# Representation and Conflict: Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Workers in the Entertainment Trade Unions

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# FOREWORD

The 1990s was a difficult period to enter the UK TV industry. Workers were facing upheaval of the sector as a result of the 1990 Broadcasting Act, whilst at the same time finding themselves unprotected as a result of anti-trade union legislation. It was in these unpropitious circumstances that I began my own TV career. Reflecting back on a quarter century in the industry it is clear to me that the world I entered, a brown face in a sea of white, has not changed. In seeking a remedy to this situation, the disparate Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers in the industry face the problem of isolation. How do we organise when our numbers are relatively few? For me, the answer was to turn to my trade union in the hope that I could be part of a movement with fellow Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers. It is my experiences within this struggle that have led me to ask what the potential, challenges and limitations of such an approach are? And how could trade unions better serve their Black, Asian and minority ethnic members in tackling the problems they face in the industry.

The PIMID grant from the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity has allowed me to make a foray into answering these questions. My hope is that this endeavour, combining insight from my lived experience with lessons and methodology from academia, is one that benefits both academic and practitioner, producing research that is greater than the sum of its constituent parts. This study leads out of insights I have gained as an entertainment sector worker and trade union member but would be impossible without the assistance of Dr Jack Newsinger, Dr Siobhan Stevenson, and the support of the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity.

This research, conducted between April and June 2021, examined the experiences of Black, Asian and minority ethnic members of the five entertainment sector trade unions: BECTU Sector of Prospect, Equity, the Musicians' Union, the National Union of Journalists and the Writers' Guild of Great Britain. It sought to explore the role that the five unions play in anti-racism activity within the sector; to identify barriers; and make recommendations to improve the capacity of the unions to contribute to greater equality for Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers. Data is drawn from a series of semi-structured interviews with trade union members, conversations with union officials and desk research. The research evidences gaps in the ability of entertainment trade unions to effectively serve the interests of their Black, Asian and minority ethnic members and identifies structural reasons why this may be so. It offers nine recommendations to improve the situation.

*Riaz Meer*

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following report is based on interviews with fifteen Black, Asian and minority ethnic members of the five entertainment trade unions. The research aim was to investigate the experiences of Black, Asian and minority ethnic trade union members with their trade unions and the role the entertainment unions played in their anti-racism work. We also investigated the structuring of the five entertainment sector trade unions with regard to the establishment of representative bodies specifically tasked with representing and articulating the interests of Black, Asian and minority ethnic members.

For this report, we synthesised the data from the interviews into five thematic categories. These are: union structure, union bureaucracy, equality monitoring, the move from marginalisation to conflict, and cross-union organisation.

We found that the majority of interviewees faced significant obstacles in their trade union activity, especially with regard to their anti-racism work. Union structure, bureaucracy and leadership were all identified as barriers in advancing an anti-racist agenda across the unions.

In looking at the ways the five unions accommodated structures to represent Black, Asian and minority ethnic members we found a wide variance in regard to methods of representation, selection procedure, powers to influence union decision making and resourcing.

Using this comparative analysis, we suggest that unions can adapt their structures to enhance their Black, Asian and minority ethnic representative bodies, and thus better represent their Black, Asian and minority ethnic members.

We suggest that the racial demography of the five unions can cause a misalignment between the interests of Black, Asian and minority ethnic members and the majority white membership. We use the Essence of Unions Framework (Hodder & Edwards 2015) to offer an explanatory model by which the concerns of Black, Asian and minority ethnic members, particularly with regard to anti-racist activity, can often be side-lined and thought of as outside the core area of union activism.

Using this framework we posit that the representative bodies of black and ethnic minority members often find themselves in an antagonistic position with regard to the concerns of the wider union membership, which in turn leads to conflict with union leaderships. We investigate specific cases of representative body/union leadership conflict and look at our interviewees' experiences of such cases.

## 9 recommendations

Based on our analysis we offer nine recommendations that we believe will have a positive effect on the experiences of Black, Asian and minority ethnic members within the entertainment trade unions. These are summarised below:

- The unions should review their constitutive rules of the respective representative bodies that serve their Black, Asian and minority ethnic members and adopt best practice within the sector in order to strengthen democratic representation, increase the power of representative bodies in decision-making and ensure they are represented in executive bodies.

- Representative bodies should have greater autonomy.

- Greater effort should be given to the equality monitoring of trade union members.

- All unions should implement a policy of capturing equality monitoring data for their paid officials.

- Unions should try to ensure that Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff are available to support members who believe they are being discriminated against

- Unions should look at the way new members are welcomed and the way that information is given to them.

- This should include an enhanced induction programme for new Black, Asian and minority ethnic members.

- Union leaderships must accept that providing Black, Asian and minority ethnic members' representative bodies with greater autonomy opens up the possibility of conflict. Union leaderships must provide a mechanism whereby conflicts can be mediated.

- Organising by Black, Asian and minority ethnic members across the entertainment unions should be encouraged.

# INTRODUCTION

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There are many well-rehearsed reasons for being part of a trade union. These include: collective bargaining, negotiating pay and working conditions, and health and safety at work. There is also the security one feels when one is part of an organisation whose legal resources and immense experience can be drawn on if one is involved in a workplace dispute or unfairly dismissed.

For workers in the cultural sector things are a bit different. Most of us do not have permanent employment and as such many of the traditional benefits from trade union membership do not apply. For example, the Employment Rights Act 1996 and the Employment Act 2008 do not cover self-employed workers and much of the excellent legal support unions offer has therefore been denied to us.

Despite this there is power in a union. The sense of being part of a collective is of immense value to a workforce that has become atomised through the demands of employers. One potentially important activity that comes from being part of a union is the ability to campaign against the erosion of rights that we, as workers in the cultural sector, have endured over the years. Actors, musicians, writers, journalists and broadcast and theatre workers value the ability to be able to campaign under the umbrella of a union. They understand all too well that if they speak out as individuals they expose themselves to the very real threat of reputational damage and de facto blacklisting.

For Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers in the entertainment sector therefore, the ability to be able to launch anti-racist campaigns through a union has obvious benefits. This study looks at the experiences of such workers within their trade unions and asks how effective they have been in being able to use their unions to struggle with them and on their behalf against the racist employment practices that pervade their industries?

The picture that emerges will not necessarily be an easy one for the unions to look at. Many of those interviewed had positive things to say about their trade union membership, but the majority reported feelings of frustration, marginalisation and disillusionment. The story that is told by many of these union members is in effect a two-fold struggle. The fight against discrimination in their work, and a fight to get their interests properly understood and defended by their majority white trade unions.

Despite this there are examples of good work being done by the entertainment unions in tackling industry racism and increasing opportunities for Black, Asian and minority ethnic members. There are also important examples of the positive difference good leadership at the top of the unions can make in placing anti-racist activity at the centre of their agendas.

Similarly, there are lessons to be learnt from the ways the five unions position the representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic members within their structures. Some trade unions have taken seriously the need to provide space and resourcing in order to allow Black, Asian and minority ethnic members to self-organise. Where this has taken place, however, there remains the question of how well union leaderships then respond to the articulation of these members' interests.

## The purpose of this report

This report is for a wide audience. We hope it will prove informative to all trade union members, particularly (but not only) those in the entertainment sector, and that it will be read by members regardless of their race. We also hope it will prove useful to Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers in the cultural sector who are not currently part of trade unions, and although the report is challenging, we hope that the voices in the report will inspire them to join their brothers and sisters in the important work they seek to do.

