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Breaking

**The experience of racially minoritised
people working in UK TV newsrooms**

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Dedicated to:

Kanai Lal Chatterjee

and

Violet Ethelga Blake

For all the first-generation immigrant parents who taught their children to speak up.

Acknowledgement: We want to explicitly acknowledge the time and emotional labour of those who took part in the research for this report. Every conversation played a significant part in our thinking. Thank you.

Executive Summary

Five years of sustained focus on racial diversity in British television news has not delivered the structural change promised. Instead, racially minoritised staff describe a system in which diversity has been performed rather than embedded — visible in rhetoric, tokenistic recruitment, and superficial interventions, but largely absent from the mechanisms that determine editorial power and career progression. For many, the result has been stagnation, frustration, and in some cases exit from the industry. Yet even as racially minoritised staff report only limited progress, many are now experiencing a backlash from some White colleagues who believe they have lost out because of diversity, expressed through resentment, resistance, and attempts to roll back these efforts.

Perceptions of failure and tokenism

The diversity efforts in British television news that followed the murder of George Floyd in 2020 are perceived to have been reactive and reputational — a response to events rather than a serious attempt to understand and remedy racial inequity. Words like “box ticking” and “optics” were heard frequently during our interviews. The survey data aligns with this sentiment: 60% (n=48) disagreed or strongly disagreed that diversity schemes in their workplaces were working well; only 9% (n=7) believed they were. Two-thirds, 66% (n=53), said the initiatives of the last five years had made no meaningful impact at all.

Resentment, backlash, and unequal burdens

Surface-level interventions were felt to have produced parallel dynamics: resentment from some White colleagues — who perceived diversity as conferring unearned racial advantage or lowering standards — and exhaustion among racially minoritised staff who reported experiencing little of this supposed advantage, but remained at the receiving end of such commentary. Respondents described editorial leaders as largely blind to these dynamics and insufficiently attentive to the new forms of backlash emerging in the wake of diversity discourse. Racially minoritised staff also said they were expected to perform additional, invisible labour to protect their organisations from reputational harm, correcting colleagues in an age of heightened racial awareness.



Racism, marginalisation, and coverage

63% (n=50) of respondents reported experiencing racism while working in a television news environment. These experiences were tied not only to interpersonal prejudice but to the institutional architecture of news production — what one respondent called “an apartheid newsroom”. Many respondents observed that even as newsrooms became more visibly diverse, authority did not shift: racially minoritised staff were concentrated in junior roles. The roles perceived to be the most prestigious — executive producer positions, senior roles in coverage of politics and international news — remained overwhelmingly White — racially minoritised staff feel excluded from these areas. This imbalance was said to shape coverage, particularly of Westminster and the world. Racially inflected stories, including stories about migration, were often described as poorly handled, with diversity in newsroom staffing not translating into diversity in editorial judgement.

Progression, stalling, and exit

Many respondents felt that diversity interventions were focused on getting racially minoritised staff through the door—and then leaving them there. The crunch point was felt to be mid-career, where opportunities narrowed sharply and where many perceived White colleagues of equal talent more easily progressed. Only 18% (n=14) believed there were enough opportunities to progress; 70% (n=56) felt opportunities were insufficient. Racially minoritised staff described three problematic routes to advancement: conforming to majority-White editorial perspectives; becoming uncritical ambassadors for diversity schemes; or advancing through tokenistic pathways. Several respondents spoke of colleagues who had left the industry entirely.

Intersectional harms and working-class women of colour

Women of colour—particularly those from working-class backgrounds — faced the most severe obstacles, where racial, gender, and class inequalities combined. Survey responses showed 67% (n=31) of women had experienced bullying in their workplaces compared to 40% (n=15) of male respondents. Respondents also argued that the limited space created by diversity policies was disproportionately taken up by men of colour, leaving women feeling blocked once a single seat at the table was occupied.

A perpetual work in progress

Broadly, respondents believed diversity had become a perpetual work in progress: ever present in language and publicity, but with few mechanisms capable of redistributing opportunity, voice, or editorial authority. The result, as one respondent noted, is diversity “without change”—high visibility at the surface, low impact at the structural level, and a continued belief among racially minoritised journalists that their experiences remain markedly different from those of their White peers.

