.

These are microaggressions and the problem with that is that they slowly eat away at you as a person. Because they are so insidious, at first you internalise it and think ‘Is it me?’ You try and make yourself smaller to fit in or get bigger to not let it show, as if nothing affects you. They couldn’t see all the crying I did at home.

I took it upon myself to ask questions of the diversity leader and the only option I was given was to make a formal complaint. That’s not the way it needs to go. Frankly, you don’t want all that that involves, unions getting involved. So, I eventually left.



KEY THEMES AND EXPERIENCES

The PR professionals in this UK research have all expressed feelings of frustration, exhaustion and anger as their PR careers have progressed, stalled or prematurely ended. These negative experiences have followed them throughout their career, and they see very little real action being taken by senior leadership in the PR industry to address it.

The story told is one of an exclusive industry that encourages and rewards conformity of thought and action. It is inflexible and doesn't openly encourage diverse cultures. This is at odds with the reported values of the communications community that seeks new insights and innovative thinking to find creative solutions – all attributes associated with diverse teams.

The following themes tell the story of those interviewed and the shared experiences of their careers. Their words are quoted both directly and within the findings.

RACISM AND MICROAGGRESSIONS

Racism is a significant factor that impacts the lived experiences of BAME PR practitioners and is a key cause of poor diversity numbers within the profession. Despite this, it has received less attention in the debate on how to address diversity within the profession. Racist experiences manifest in many ways. While it is "politically incorrect now to be overtly racist", respondents feel that racism manifests in different ways and is ever present in their day-to-day experiences.

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

Addressing this is difficult as "it is repressed in people and they divert the conversation". Some felt that the quality of their work was under constant scrutiny. They didn't feel trusted to do the job because they were different from their white middle-class colleagues and the associated elite culture within the industry. This treatment reflected the "institutional racism" BAME practitioners felt as if their work wasn't valued in the same way. One individual reported being "asked ten times more questions because they somehow think you're more likely to be wrong".

At the most extreme end, there are examples of overt racism in the PR workplace involving both colleagues and clients – and, too frequently, there was inadequate support for the BAME individual involved. In one example, a client deliberately and consistently criticised and blocked an individual's work for no apparent reason, but nothing was done to address this situation as "they (the agency) couldn't afford" to lose the client. Instead, despite senior colleagues acknowledging the client's racism, the individual was asked to continue to work on the account.

MICROAGGRESSIONS


BAME practitioners, regardless of their level of seniority, also speak of microaggressions. These build up over time and negatively impact the individuals they are aimed at. In one instance, a BAME practitioner was subject to inappropriate comments about her hair but felt uncomfortable and unable to address this as she feared falling "into the stereotype of Black African people being aggressive". Microaggressions are subtle, indirect and possibly unintentional, and their nature make them difficult to address through policies and procedures.

When individuals make efforts to address a lack of BAME diversity, they can be met with tension or outright rejection. One practitioner regretted her attempts to address diversity because she then felt she was labelled "trouble".

Microaggression



A statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority.





"I feel there is a real misunderstanding of what racism is. It's politically incorrect now to be overtly racist so it is repressed in people and they divert the conversation. You can't invalidate someone's experience just because you can't relate to it. They say, 'Oh, they're always playing the race card and victimising themselves, they're just lazy.' Some people say racism doesn't exist. If you can't have a conversation about it, we can't get anywhere. It's important to acknowledge and embrace our differences; do not suppress them. Make people feel welcome."

"I have to say being completely honest I don't really think white British people care. There is no active interest on their part to actually understand."

"When I was at a small PR agency, I directly experienced racism from a client. All my work was signed off by a more senior staff member within the agency and by the client lead. There was never any question that my work was not good quality, but this specific client kept rejecting it. In the end, my boss at the agency called a meeting with me and the Client Director and said that they had reviewed all my work and they could see no other reason for this client's complaints other than he was being racist. My boss then went on to say that whilst they wanted to drop the client, they couldn't afford to and therefore could I continue to work on the account, but that they would attend all the meetings in my place. Ultimately, I didn't feel that they had my back and so I left shortly after this."