We also hope the report will be welcomed by the leaderships of the five entertainment unions. This is a constructive critique. We believe that as well as offering recommendations, it highlights just how important union leadership is in enabling and encouraging an anti-racist agenda led by Black, Asian and minority ethnic trade union members.

# BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

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## 1. Academic literature

The academic literature related to workforce diversity and inequality in the UK's cultural and creative industries almost completely ignores the role of sector trade unions. There has been some attention to gender inequality, including Frances Galt's ground-breaking research on trade unions and women in the British film and television industries (2020). But there has not been, to the best of our knowledge, any empirical research into the sector unions and issues around race and racism. A book as important as Anamik Saha's Race and the Cultural Industries (2018), for example, makes no reference to trade unions. An evidence review conducted by the University of Leicester's Cameo Research Institute (2018) on diversity in the UK screen industries (which, it should be noted, one of us co-authored) found no research related to trade unions.

This neglect of attention to trade unions in the research literature is curious and, we argue, a significant gap in knowledge around diversity and inequality in the creative industries. Despite declining membership levels, trade unions remain by-far the largest democratic organisations in the UK with 6.56 million members, representing 23.5% of workers (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy 2021). Whatever the hype about individualisation and a-typical contracts, trade unions remain the most important democratic membership organisations that workers, in the creative industries as elsewhere, are likely to be involved in and as such are important – if imperfect – representations of workers' specific, sectional interests. Unions occupy a unique position within industry and wider civil society in that they have political and financial autonomy when compared to other sector organisations, such as trade bodies or pressure groups, which rely on funding from the state, from companies or voluntary donations (Coles 2016). They are thus uniquely placed, in theory at least, to challenge racialised discrimination in the sector.

The extent to which the UK trade union movement has been a site for anti-racism work is beyond the scope of this article, but it should be noted that research for the Trade Union Congress 'Racism Ruins Lives' report (2018) uncovered a catalogue of institutional failures in the representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers faced with discrimination. As noted by one of the co-authors, Stephen Ashe:

*"In part, these situations stem from trade union officials exhibiting a limited understanding of racism and/or lacking the experience and knowledge required to respond to workplace racism in an effective, satisfactory manner [...] Trade union members also reported that their union did not have race equality/equality and diversity officers in place whose role it is to represent, support and advise members in relation to workplace racism and other forms of discrimination. And they also reported a lack of representation of non-White British trade union members in senior leadership positions, particularly of non-White British women."* - Stephen Ashe 2019

Part of our purpose in this report is to explore the extent to which these issues exist within the entertainment trade unions.

Anti-racism as a trade union policy objective comes both from within the union membership itself from Black, Asian and minority ethnic members and their white allies, and as a force from wider civil society (see Wrench 2004). This objective is further mediated by a range of factors, which are divided into four categories by Penninx and Roosblad (2000, cited in Wrench 2004: 8):

> ✓ **The social position of the trade union movement and its power and its structure.**
>
> ✓ **The economic and labour market situation at the time.**
>
> ✓ **The broader social and institutional context, the political structure, legislation, national ideologies, and public discourse.**
>
> ✓ **The characteristics of the ethnic minority themselves.**

All of these may well be relevant sites of investigation to help develop our understanding of the role of entertainment sector trade unions in anti-racist work. For this article, we are primarily focussed on the power and structure of the unions themselves.

# 2. The essence of Unions framework

According to Richard Hyman, the purpose of a union is to pursue objectives that reflect its identity. Its ideology is the set of values and ideas that inform and give meaning to purpose. Strategies are concrete plans and objectives which arise from the complex interaction between the leadership and the rank and file and lead to specific actions such as campaigns to organize certain groups of workers (Hyman cited in, Hodder & Edwards 2015). Drawing on this, Hodder and Edwards (2015) developed the Essence of Unions Framework. See Figure 1.
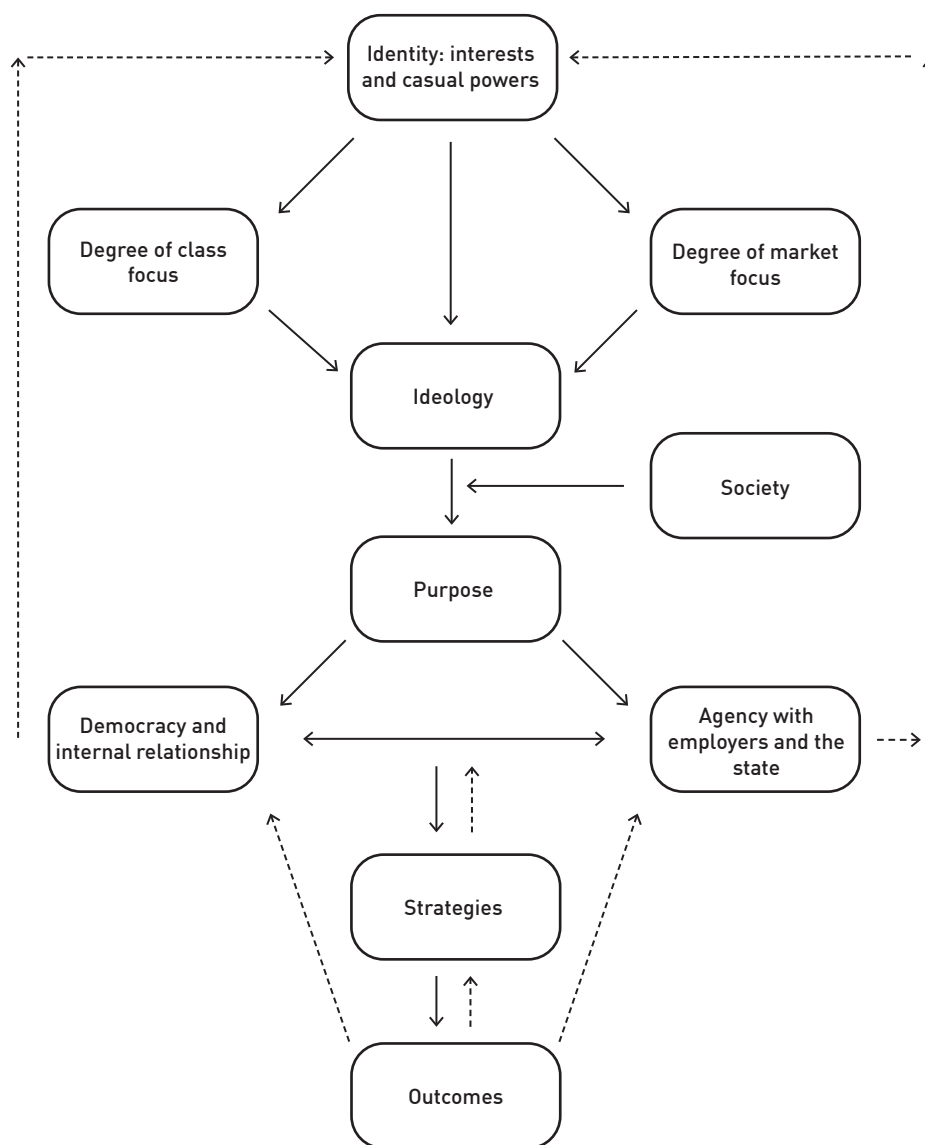


*Figure 1. The essence of unions framework, Hodder & Edwards 2015.*

Identity is therefore seen as being fundamental to unions: 'Identity' means what a union is, its 'very nature' (Hyman, quoted in Hodder & Edwards 2015: p.8). A union's ideology, purpose and subsequent strategies flow (in a mediated and interactive way) from its identity.

The membership demography of a union is therefore a critical factor in determining its activities. If identity 'represents the categories whereby workers define their individual situation, the groups within which they perceive shared interests' (Hyman, quoted in Hodder & Edwards 2015: p.8), then it follows that with an overwhelmingly white demographic make-up, the core identity, the 'perceived shared interests', will be dominated by this group. The question then becomes, to what extent are these interests shared with the interests of a union's Black, Asian and minority ethnic members? Clearly there is an intersection between the interests of white and black members in their shared identities as workers: pay and conditions, for example, working hours, health & safety, and so on. However, racism exclusively affects black and minority ethic workers. Furthermore, white workers may in certain situations benefit from structural racism and racialised inequality in that it helps to maintain exclusive access to professional opportunities and advancement.

We will make use of the Essence of Unions Framework to aid us analyse our respondents' experiences and suggest ways in which the interests of Black, Asian and minority ethnic members may be impeded.

# METHODOLOGY

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Primary data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews with industry professionals drawn from across the five trade unions responsible for representing workers in the entertainment sectors. Interviewees were recruited using the snowball sampling technique in which research subjects enable the recruitment of further subjects. 26 potential interviewees were contacted to take part. Fifteen interviews were conducted between 26th April and 26th May 2021.

All respondents identified as black or minority ethic. Seven were female, eight male. The majority are freelance workers. Most live in London, with other respondents in the North of England and Scotland. The sample contained respondents active in each of the five entertainment trade unions with BECTU being overrepresented and the WGGB underrepresented. All our respondents have a history of trade union activism and engagement.

All interviews took place online using videoconferencing platforms and were transcribed using automated transcription software. Transcriptions were checked for errors and corrected.

The interviews themselves focussed on generating respondent-centred perspectives. An interview guide was developed which adopted principles of the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) combined with a mini-life story approach.[1] Participants were asked to describe positive and negative examples of their involvement with their respective union. They were free to interpret this in any way they saw fit. The information from the interviews was manually thematically coded by the research team and analysed inductively which resulted in the identification of 62 common and cross-cutting themes.

The specific nature of many of the examples generated combined with the relatively small number of Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers active in the entertainment unions, makes respondent identification an increased possibility. In an industry in which the largely freelance labour markets are organised around reputation and word-of-mouth (Ursell 2000), the fear of career damage for speaking out is very real and, indeed, is itself a major barrier to effective anti-racism work. Unfortunately, this issue is present within trade unions themselves, perhaps as much as it is in the wider industry. For this reason, we have adopted a heightened degree of anonymity within this article in order to protect the identities of our respondents. For example, in the text that follows we have generally not identified which of the five unions a respondent belongs to or is speaking about or given the demographic characteristics of our respondents such as age and gender when we quote them. We have redacted any other potentially identifying details.

The interview data was supplemented by a number of 'off-the-record' conversations with union officers and correspondence with several union leaders. We also conducted a small amount of 'desk research' around the workings of the various trade union bureaucracies.

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[1] CIT was developed by John Flanagan in the 1950s (Flanagan 1954) and became ubiquitous in fields such as nursing, job analysis, counselling, education, medicine, marketing, organizational learning, psychology and social work (Butterfield 2005). Through the collection of detailed observations or reports of behaviour in relation to specific, significant phenomena (critical incidents) researchers can quickly build robust and reliable understandings with a range of immediate practical applications. From the late 1980s, CIT began to be utilised in research from a social constructivist perspective (Chell 2004, Butterfield et al. 2005). This research tended to focus upon CIT's utility to generate data on self-understandings of phenomena, and as an inductive tool to generate and develop theoretical models. Foundational in this was Lorette Woolsey who advocated CITs use in counselling psychology, with particular utility for theory and model-building (Woolsey 1986). CIT is particularly appropriate for its utility to generate data on self-understandings of phenomena, and as an inductive tool to generate and develop theoretical models (Woolsey 1986, Butterfield et al. 2005).

# 1. Interviews and analysis

The interviews with our respondents generated a rich resource of data totalling some 110,000 words. There is not space in this report to investigate all the themes raised and this offers the possibility of further research. For this report we have highlighted three major themes that emerged from the interviews that are relevant in explaining many of the experiences of our sample.

These are:

• **Union Bureaucracy**

• **Equality Monitoring**

• **From Marginalisation to Conflict**

We end this section by looking at another theme that emerged as a result of speaking to respondents across the five unions, that of **Cross Union Organising.**

To begin this section it is necessary to undertake a comparative analysis of the Union Structures and the position, processes and powers of the representative bodies of Black, Asian and minority ethnic members across the five unions.

# 2. The development of Union structures

*"We have an important role to play as the representative organisations of working people, black and white, men and women"*

- Norman Willis, General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress 1988

Union structures, by which we mean their organisational composition, rules and regulations, representative committees, and so on, are very significant in determining the extent and character of the participation of ordinary members and in the ways in which members' interests are represented. The question of the extent to which union structures enable or discourage anti-racism work and the effective representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic members is therefore of great significance.

During the 1980s the Trade Union movement began the process of incorporating bodies to represent Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers. The first TUC Conference on Black Workers and Trade Unions (now called the TUC Black Workers' Conference) took place in 1985. In 1988 the TUC set up an Equal Rights Department with an aim 'to secure equality for Black workers' (Willis 1988).

The aim of the 1988 conference was to find ways for unions to work more effectively for their Black, Asian and minority ethnic members. Since then, unions have devised structures to represent and articulate the interests of Black, Asian and minority ethnic members. The five entertainment unions, while differing in the speed at which they responded to this project, have all developed such structures, but they vary in terms of the way the respective bodies are selected, the power they exert, and their place within the wider union structure (see Table 1 below).

# Table 1 – Black, Asian and minority ethnic representative structures within the UK Entertainment Unions

| Union | Representative Body | Who they represent? | Selection Method | Powers | Resourcing | Ruling Executive Representation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BECTU | Black Members' Sub Committee | Black, Asian and minority ethnic Members. | **1st Round** Committee Members elected annually via AGMsof Divisions (number elected to reflect membership level of each Division). **2nd Round** Three further Committee Members elected via ballot of committee members selected in the 1st round. | Advisory | Activities funded centrally | None |
| Equity | Race Equality Committee | Black, Asian and minority ethnic Members. | Committee Members elected biennially by ballot of all Equity members who define themselves as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic. | Entitled to submit one motion and one amendment to a motion to the Annual Representative Conference. | Activities funded centrally | One Minority Ethnic Members' Seat on the Equity Council. |
| Musicians' Union | Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Committee | Black, Asian and minority ethnic Members, LGBT+ Members, Women, Disabled People, Young Members. | Elected Biennially by ballot of all MU members. Five out of the 20 Committee Member Posts are reserved for Black, Asian and minority ethnic Members. | Advisory | Activities funded centrally | None |
| NUJ | Black Members' Council | Black, Asian and minority ethnic Members. | Eight Committee Members elected at a conference of Black & Minority Ethnic members. A further nine members are selected, one each from the Irish Executive Council, Welsh Executive Council, Scottish Executive Council and Six Industrial Councils. | Entitled to table motions to the Annual Delegate Meeting. Selects the speaker for the annual Claudia Jones Memorial Lecture. | Allocated its own budget administered by the elected Treasurer of the Black Members' Council | One representative of black members on the National Executive Committee. |
| WGGB | Equality & Diversity Committee | All "groups and communities currently under-represented in the creative industries". | Recruited from members who express an interest. | Advisory | Activities funded centrally. | None |

Since 2019 all the entertainment unions, with the exception of the NUJ, have undergone changes to the structures of their representative bodies.