"A colleague of mine was on the phone and was arguing with a customer services representative; whilst on the phone, she spoke to them in a very condescending tone. She then gave a detailed account of what was said when she came off the phone and then as she turned away, she said 'AND THEY WERE BLACK'."

"When I go for interviews, I make sure my hair is really slicked back. I had a bad experience at work once when I left my hair naturally curly straight after washing it. A girl there said to me 'Oh my gosh what have you done to your hair'. I explained and she said, 'My hair doesn't do that when I put water on it!! She was White. It really hit me, I had to refrain myself from saying something. You don't want to fall into the stereotype of Black African people being aggressive. I just went straight home and braided it. People often touch your hair too and say, 'ooh what does it feel like'."

"My life in that organisation would have been so much easier if I had just never said anything about diversity. Just not raised my head above the parapet and made myself stand out. They just think you're trouble. I realised that they thought I was the problem."

"It's difficult to talk about these things when they are not overt, and you do internalise it because for a long time you think 'If I was truly good at my job, I would transcend all of this, my race wouldn't matter. It must be that I'm not good enough at my job.'"

"I once mentioned to a white colleague that I went to a private school and his response was, how did your parents afford that? That's an example of a microaggression, people assuming that because you are black that you come from a deprived background."



INFLEXIBLE AND NON-INCLUSIVE CULTURE

The experience of the PR profession to BAME practitioners is often of an industry that is inflexible and supports a culture of non-inclusivity, one that enforces existing cultural norms and fails to encourage new approaches or more diverse thinking.

PRESSURE TO CONFORM

BAME practitioners tell how they feel the need to fit into a certain mould to progress within the industry – a monoculture of white, middle/upper class privilege. They are made to feel – from their often different backgrounds and experiences growing up, to having to “say the right things or speak the right way”, to their physical appearance – that they do not belong. Efforts to fit in, conform and belong can result in many feeling like an “imposter” and being unable to be their authentic self. BAME individuals expressed feeling a pressure to act and behave how they thought a “white British person would”. Some felt their authenticity was suppressed by a profession comprising “lots of grey suits and people pretending to be something they’re not”.

This pressure to conform occurs across the career journey. It is an experience difficult to explain beyond the fact that they come from BAME backgrounds from their colleagues. Many reference the psychological impact that not being yourself has on your emotional wellbeing and work.

MOVING IN THE RIGHT SOCIAL CIRCLES

There appears to be a correlation between one’s socio-economic background and individuals’ work experiences and career prospects. Some respondents expressed the importance of parents’ “social circles” and the “favours game” that came with it. This practice disproportionately impacts BAME practitioners from less wealthy backgrounds. A successful career in PR is deemed to be about “who you know, not what you know”.

This cultural conformity and ‘one-think’ approach extends to recruitment where candidates refer to having to be a “certain ‘type’ of person” to be hired, and some felt that “agencies would never take [them] on” unless they did.

CULTURAL RIGIDITY

This unequal and damaging practice continues across a practitioner’s career path. One respondent admitted feeling like an imposter despite being “headhunted for the next job in a consultancy”. Across the career path, BAME practitioners are surrounded by colleagues from more privileged backgrounds, recruited in the leadership’s image and likeness. Practitioners expressed the impact of this culture describing it as “overwhelming” and it “dent[ing] confidence”. The cultural rigidity of the profession prevents practitioners from being themselves. Instead, it forces BAME practitioners to conform and ‘morph’ themselves to reflect the dominant culture in order to belong.

“It’s such a polished world in comms in London. You need to say the right things and speak the right way. I’m not posh at all, it has been years of tailoring my voice, the way I sound and act. Especially in the final year at uni when you start applying for jobs, you become aware of what’s needed for you to be in this industry. My dad is from Southeast Asia and my mum has a strong UK regional accent, so I didn’t sound or act like the people in this industry. I had to really work on it.”

“I acted and behaved how I thought a White British person would. I didn’t say I celebrated Diwali and I did send out Christmas cards.”