The Musicians' Union previously had a body called the Equalities Committee. In 2019 this was disbanded by the union leadership on the basis of their concern that it 'wasn't functioning properly'[2]. An interim sub-committee was formed whose members were invited by the leadership to join rather than being elected by the membership.

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[2] This description comes from a source within the Musicians' Union.

Elections were held after 6 months when the sub-committee was replaced by the new Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Committee (EDIC). The formation of the new structure coincided with the appointment of a new full time Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer. Previously the officer overseeing equalities issues was also tasked with administering the union's educational activities. The splitting off of these roles therefore represents an increase of resources to equalities issues.

The Writers' Guild of Great Britain appears not to have had a body to represent Black, Asian and minority ethnic members before the establishment of their Equality and Diversity Committee (EDC). A working group existed prior to this, and it was formalised into the EDC in 2019. There is no election process: the Committee is open to any Black, Asian and minority ethnic member that wishes to join. This organisational structure stands out as an example, in theory at least, of direct, as opposed to representative, democracy.

In 2017 BECTU became a sector of the trade union Prospect. The National Executive Committee of Prospect ordered a review of the Black Members' Sub-Committee (BMSC) in 2020. The results of this are pending at the time of writing.

Equity's Race Equality Committee (REC) was forced into an overhaul in 2020. In March 2020, the REC made public criticism of Laurence Fox's views on race after the actor's appearance on an edition of BBC Question Time. After the threat of legal action the union apologised to Fox and made an out-of-court settlement. In response the entire Race Equality Committee resigned in protest. After the resignations, Equity established the Independent Committee for Race Equality (ICRE) which investigated the Laurence Fox case and issued recommendations. The amended Standing Orders of the Race Equality Committee were issued in January 2021.

The NUJ are alone in not having gone through a process of review or upheaval in recent years. One of our respondents spoke with pride about the NUJ's Black Members' Council (BMC). 'I think that we have the gold standard of black self-organisation within the trade union movement in the NUJ [...] but it hasn't been properly rolled out in all the unions'.

Of the different organisational structures of the five entertainment unions, the NUJ's Black Members' Council and Equity's Race Equality Committee stand out in a number of ways as more effective examples of structures that enable Black, Asian and minority ethnic participation and representation. In particular, they are both elected by Black, Asian and minority ethnic members themselves, and they both have powers to bring motions to conference. The NUJ's BMC, however, is alone in having its own self-administered budget (no other equivalent body has a Treasurer).

The Black, Asian and minority ethnic members' representative bodies of BECTU, the Musicians' Union and the WGGB do not have the power to bring motions to conference, nor do they have their own budgets. BECTU's BMSC and the Musicians' Union's EDIC have elections, but the electorate is made up of the unions' entire membership rather than only their Black, Asian and minority ethnic members. As pointed out the WGGB's EDC currently exercises a form of direct democracy. It is open to question whether the union will need to move to a representative model in the future.

Whereas all the bodies claim to represent Black, Asian and minority ethnic members, the Musicians' Union's EDIC and the WGGB's EDC simultaneously represent other groups. In the words of the WGGB these include all the 'groups and communities currently under-represented in the creative industries' (WGGB Annual Report 2019-2020). In practice, and as explicitly set out by the Musicians' Union, these include LGBT+ members, women, disabled people and young members. There is a debate about how effectively such umbrella groups satisfy the needs of any one of the groups it claims to represent. Set against this is the benefit that that may accrue in allowing for a more intersectional approach; one that challenges the limitations of a single-issue approach to discrimination (Crenshaw 1989).

The organisational structures of the NUJ's BMC and Equity's REC are alone amongst the UK's entertainment unions in having guaranteed representation on their unions' ruling bodies. Where such guarantees are not in place, unions have a patchy record. According to one BECTU member, the first ethnic minority member of BECTU's NEC was elected in 2003. This number had grown to four by the late 2000s before falling away. In discussions with the Musicians' Union we were told that they were looking into reserving seats on its Executive Committee for Black, Asian and minority ethnic members. Reserving seats at ruling body level may be necessary in order to maintain Black, Asian and minority ethnic representation.

Should union members wish to make changes (e.g., guaranteed representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic members on ruling bodies) the method for doing so is to bring a proposition to conference. However, as Table 1 shows, only Equity's REC and the NUJ's BMC have the formal power to do this[3].

The Musicians' Union does offer a method for submitting propositions. A proposition may be submitted if supported by 20 members, and there are 20 members on the Musicians' Union's EDIC.
The WGGB's EDC has no formal mechanism to submit propositions to their General Meeting of Members, however the procedure for submission is very open, and any two members may jointly submit a proposition.

For BECTU's BMSC there is no mechanism by which a proposition can be submitted to conference. There is also no mechanism by which individual members (with support) may submit a proposition. All propositions must be submitted through BECTU Branches. This means that any Black, Asian and minority ethnic member wishing to make a rule change, must first obtain the consent of their branch.

The analysis above shows the importance of organisational structure in the participation and representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic members in the entertainment unions. But this is not straightforwardly a case of opening-up closed or cumbersome union committees to black members, or simply promoting more democratic decision making. Participation by Black, Asian and minority ethnic members is best where organisational structures guarantee representation of their specific interests in decision-making, particularly at forums like conference.

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[3] At the NUJ's 2021 Annual Delegate Meeting a motion from the BMC calling for the NUJ to examine its employment of black people at all levels and take up issues of unconscious bias and institutional racism was removed after a majority of delegates backed an amendment by the union's ruling body calling for its deletion.

# 3. Union bureaucracy

> **"It's exactly what my colleague said – it's all a bit clipboards."** - Respondent 8

While the macro-organisational structures of the entertainment unions are very significant in determining the space available for anti-racism activity, the more micro bureaucratic structures of rules, regulations and traditions are also worthy of attention, particularly in how they can limit participation by under-represented groups.

Issues around labyrinthine and confusing trade union bureaucratic structures and rules were repeatedly highlighted in our data as barriers to better representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic members (seven of the respondents made explicit reference to it). Difficulties in navigating complex and opaque rules and procedures and the alienating nature of these might be general issues within trade unions and, indeed, other democratic and participatory organisations all the way from book clubs to political parties. However, they can also have a particular relevance for our understanding of the failures of the entertainment unions to effectively represent Black, Asian and minority ethnic members. What emerges from our interviews is a picture of an often conservative and cloistered governing bureaucracy that can be unwilling to engage with anything perceived as a challenge, which issues around race and discrimination frequently are.

The esoteric nature of union bureaucracy, particularly the specialised jargon and terminology often employed, was highlighted by two of the respondents, both of whom had long experience of activism within their trade unions. For example, respondent 5 described union bureaucracy in the following terms:

> *"Everything is shrouded in this mysterious procedure. There's procedures to this day I still don't understand. This jargon I still don't understand. No one really explains it to you, people don't even explain it to you as it goes along. I think it's the preserve of a small group around the middle who are, I don't know, educated that way to kind of understand that kind of language. And I don't think it's accessible enough."*

Similarly, respondent 12 described the specialised nature of union knowledge as both a source of pride, and of alienation:

> *"This is a sort of parallel with [my work] – where we have our own language, where we have a whole glossary of terminology that only we as [creative workers] know [...] there's a little bit of a sort of badge of pride in that isn't there, because it's like your own little world and you're not letting anybody else in [...] and I think we're guilty of that with trade unions as well, [...] we take pride in it and actually it can be a little bit alienating."*

While this issue is general, the alienation created by the arcane nature of union bureaucracy (its rules, processes and terminology) was spoken about by other respondents as specifically relevant for Black, Asian and minority ethnic members. Indeed, it was this issue that was often cited as the reason why Black, Asian and minority ethnic colleagues had not joined or become more active within their union or had left it completely. For example, respondent 5 put it in the following terms:

> *"...to a lot of especially young Black, Asian and minority ethnic people, I think it looks obscure, dull, bureaucratic and quite forbidding in many ways. I don't think it's attractive enough [...] I just don't think it's really something that people want to get involved in at the moment."*

There seems to be a failure by the unions to adequately explain union bureaucracy to members. Some members had clearly benefited from being socialised into the union by a union official steeped in the union's bureaucracy, but this was in no way a formalised process. There appears to be the absence of any rigorous induction programme for new members. The experience of respondent 6 may be typical:

> *"I never got a pack that told me about how this works and how if you want to get involved this is what you need to do [...] I never had any of that. I signed up online, paid my money, they sent me direct debit instruction. And on your way I was."*

If respondents had persevered against the often-impenetrable nature of union bureaucracy, they often reported instances where they felt the union used rules and procedures to stymy their activism. According to respondent 1:

> *"I just feel like it's just open to abuse a lot of the time [...] I'm sure the laws are there for a reason [...] but, you know, systems can be there to be abused as well."*

In certain instances, respondents complained that the obscure nature of union bureaucracy was used to prevent members from holding the union leadership properly to account. This point is highlighted by respondent 7 who describes how opaque rules and structures can be used to stifle democratic accountability:

> *"A lack of transparency means that you can't be held to account for certain things, right? And I think that [...] the more opaque and mystifying that things remain, the less likely it is for people to challenge or ask questions about management, about the way that the union's finances are managed, to ask questions about what membership is for, what's actually being done for members."*

For respondent 7, bureaucracy is explicitly employed to preserve a conservative status quo that sees anti-racism work and related issues as too political:

> *"any sort of hint of radical politics or anything that challenges the status quo, you become very quickly isolated."*

# 4. Equality monitoring

> *"Unions should make attempts to collect statistics on the ethnicity of their members, in order to be able to see where to concentrate our efforts. I know there are genuine difficulties involved in this."* - Willis 1988

The collection of equality monitoring data is a vital prerequisite to the improvement of workforce diversity in the creative industries. As Clive Nwonka notes:

> *"Over the last decade, it has been recognised that data capture and analysis is a key method for evaluating the ability of the cultural and creative industries to enable cultural diversity."* - Nwonka 2021: 462

Indeed, struggles over the collection and dissemination of diversity data have been an important, if secondary, element to the overall picture of struggles for equality and greater representation for marginalised groups within the industry (see Eikhof, Newsinger, Luchinskaya & Aidley 2018; Cobb 2020). This is represented most clearly in the boycott by all five entertainment unions of the screen industry's flagship but deeply flawed attempt at self-regulation, the diversity monitoring scheme Project Diamond, since 2017.[4] But how successful is equality monitoring within the unions themselves, and what does it tell us about their demographic composition, both in terms of their membership and their staffing?

As part of the research for this article, we contacted representatives from each of the five entertainment unions and asked if they collected equality monitoring data about their members, and if they were happy to share the data with us. BECTU, Equity and the Musicians' Union shared their data with us. The information for the NUJ was obtained from their website. The WGGB had not responded by the time of writing.

The information obtained shows a mixed pattern in the racial equality monitoring data which the unions collect from their members. At the top end of the scale is BECTU which has collected equality monitoring data from 75% of its 33,145 members. 2001 members, approximately 6% of the total membership, identify as Black, Asian and minority ethnic.

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[4] As a result of a campaign launched by the Black Workers Sub-Committee of BECTU, all five unions agreed to boycott Project Diamond, the industry equality monitoring scheme, until it agreed to release workforce diversity data at a programme level, instead of at the level of genre.

Equity has approximately 50,000 members. The percentage of members who completed an equality monitoring form was not given. 1,963 members, representing 4% of the total membership, identified as Black, Asian and minority ethnic, although the true figure is likely to be higher. One reason given by Equity for a potential underestimation is the insecurity felt by Black, Asian and minority ethnic actors in the industry, and a subsequent lack of confidence in revealing their identity. Equity have recently made the equality monitoring form more prominent in the application process in an attempt to increase the response rate.

The Musicians' Union has approximately 30,000 members. It has collected equality monitoring data from only 5% of its members. Of these, 222 members representing 0.75% of the total membership identified as black or minority ethnic. The MU has acknowledged that it has a problem with collecting equality monitoring data from its membership. It has recently issued the MU Equality Action Plan[5] with one of the aims being to collect 25% of members' diversity data by 2022. The union is about to implement a new system for collecting equality monitoring data that it hopes will remove many of the barriers members currently face.

The NUJ has approximately 38,000 members. Information from its website[6] states that 7% of its members define themselves as Black, Asian and minority ethnic. This would represent 2,660 members.

Within a context of poor-quality data, Black, Asian and minority ethnic union membership appears to be largely in line with the data that is available about the workforce in this sector more generally. For example, Creative Skillset (2012) reported a steady decline between 2006 and 2012, from 7.4 to 5.4 per cent. If accurate it would suggest that membership of the entertainment sector trade unions reflects the demographic makeup of the industry as a whole.

On one level this is unsurprising: one might expect the trade union demographic profile to reflect the industry it represents. However, within the entertainment sector it is accepted that the workforce underrepresents Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers. What this tells us therefore is that, firstly, the entertainment unions are, like the industry itself, overwhelmingly white. Secondly, it tells us that the entertainment unions have been largely unsuccessful in attracting black and ethnic minority workers who are struggling to get a foothold in the industry. To put this another way, there is little evidence to suggest that union membership is seen as an effective vehicle for Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers to combat the discrimination that they encounter within the industry, and which does not affect their white colleagues who form the majority of union members.

[5] https://musiciansunion.org.uk/about-the-mu/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/mu-equality-action-plan
[6] https://www.nuj.org.uk/about-us.html

We asked the unions if they collected data on the number of full-time officials who consider themselves Black, Asian and minority ethnic? BECTU were unable to say if they collected such data but did point out that they had recently employed two Black, Asian and minority ethnic officials.

The Musicians' Union do not currently collect this data, but state that they are working with an HR consultant to rectify the situation. Equity collect data on their staff, and currently have eight Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff members out of a total workforce of 56, representing just over 14%. This includes a number of black and ethnic minority staff who have recently been recruited. The NUJ hold staff data, but they said that the consistency of the data they hold varies depending on the start date of employment. They were unable to share their staffing data with us. The WGGB had not responded by the time of writing.