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"I was constantly having to prove my commitment and skills above and beyond others, to prove I was good enough. I always took the emergency phone home at Christmas, stayed late at work and was always willing to go the extra mile."

"Agencies would never take me on, full stop. I think that is a bias, not just colour but a certain 'type' of person. I didn't fit that type and didn't look like them. At senior levels, it's all men, so that's me out too."

"I didn't feel aware of being a Black African woman at my first agency. I knew I wasn't fitting in but thought it was because I was new and had buckets of personality and fun and the Public Affairs team that I was in were sombre and serious. I got on better with another team and looking back they were more diverse."

"It was challenging and intimidating at first. You're surrounded by such intelligent people. You don't feel you fit in. Everyone came from such prestigious universities. Looking around the room it's just white British people. I never felt I was good enough to be in there. I've felt that throughout my career."

"Even when I got headhunted for the next job in a consultancy, I still felt like an imposter, even more so. They were even more prestigious than my previous agency. Everyone's parents had such prestigious jobs; it was overwhelming. I think the bigger problem for PR is keeping BAME people in the industry. Even if they get better at attracting BAME people into PR, they will still feel like an outsider, that they are not good enough to be there, then they won't stay there because they'll find the culture hasn't actually changed at all."

"This has to stop being a 'favours game' and be taken much more seriously. If you haven't got the right background and connections, you can't get work experience at the moment and you certainly can't afford to work for nothing. "I was once working in one of the top large PR agencies. I got in there and it wasn't for me. It was a combination of things. The culture was very corporate, and they were not my sort of people. Their mindsets were not my mine. There was a facade, lots of grey suits and people pretending to be something they're not. A real lack of authenticity. I didn't want to be around that."

"I was always aware that I didn't have the right connections through my family to get a good job. My parents weren't in the right social circles. Lots of the people I work with here have dads that are CFOs, etc. I'd say your social background has more of a disadvantage than your ethnic background."

"When we don't see our own family, friends and people like us in these roles, then we don't perceive that they are open to us. I'm still surprised when I meet Comms people who are not white. And I'm not white, what does that tell you?"



LACK OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND PROGRESSION

The lack of BAME diversity in the profession adversely impacts both the day-to-day and longer-term experiences of BAME practitioners. Instances range from being left out of certain tasks and projects – including working with more prestigious accounts and clients, despite being more than capable and qualified to do so. The lack of support from colleagues and management has meant many BAME professionals "haven't had the opportunities [they] thought [they] would." This unequal treatment results in BAME practitioners feeling they must "work harder than everyone else" to be considered for the same opportunities as their colleagues.

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At best, progression feels slower. This issue affects BAME professionals at all stages of their careers and has led to many leaving their roles and/or deciding to establish themselves as independent practitioners. Although there are often formal policies in place for structured review, they fail to address fairness or unconscious and conscious bias relating to diversity. Managers remain unaware of unconscious bias, nor do they have the necessary training to ensure truly fair reviews and opportunities for career development.



"My dad had always said to me 'Son, you'll have to work twice as hard to get what the white man has got'. He wasn't wrong! It certainly has felt like that in PR."

"The most overt and obvious example I've experienced was in an in-house job I'd had for quite a few years. I'd held a number of positions related to internal comms and rose through the ranks. I was always exceeding in my performance review. But I was then moved sideways when I felt I should have been given the role of Head of Internal Comms."

"The role had been promised to me, but it never materialised, and I got myself another job instead. As I left, I discovered that the job had been given to a more junior colleague who I'd been informally mentoring. The woman who secured this position is white, privately educated, went to a top university and is well-spoken, she fitted the mould. There was no formal interview process as it was an interim position (initially). It felt like they kept me at a certain level but didn't want to promote me into that final leadership position."

"It's a slower progression for BAME people. I'm not as senior as my male white peers from uni, put it that way. I'm in-house, charity, not that senior, compared to my white male peers from uni who are very senior already in big consultancies."

"I wasn't getting the progression I wanted at the large agency and I was working much too hard without recognition."

"There are certain things I've wanted to work on here and haven't got them. I haven't got anyone here who's got my back yet. I haven't had the opportunities here I thought I would."