A lack of Black, Asian and minority ethnic union officials was highlighted as a problem across our sample. In particular, it was seen as a barrier towards recruiting new members and representing existing Black, Asian and minority ethnic members. For example, respondent 7 said:

> *"It's something that's come up in events I've held with other members who've said, if they are current members, they say that they will never go to the union for any help with anything that they think might be race related because there's nobody there that looks like them and that they feel have the knowledge or the experience to speak about a race related incident. And people not joining for that reason as well."*

Similarly, for respondent 3:

> *"Your structure does not represent us. You get to a level, there's one culturally diverse person in that building who is taking on all the labour [...] and when you move up from that level, there is no one, they're all white, all of them, right up to the very top. And that's the problem. It's so obviously the problem, and that's why they're [...] struggling for culturally diverse members to join. Why join a union where they can't see themselves in? [...] Why bother?"*

Respondent 11 made the point that a lack of full-time black and ethnic minority staff placed the onus of pushing forward an anti-racist agenda onto unpaid activists within the union:

*"I think that is important because actually [...] the awareness and expertise, is coming from a committee of members who are doing this for free. And I think actually, when you have a more diverse workforce, these things come in, in a different way [...] when it comes to race, there are three of us on the [Ruling Body], and it's kind of very much up to us to push, it feels. As an executive we steer the general secretary, rather than there being staff that steer it."*

Equity, the Musicians' Union and BECTU told us that there is more work to do in terms of achieving a more representative staff. This is a pressing concern for a number of reasons. As respondents have noted, the lack of Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff is a potential problem for recruiting and retaining Black, Asian and minority ethnic members. Being able to turn to Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff is of particular importance to members suffering discrimination. Placing the burden of raising and pushing an anti-racist agenda onto the unpaid labour of activists may diminish the prominence of this agenda over time. This is a resourcing issue for the entertainment unions and reflective of a culture in which anti-racism work is not prioritised.

There is a further point regarding union staffing that relates to the effectiveness of the unions' own campaigns to increase diversity within the industries of the workers they represent. The unions' justified case against racism and lack of equality in the industry is undermined if their own staffing levels are unrepresentative, and their calls for the greater transparency of industry diversity data loses power when not adopted as a practice within the unions themselves.

With regard to the available membership data, the racial demography it shows has important implications for the way these unions operate. Trade unions are democratic organisations. When black and ethnic minority members hold such a numerically small stake in the overall membership it is justifiable to assume that getting their specific interests acted upon through the democratic processes of the union is an uphill struggle. Given this, it is important to question the extent to which these unions are successful in being sites of anti-racist activity.

# 5. From marginalisation to conflict

Using the Essence of Unions Framework (Hodder & Edwards 2015) together with the available membership data of the entertainment unions and our interview data, we suggest that feelings of marginalisation and frustration might be expected from Black, Asian and minority ethnic members in relation to unions' anti-racism work.

As the analysis below shows, there were, in our sample, widespread feelings of marginalisation and frustration around the operation of all the entertainment unions and how they represent Black, Asian and minority ethnic members' concerns. These feelings were often grounded in specific examples which we draw out here.

Ten of our fifteen respondents reported feelings of marginalisation (feelings of being insignificant or peripheral). The marginalisation experienced can be divided into two categories. Firstly, there is the marginalisation of the representative body of Black, Asian and minority ethnic members by other sections within the union such as the leadership, ruling bodies or members' conferences. The second category is the marginalisation of individual members as a result of raising issues they felt relevant to them as a Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers. This could include marginalisation from and by the representative body itself. In the first category of marginalisation, respondents reported a feeling that Black, Asian and minority ethnic representative bodies were seen as an adjunct to the main union structure, a body that was not integral to the union and therefore sat outside the core business of the union.

The representative bodies of the five unions inhabit a distinct space in the union structure, a space that can best be described as a place where 'equalities issues' can be expressed. The NUJ's BMC is the most integrated to its union in that as a 'Council', it has an equivalent footing to the NUJ's Industrial Councils (it is this equivalence that justifies the power it holds to submit propositions and have representation on the ruling body).

The distinct space in which the representative bodies operate can lead to a marginalisation from the rest of the union. As respondent 5 puts it:

> *"one of the problems, the [Representative Body] always had was being taken seriously."*

Respondent 7 talked of the representative body being side-lined even in the context of the murder of George Floyd and the BLM movement:

*"It is as if we don't exist, apart from a little side-line thing irrespective of all the big things that've happened in the past year. It's not enough. Like it's not penetrating."*

Respondent 1 made the point that once representative bodies are side-lined, so too are the concerns of Black, Asian and minority ethnic members:

*"Diversity is something on the side, it's something you think about afterwards, something that you have at the end of your meeting rather than it being at the forefront. And I think there's still the thing that the concerns of black members is something seen as aside from and apart from, rather than something that they should be actively working for right across the union."*

Respondent 4 placed the responsibility for this marginalisation on a failure of union leaderships to adopt a properly integrated anti-racism agenda within the unions:

*"I don't think that any of the union leaderships fully understand what racism is. What institutional racism is. What systemic racism is because they're not having that conversation with their black members. Black members committees and councils and sections in unions are sort of add on. They're not integral to the union structures."*

Respondent 3 described the often-dismissive nature of the interactions between their union's leadership/ruling body and the Black, Asian and minority ethnic members' representative body, saying:

*"there were references towards the [Representative Body] just being a bunch of mouthy coloured people."*

The process of setting up representative bodies for Black, Asian and minority ethnic members can be viewed as a way for unions to successfully compartmentalise those members' concerns. This process of compartmentalisation can remove the interests of Black, Asian and minority ethnic members from effecting the wider union purpose. What comes across from the respondents is a feeling that the process of compartmentalisation can then lead to containment and thus the marginalisation of their representative body.

At union conferences several respondents reported how marginalised they felt when propositions about racism were raised. Respondent 5 makes the point thus:

> *"Our [representative body] get up to present the motion and people just sit there chatting with each other, you know, "it's not interesting what black people are saying. It's nothing to do with us"[...] and they're more interested in arguing about the change of the logo. I mean, that was a fierce argument, it went on for hours."*

And conference itself was talked about as being a challenging experience for black and ethnic minority members, one in which members are directly confronted with the whiteness of their union, as respondent 2 describes:

> *"I definitely feel there's racism, I think. And maybe being just a few black people in that space. I've always felt most people are nice, but I just think a lot of people are ignorant or just a bit awkward. They don't know how to talk to someone who doesn't look like them. And it's a very white and male conference."*

Examples of overt racism within unions were rare, but some respondents saw their marginalisation as stemming from racist attitudes from other members. One respondent recalled an attempt to prevent their representative body from presenting to conference:

> *"It genuinely felt like the reason we weren't being allowed to make that presentation in the proper manner was because we were black. So, yes, that felt like overt racism."*

Respondent 13 went so far as to say that Black, Asian and minority ethnic members were effectively looked on as second-class citizens within their union, mirroring their experience in the industry:

> *"Marginalisation is really wide in the industry as well as in the union itself because people who really run the unions are not interested in those issues. They really kind of sometimes look at you when you're black or ethnic minority, if you're not white, you're not competent, you don't have the skills, you can't be trusted, and you're not in our clan, and why do you have to waste money and resources on you?"*

Another respondent described the obstacles they had faced in trying to influence opinion within their representative body. On one occasion the representative body was part of a union delegation giving evidence to Parliament. The respondent was disappointed that Black, Asian and minority ethnic members had not been consulted before the hearing took place:

> *"There's one or two questions I wish they would have asked. I would have hoped that pre having that meeting maybe [they] would have got people of colour together or even said, look, we've got this really really great opportunity [...] Is there anything you would like to say, because we're a representative union representing you [...] I'm a person of colour [...] you represent me whether I like it or not [...] So you should be listening to me. At least have the conversation with me."*

The marginalisation of representative bodies, individual members and even (as was reported by one respondent) Black, Asian and minority ethnic full-time union officers, leads towards frustration and six of our respondents described feelings of frustration with their unions. Here we quote respondent 2 as an example:

> *"There was impatience where I felt that the union was slightly out of step and didn't really keep up with the changes that were happening in the industry, especially for Black, Asian and minority ethnic professionals, and many were leaving the industry [...] and therefore that led to frustration because I felt that we missed a lot of things that happened [...] If they think that there will be any sort of racial policies through [my union] then I think they'll be waiting maybe another 20 years."*

Feelings of frustration lead to disillusionment. All our respondents remain members of their respective unions, and most were committed to the principals of union membership. However respondent 6 questioned whether there was much point in staying in their union:

> *"What's the point? It's just a waste of money [...] I can't say that I've had any benefit from being part of [the union] at all."*

Disillusionment can ultimately result in Black, Asian and minority ethnic members leaving their union. On the other hand our respondents, who are (largely) activists, see their union membership as being a key resource in advancing the changes they seek within industry, and therefore commit to fight their corner despite the obstacles they encounter. Under these conditions the scene is set for conflict between Black, Asian and minority ethnic members and their union leadership.

Using the Essence of Unions Framework we suggest a strong potential for a misalignment between the interests of Black, Asian and minority ethnic representative bodies and the purpose of a union leadership mandated by an overwhelmingly white union membership. Where such a misalignment exists we suggest that conflict between the representative body and the union leadership is likely. In recent years there have been high profile examples of this[7]. Seven of our respondents had direct experience of conflict with their union's leadership.

Respondent 13 who had sat on a ruling executive body described the advice they were given by another Black, Asian and minority ethnic member:

> *"He said when I was joining the [ruling body]; "Careful, [...] be diplomatic, don't talk all about ethnicity or ethnic minorities, because you're going to be sitting there with lots of white people."*

Whether the advice was heeded or not, the same respondent described how they subsequently felt undermined in ruling body meetings:

> *""I'm misinforming people" and "my tone is too out of order" and I need to "tone down a bit" and all that kind of stuff, you know?"*

Union leaderships need to understand that the identity, ideology and purpose of their union may inevitably face challenge from bodies representing black and minority workers, or in the words of respondent 4:

> *"They should feel threatened. That's the whole basis upon the struggle for black rights [...] They should feel threatened because they have the power. Men should feel threatened by feminism. Straight people should feel threatened by LGBT politics. Because as the oppressed our job is to disturb the status quo and to reorder it in terms of equality. And it's how they deal with that fear. And sense of threat. Do they engage with it? Do they embrace it, and see it as necessary? Or do they manoeuvre and elide and disguise?"*

No doubt embracing the threat from these bodies and seeing it as "necessary" poses an immense challenge for union leaderships. But without taking this challenge seriously, leaderships are left with two alternatives: clamp down on and control black and ethnic minority representative bodies or exist in a state of constant tension erupting at times in all out conflict[8].

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[7] The most prominent recent examples we found were the resignation of Equity's Race Equalities Committee in 2020 following the Equity leadership's handling of the Laurence Fox case, and the cancelling in 2018 of the NUJ's Black Workers' Council Claudia Jones Memorial Lecture after the NUJ leadership vetoed the choice of speaker.
[8] When tensions with union leaderships do erupt into conflict, the outcomes can on occasion be helpful. In the wake of the Laurence Fox incident, the subsequent ICRE report, and reforms to Equity's Race Equality Committee can be taken as an example where positive change has emerged out of conflict between a Black, Asian and minority ethnic representative body and a union leadership.

Where this is the case it is always draining for the Black, Asian and minority ethnic members involved, and for these members, engaged as they are in a two-fold struggle (with their industry and within their union) the demands can be overwhelming. One of our respondents felt moved to leave their union's representative body because of the conflict with the union leadership, telling us:

*"I can be involved in wars if necessary, but I can't be involved in unnecessary wars."*

# 6. Cross Union organising

The five unions we have covered in our study represent workers in associated and overlapping industries within the entertainment sector. Members from these unions often work together: BECTU, Equity, the Musicians' Union and WGGB members in the theatre, BECTU and the NUJ in News & Current Affairs, Equity and BECTU on film sets, for example.

The unions working in this sector have long recognised a common purpose and shared interest, and as a result, the Federation of Entertainment Unions (FEU) was formed in 1968. This joint representative body currently comprises BECTU, Equity, the Musicians' Union, the National Union of Journalists, the Writers' Guild of Great Britain and the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA).[9]

The FEU acts as a forum where the leaderships of the respective unions can meet and plan collective action. During 2020 for example, the FEU called for an income guarantee[10] to protect workers in the arts and media, and in 2021 the FEU condemned the government's failure to agree travel rights[11] for UK artists. The FEU has also proved to be important in challenging racism in the TV industry. For example, as noted above, in 2017 it was instrumental in the cross-union campaign to boycott Project Diamond, the industry equality monitoring scheme.

Organising within the FEU with regard to racism in the entertainment sector is limited to a quarterly meeting of the Equalities Officers from BECTU, Equity, the Musicians' Union, the National Union of Journalists and the Writers' Guild of Great Britain. There is no equivalent meeting of Black, Asian and minority ethnic members from the five unions, or of their representative bodies.

There was a strong appetite for more cross-union organising around anti-racism work within our sample. Many of our interview respondents said they would welcome the opportunity to organise with Black, Asian and minority ethnic members from sister unions. Respondent 12 put it in these terms:

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[9] This study has omitted the PFA because it is seen as existing within the Sport & Leisure sector rather than the Entertainment sector. However recent events such as the argument surrounding the players of the English national football team taking the knee demonstrates that members of the PFA are high profile actors in the current debate around BLM. The recent activities of players such as Marcus Rashford also demonstrate the political effectiveness of campaigns led by high profile PFA members. Any future organising by Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers across unions would therefore do well to include PFA members.

[10] https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/feu-calls-for-an-income-guarantee-to-protect-workers-in-the.html
[11] https://www.equity.org.uk/news/2021/january/feu-statement-on-no-deal-for-creative-industries/

*"At the end of the day, we're working in the same industries and so, of course, we're going to encounter a lot of parallels and a lot of similarities [...] it would make complete sense for us to work closer together. And just to kind of network more."*

With specific regard to challenging racism in the entertainment sector, some respondents believed that Black, Asian and minority ethnic members organising across the five unions would enhance their power. Respondent 3 put it like this:

*"What if the FEU had some kind of caucus, a group of like-minded people from each of these different unions [...] that will act as a pressure group so that they could act with impunity [...] This caucus needs to happen because in our own individual unions, we have no power [...] and I think we would have a greater power if there is that group [...] We need a group that's not nervous about fighting for what is right and can take all that power to front up to these producers and gatekeepers."*

Respondent 5 suggested that the current political climate made cross-union organising by Black, Asian and minority ethnic members within FEU unions all the more pressing:

*"I think we have to come together, especially in light of what I call the Tory Culture War. You know, the 50 percent cut in education, what they're trying to put through about not being allowed to critique empire? I think all the FEU unions need to come together very strongly and I think we'd be a very powerful voice [...] We've got to come together on it, because I think it's going to get really fierce and really nasty."*

Taking such a stance would draw the FEU into a more politicised role and represent a departure from the craft basis of much of the composition of its membership (Banks 2010). For many of our respondents, a more politicised activist role, crossing the individual sectoral interests of each craft union, provides the biggest potential for enhanced anti-racism work in the sector.