"I want to get to a senior position but not sure I want to be in the boardroom. I don't see authentic people in there."

"It makes me so angry, because of the lack of action and a lack of understanding, or even a refusal in some cases to understand."


"It's like as you're growing up every hurdle that you pass, as you go from school to uni to work and then progress at work, at every stage, you see less and less people like you."



Unconscious Bias



Social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness.



UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Unconscious bias isn't limited to the earlier stages of a career; the research found that BAME practitioners who had progressed to senior management still experienced this prejudice.

Practitioners felt this disproportionately limited their, and their organisations', progression. Their work is unfairly scrutinised and there is a deeply ingrained feeling that they must "work twice as hard," to achieve the same opportunities as their colleagues. BAME practitioners acknowledge that judgements made about their ability may not have been intentional, but they do frequently happen and are consistently experienced in different roles and throughout their careers.

Without a rigorously fair review process, instances of unconscious bias are not being dealt with and BAME practitioners struggle to raise such issues through fear of being perceived as difficult. Many stay quiet because they don't want to be judged to be "play[ing] the race card" or, in one case, be labelled a "chippy, angry black woman".



"I did experience unconscious bias as I became more senior, with senior management, recruiting in their own image and me feeling my face didn't fit."

"The issue is not with the marginalised groups, we're not the ones who have a problem with working with other people. But it falls to those marginalised groups to do all of the work in an organisation. It's not my unconscious bias, as a Black woman from a council estate, that other people are unable to hang out with people who don't look like them, it's their unconscious bias that stops the progression."

"I get an overwhelming sense that men in leadership positions question my ability. It is unconscious bias and I am sure they were not aware they were making judgements based on my ethnicity, but they were."

"I chose an in-house internship. Agency life did not appeal to me at all. I felt the bias would be much stronger and more cut-throat in agency life. The bias is still there in-house though: White British, middle- and upper-class females, men at the top, privately educated and Russell Group unis, lots of nepotism, it's who you know, not what you know. I found that they would vocalise their disappointment in my work in a way they didn't do with anyone else. I was working full time and then evenings in a restaurant, I was always tired. They offered me no support or guidance in terms of house styles, which left me open to criticism, it was catch-22."

"As I've progressed I've come to realise that some, a minority, question my ability based on the colour of my skin. I also have a general sense, and some experience, of some people labelling Black women as aggressive when they are simply being assertive."

"We don't have enough BAME people in senior positions, I think it's unconscious bias. We don't, therefore, have enough senior mentors and role models around to show us how we need to develop to get into senior positions. There are mentors at the junior and mid-level but less and less as you progress through the industry."



BECOMING AN INDEPENDENT PRACTITIONER TO ACHIEVE CAREER ASPIRATIONS

In line with anecdotal reports, the research found that after many years of working in PR, some BAME PR professionals decide to become independent practitioners because their aspirations were not realised in their previous roles in agencies or in-house teams. There were a number of reasons related to diversity that drove this choice.

For many, becoming independent provided a solution to the feeling that, when working in the profession, they were not able to be themselves.

For some, it was the difficulty associated with career progression or finding roles via traditional recruitment routes – either not being invited to an interview or being unsuccessful in securing the role, despite their relevant expertise and experience.

MOVING JOBS MORE FREQUENTLY

Several participants in this research believe the recruitment industry finds it difficult to talk directly and openly about how ethnic background is a barrier to successful placement, and report that BAME practitioners have to move jobs more frequently than white counterparts. Whereas some had found success through networking and via existing contacts who could make introductions leading to a post or contract, others felt it necessary to become an independent practitioner, providing access to the right roles and effectively 'getting in the back door'. Others established, and worked directly with, their own client base.

Being independent provided increased flexibility, fulfilled the desire to be an entrepreneurial spirit (which many practitioners identify as common within their communities) and to establish a brand of their own, as well as providing affirmation and recognition not realised within the workplace as an employee.

For the wider PR industry, this move by experienced BAME PR professionals to independent status means the loss of critical, senior role models from agency and in-house teams – making it harder to create inclusive cultures, demonstrate career paths for non-white practitioners and challenge unacceptable behaviours.