# CONCLUSION

# CONCLUSION

*"We're talking about systems that are either used to amplify or oppress, right?"* - Respondent 14

Our interviews were with Black, Asian and minority ethnic members who overall remained committed to their trade unions and the ethos of collective worker organising. Respondents valued the greater security and networking potential they perceived as coming with union membership. Some respondents also reported the positive benefits they had received from union membership through the advice and representation they had received during workplace disputes (although other respondents reported significant examples of having been let down in such situations). Specific union activities were cited as being of benefit to Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers. These included BECTU's Move on Up programme and the NUJ's George Viner Memorial Fund (a bursary programme for Black, Asian and minority ethnic journalism students).

Our research also uncovered a widespread feeling of discontent with the unions in a number of areas including difficulties with engagement, bureaucracy and representation. The lack of Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff was also cited as a concern, and believed to be an impediment in recruiting, retaining, and representing Black, Asian and minority ethnic members. Respondents also questioned the ability of unions to centre anti-racist activism and be an effective force for change in a sector that remains under representative of Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers. Using the Essence of Unions Framework (Hodder & Edwards 2015) we see that the identity of a union, its interests and causal powers, are shaped (in part) by the democracy and internal relations of the union. What this analysis shows is a relative failure for this feedback loop to work effectively on behalf of the unions' Black, Asian and minority ethnic members.

In order to address this problem, and other specific concerns highlighted in our report, we have put together nine recommendations for the entertainment sector trade unions. These recommendations have some overlap with those made in the TUC's Racism Ruins Lives report (Ashe 2019)[12].

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[12] From the TUC Racism Ruins Lives report, the recommendations for Trade Unions 2, 4, and 10 are of particular significance to our recommendations. It is worth noting that BECTU passed a motion about the TUC

## Our recommendations are as follows:

✔ BECTU, the Musicians' Union and the Writers' Guild of Great Britain should review the constitutive rules of the respective representative bodies that serve their Black, Asian and minority ethnic members. Drawing on the examples from Equity and the NUJ they should:

    a.    Institute a method by which Black, Asian and minority ethnic members select the majority of members to their representative bodies. There is a strong argument for ensuring that all sections of the membership are represented on the body and rules for this can be drawn up or retained, however a failure to have a direct way for Black, Asian and minority ethnic members to select their representatives calls into question the very representation these bodies seek to provide.

    b.    Empower the representative bodies by allowing them to bring propositions and rule changes to conference.

    c.    Reserve places on ruling executive bodies for members of the representative bodies.

✔ BECTU, Equity, the Musicians' Union and the Writers' Guild of Great Britain should increase autonomy and resourcing to their representative bodies by allocating to them an annual budget to be administered by the representative bodies.

✔ Greater effort must be given to the equality monitoring of members. Given the low response rate across the unions (with the exception of BECTU) efforts must be made to capture equality monitoring data from existing members as well as new applicants.

✔ All unions should implement a policy of capturing equality monitoring data for their paid officials. This data should be published annually in line with the unions' own recommendations for publication of TV industry data at programme/production level. Unions should also provide information on the number of Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff employed in the higher levels of the unions' leadership structures.

- Unions should try to ensure that Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff are available to support members who believe they are being discriminated against. This service must be properly resourced and information about it widely disseminated to all staff and members.[13]

- Unions should look at the way new members are welcomed and the way that information is given to them. All new members would benefit from a more rigorous induction programme. This should include information on union bureaucracy. Unions should look at their bureaucracy and ensure rules, processes and terminology are as clear, concise and accessible as possible.

- For new Black, Asian and minority ethnic members an induction programme should set out clearly how their union is relevant to them, what services regarding anti-racism are on offer and how to access them, how they are represented (as Black, Asian and minority ethnic members) within their union, and how as individual members they can effect change.

- Union leaderships must accept that providing Black, Asian and minority ethnic members' representative bodies with greater autonomy opens up the possibility of conflict between representative bodies and unions' wider purpose, ideology and strategies. Union leaderships must provide a mechanism whereby conflicts can be mediated whilst ensuring that the autonomy of their representative bodies is retained. For example, regular communication between union leaderships and the representative bodies of their Black, Asian and minority ethnic members is a necessary (but not sufficient) element of this.

- Organising by Black, Asian and minority ethnic members across the entertainment unions should be encouraged. Unions should provide the space and resourcing for this to happen, but this should not be a top-down approach and organising should be led by Black, Asian and minority ethnic members.

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[13] Although we identified this need from our research, we also suggest that unions guard against marginalising black and ethnic minority staff by pigeonholing them solely into areas that serve Black, Asian and minority ethnic members.

Some respondents also questioned whether the unions had the appetite for taking a stance when it comes to challenging the cultural output of the sector. All the unions that make up the Federation of Entertainment Unions represent workers involved in cultural production. The concerns of Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers in this sector therefore not only centre upon workplace issues, but range more widely in dealing with the very culture that is produced and challenging racism in wider society. For our respondents, examples of this included the more general (for example, the experience of writers in writers' rooms, blackface and yellowface casting) as well as the particular (the demonisation of Meghan Markle in the UK Press, the content of Rule Britannia). The NUJ's Race Reporting Guide is an example of a union stepping into the arena of cultural production with regard to racism, however even here respondents expressed disappointment with its effectiveness in shaping journalistic output. It remains to be seen whether a second front, one that contests the stories that are told and the ways they are told, is one in which the entertainment unions are willing to actively campaign on. Because this was an area that many respondents felt important, it is in itself a good indicator of both the ability of Black, Asian and minority ethnic members' representative bodies to represent, and of unions' ability to respond positively.

## There's so much more to say.

Our report is not a complete analysis of the data received from our research. There is much more to say. One key area was the feeling of disconnectedness from their union that many respondents experienced. Our sample was skewed towards black and ethnic minority trade union members with a history of activism and engagement. Further research needs to be undertaken to include a wider sample of respondents: black and minority workers in the sector who are less engaged with their trade union, have left their trade union or who have seen no reason to join. This would enable us to investigate how the entertainment sector trade unions can make themselves more relevant to the wider Black, Asian and minority ethnic workforce.

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# ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

- Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union SECTOR RULE BOOK 1 January 2017, as amended at the biennial sector conference held on 19 May 2019.

- Equity, Rules and standing orders for the Race Equality Committee (amended January 2021).

- Musicians' Union Rules Revised 23 July 2019. All previous Rules rescinded.

- NUJ Rules 2018 - 2020 Includes rule change amendments from DM Southport, April 2018.

- Writers' Guild of Great Britain Rule Book with effect from 23rd September 2020 All previous versions rescinded.