"You're in an industry where you constantly feel you're not enough. So, if you become an independent you can discover if you are in fact enough. What you discover is that you are amazing and it's such a good feeling. It's taking a punt on yourself because your industry doesn't have confidence in your ability and treats you badly."

"It made me so angry and completely dented my confidence. But after a couple of months, it is what turned me around and was the turning point in my career. I now realise that it is not an industry that has allowed me to be myself and this is such a shame. We should be celebrating and embracing the diversity that BAME people could bring, rather than shutting it out. I morphed into what I thought I should be and now as I launch my own PR brand being myself sits at the very heart of what I am trying to do."

"In-house my aspirations weren't realised. There were constant re-organisations and I didn't ever get promoted. I didn't want to go through it all again, another re-organisation. So, I went independent."

"The main reason for being independent is thinking "I'll just do this because I can't progress in my company."

"Getting a pure comms job was so difficult, either I wasn't chosen or wouldn't quite get through. I found more success going to places as a contractor and then working it around. I always felt like I was getting in the back door."

"That's a positive thing in my eyes. Certainly, in India and Africa, you have a lot of entrepreneurialism. You grow up knowing that to be successful you need to be in business. But the ultimate success is to have your own business and do things by yourself. Ultimately, I would love to own my own business. To me, if you want to make money and have a really interesting life you work for yourself."

"When you go to recruitment agencies, they say you're amazing and then they say, 'but they don't want you.' It does have an impact, it's something about people not seeing you in that space. My colleagues can't quite believe that I've been a success."

"I want to get to a senior position but not sure I want to be in the board room. I don't see authentic people in there. I want to master my craft and be the best I can be, but my ultimate goal is to do some work that really helps the community."



PARTICIPANTS' VIEW OF THE INDUSTRY RESPONSE

For several years, the CIPR's State of the Profession survey reports that the majority of those working in public relations believe teams are more effective if they are ethnically and socially diverse. Diverse teams bring insights into different communities and understand social, fragmented media, enabling them to challenge the traditional ways of doing things. The profession has been largely united in calling for greater diversity. And yet the profession has become less diverse in recent years.

The ongoing discussions and events on how to tackle diversity do not match the need for effective policies and processes that focus on cultivating an inclusive culture, establishing fair and open recruitment and progression practices, and addressing unacceptable behaviours within the workplace.

Instead, BAME PR practitioners often find the responsibility to tackle the lack of BAME diversity is placed on them. Their experiences suggest senior leaders are more concerned with being perceived as being diverse rather than delivering a fair and diverse community.



"These conversations about diversity are always happening and it's frustrating and totally exhausting at this point. All of the ways of sorting it out are out there already. They exist. Organisations do not have to reinvent the wheel, they just have to put the work in, walk the walk, and there needs to be a degree of accountability too."

"I'd say my ethnic background has been an advantage lately because they always want to throw you in the pics and I've had that since school too, they always want you on the programmes and prospectuses. I don't really mind; I think it's fair enough what they're trying to say but sometimes you do feel a bit awkward because what they put on the cover is not actually reflective of what's in the organisation."

"I previously worked at a very traditional British institution that had all the diversity policies in place, they were constantly rewriting them and going to panels about how to be more inclusive. But they didn't walk the walk. The leadership team had no BAME people in it at all, not one. This is a public organisation in one of the most deprived parts of London. They are putting on public cultural exhibitions and constantly talking about how they can make their audience more diverse. They could start by making the team more diverse! But no one is held accountable for any progression in diversity, or lack of it, in their working areas."

"Lots of organisations have set up diversity schemes for gender, age, ethnicity etc. But you do get a sense that there is not enough senior leadership buy-in to these diversity schemes and there is no accountability, nor tangible targets."

"It makes me so angry, because of the lack of action and a lack of understanding, or even a refusal in some cases to understand."



“

I found that experience so exhausting, we were having conversations about diversity all the damn time, but nobody was walking the walk. Just lots of talking the talk.

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A CALL TO ACTION FOR SENIOR LEADERS – A BAME STEP CHANGE IS NEEDED

Cultural and behavioural change is not easy. The UK profession won't always be right or get it right first time. It will make mistakes and misread situations. But it must change, and senior leaders must commit to making the industry fair, equal and open to all. Senior industry leaders are the only ones who can make this commitment and deliver it – not through an initiative or being a panel participant but through a full 'root and branch' review of their workplaces with the desire to make the industry reflect the UK audiences it serves.

Each leader will need to shape goals and a plan for their workplace, based on their situation, resources and BAME diversity challenge. But no review will be effective without senior leaders revisiting culture, recruitment, review and progression, mentoring, retention, training and development, and representation. Workplaces must be transparent and open about their BAME data and, ideally, other forms of diversity, too. Indeed, if the industry makes these changes, it will undoubtedly improve across all measures of diversity and inclusion.

MOVING FORWARD

This report explores the unequal, unfair and emotionally exhausting experiences BAME practitioners have had to endure working within the UK PR profession. The entire profession has a responsibility to address inequality and call out unacceptable behaviours. But the ultimate responsibility to change practices and cultures, to unleash talent and create a fair and equal workplace, rests with senior leaders.

The CIPR recognises there are a number of companies and consultants who can guide and support PR businesses and departments to make this change and build an inclusive industry for all. Below are some examples of initiatives designed to support organisations in addressing this need.



THE BLUEPRINT COMMITMENTS

A new programme specifically designed for the PR industry, The Blueprint, has been launched by BME PR Pros. The CIPR welcomes and supports it as a practical and targeted initiative, offering communications leaders a pathway to improve their BAME diversity and rewarding best practice with the Blueprint mark so others can recognise workplaces that are making a difference. The Blueprint is initially for communications agencies and will expand to include in-house teams in 2021. Agencies awarded The Blueprint mark must commit to the following:

RECRUITMENT

- We ensure our job descriptions are fair and objective and aim to remove conscious and unconscious bias
- We specify the minimum criteria for each role advertised and will interview all candidates that meet the requirements
- We always have a minimum of two people on a recruitment panel and, where possible, we include a Black, Asian, Mixed Race or Ethnic Minority colleague
- We provide detailed, constructive feedback after interviews for all candidates
- We only work with recruitment consultants that are actively committed to diversity and can, and will, put forward candidates from ethnic minority backgrounds for interviews

NURTURING TALENT

- We have objective and transparent pay rise, promotion, training and development policies
- We review each employee's client work to ensure staff have equal opportunity to work on big clients and award-winning campaigns
- We offer each Black, Asian, Mixed Race and Ethnic Minority member of staff the opportunity to be mentored by a fellow member of staff from a similar background (dependent on the agency makeup)
- We are actively committed to, and working towards, no gender or ethnic pay gap

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COMMITMENT

- We are committed to ethnic diversity across all levels from boardroom to work experience, and will capture and track data to show the impact of our commitment
- We are committed to ethnic diversity across all levels, and our senior management team and staff from across the business have attended The Blueprint diversity workshop training
- We are committed to ethnic diversity across all levels and diversity and inclusion training is mandatory for all staff
- We are committed to ethnic diversity across all levels with all members of senior management responsible for ethnic diversity recruitment, retention and promotion targets
- We publish our diversity data each financial year

CULTURE

- We are committed to an inclusive social culture, including our social activities
- We have a zero-tolerance approach to racial discrimination, harassment (including third party), victimisation, bullying, intimidation and microaggressions and will not hesitate to take disciplinary action (up to and including dismissal) if required as detailed in our code of conduct
- We have trained HR staff and all those with line management responsibilities to support staff from different backgrounds and cultures
- We regularly survey and consult with employees to seek their feedback on the inclusivity of our working environment

WORK

- We aim to create work that is inclusive and recognises diverse audiences

COMPANY

- We publish our diversity and inclusion commitment statement on our website, and ensure all our clients and customers know the standards to expect
- We request the diversity policies of all suppliers and aim to work with companies with a track record for supporting diversity
- We have a client charter issued to all clients
- We understand The Blueprint kite mark can be withdrawn from us should we breach its terms

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THE TAYLOR BENNETT FOUNDATION

The CIPR has long been a proud supporter of the Taylor Bennett Foundation. The Foundation has been delivering training and employability programmes for 12 years. Their programmes make a real difference to the lives of the young people taking part with all programmes designed to directly address the need for greater diversity within the PR and Communications industry.

Employers who are interested in working with the Taylor Bennett Foundation can support their work in the following ways:

TAKE PART IN THEIR SUMMER STARS INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME

This internship programme offers paid internships with agencies and in-house communications teams for BAME students, graduates and school leavers (18+).

The programme kicks off with a three-day intensive PR & Communications bootcamp providing the interns with an insight into the industry and giving them real work experience to begin their careers. It is proving itself to be a great talent pipeline programme.

TAKE PART IN THEIR MENTORING PROGRAMME

This is a six months commitment to mentor undergraduates and graduates. The programme involves PR and communication practitioners sharing their insights into how the PR industry operates, how best to prepare for the job market and, most importantly, expand the mentees' professional network.

PROMOTE JOB OPPORTUNITIES TO THEIR CANDIDATE AND ALUMNI NETWORK

Over 600 young people have been through The Taylor Bennett Foundation programmes and are now part of an expanding candidate network and alumni.

The alumni has a variety of experience ranging from one to more than 10 years and work across every level, sector and discipline, in-house and with agencies.

SPONSOR THEIR AWARD-WINNING PR TRAINING PROGRAMME

The ten-week, full-time training programme in PR and communications, is designed to equip graduate trainees with relevant skills and experiences that will enable them to begin a career in the industry.

The training programme combines practical workshops with regular writing and presenting tasks to provide extensive industry insight and allow the development of specific skills. The programme provides the trainees with the opportunity to learn about the myriad of different sectors and disciplines that operate within PR and enables them to make informed decisions about where they begin their careers.

**taylorbennett
foundation.org/**

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bame2020.org

BAME2020

BAME2020 was launched at Google offices in July 2016 with a simple commitment; to inspire action inside the UK PR, Communications and Marketing sector to work towards:

- 20% of the total young talent that enters the PR and Comms industry each year to come from BAME backgrounds, and for this talent to stay in the sector until
- 20% of leadership roles are represented by BAME talent

The BAME2020 ambassador team are all role models and rising stars. They have each made a personal commitment to help with targeted messaging to young people about careers in our sector. The advisors are leaders in their chosen specialist area of Marketing, PR and Communications and they champion the ambassadors, and help ensure that BAME2020 initiatives are taken into business. Its case study series 'Where are they Now' shines a light on the ambassadors' career stories.

BAME2020 is a long-term programme committed to sustainable change.

2020 is a watershed year for Inclusivity in our sector.

The BAME2020 'No Turning Back' programme, delivered by Brands with Values and f1 recruitment (co-founders of BAME2020), will work with companies to:

- Continuously measure and manage the culture needed to retain BAME talent
- Ensure that BAME talent is directed to work at companies where the leadership is serious about nurturing, developing and championing BAME professionals

To find out more about BAME2020, email Amanda or Adrian at bame2020@f1recruitment.com

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ABOUT US

ABOUT THE CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

Founded in 1948, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) is the world's only Royal Chartered professional body for public relations practitioners with nearly 10,000 members.

The CIPR advances professionalism in public relations by making its members accountable to their employers and the public through a code of conduct and searchable public register, setting standards through training, qualifications, awards and the production of best practice and skills guidance, facilitating Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and awarding Chartered Public Relations Practitioner status (Chart.PR).



ABOUT JUNGLE GREEN

Jungle Green is a boutique marketing research agency offering a full range of research tools, techniques and services.

Our mission is to combine the depth of qualitative and observational research with the measurement and scoping capabilities of quantitative research to give a balanced overall picture. Enabling clients to make informed decisions, gain competitive advantage and move forward with confidence.

We operate nationally with a strong presence in the North and East of England and have our base in Bristol.