Introduction

This report investigates the current context of UK national television newsrooms, and the experiences of racially minoritised people within them. The report builds on existing studies of diversity initiatives within media and journalism, to contribute new knowledge about diversity issues in the national television news context. This research was undertaken to assess the impact of recent diversity schemes and initiatives introduced by broadcasters over the last five years.

In 2020, in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and the global movement for greater racial equality epitomised in Black Lives Matter protests, television news organisations in the UK professed a commitment to ensuring their content and workforce reflected the diversity of the regions and nations they serve (e.g. BBC 2020, ITN 2020, Sky 2020). In the following years alongside increased social awareness of racial injustice, a backlash to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives, and a rise of political populism has occurred (Gillborn, 2024). Nationally and internationally “the symbolism of historical greatness” has often been contrasted to “a present where the history and culture are under attack from others” (Lilleker and Weidhase, 2022: 103). The complex resistance to diversity has been evident on the international stage, for example with Donald Trump’s demands for international trading partners to roll back EDI policies (Kassam, 2025), and in national ‘anti-immigration’ protests. In television newsrooms where decisions are made about how these events and underlying social issues are described and depicted, several diversity initiatives have played out and (as this report will demonstrate) been met with varying degrees of resistance.

Whilst representation across all media forms (both on and off-screen) remains important, television journalism, as a space where cultural significance and meaning is negotiated, works under additional expectations and parameters. News reporting is a key marker of democracy and as Martin Moore has observed “The diminution of public service media worldwide, alongside the erosion of independent media, has paralleled the fraying of democracy, the resurgence of autocracy and the rise of populism” (Moore, 2024: 109).

The UK cultural industries, within which careers in both journalism and television production fall, remain a highly unequal space of employment. As Oran Brook, David O’Brien and Mark Taylor observed in their updated edition of *Culture is Bad for You* (2025), whereas the Covid-19 pandemic might have been an opportunity to reset cultural spaces as more equitable “We know now, based on a range of research, that inequalities in the cultural industries not only continued through the pandemic, but were exacerbated” (Brook, O’Brien and Taylor, 2025: xi). They also note that journalism and television production are industries where a high number of workers know and socialise with people already in their industries, highlighting that “respondents seem to know other creatives, rather than knowing factory workers, bus drivers, or solicitors.

This is one way these jobs are ‘socially closed’, meaning it is difficult to enter without these sorts of networks” (2025: 76). The importance of knowing someone already in the industry you are trying to enter (or having a family member in the profession) has been repeatedly foregrounded as problematic along various intersectional lines, and due to the existing Whiteness of cultural occupations is a key issue for diversity (Friedman and Laurison, 2019).

Inequities in television, especially factual television, have an impact precisely because “who makes culture has consequences for the way individuals and communities are represented” (Brook, O’Brien and Taylor, 2025:78) especially when those representations purport to be based in fact. This is significant when we consider both what happens on-screen (who reports the stories, conducts the interviews) and off-screen (who decides what gets covered, what language or images are used etc.). Michael Schudson writing in the late 1990s put things bluntly:

“Journalists write the words that turn up in the papers or on the screen as stories. Not government officials, not cultural forces, not ‘reality’ magically transforming itself into alphabetic signs, but flesh and blood journalists literally compose the stories we call news.” (Schudson, 1997: 8)

Whilst this sentiment, that journalists make the news rather than simply report the facts, in Schudson’s context was met with resistance from news professionals, in the current moment, this idea does not seem revolutionary. The mainstream uptake of social media, the political rhetoric of ‘fake news’ and the impact this has had on public trust of established news sources, has resulted in increased awareness that news (and therefore the way we understand the world around us) is mediated. In the contemporary context, established, well-regulated news organisations become even more central to functioning democracies: “As our digital spaces become epistemological junkyards, cluttered with bot-inflated, AI-generated text and clickbait content, so the public need for stable, grounded, and verified content intensifies” (Moore, 2024:110). Thus, who gets to be the mediators of our realities, the gatekeepers or “knowledge brokers” (Gesualdo et. al., 2020) of our society, especially in the ever-expanding space of media culture, remains a significant issue.

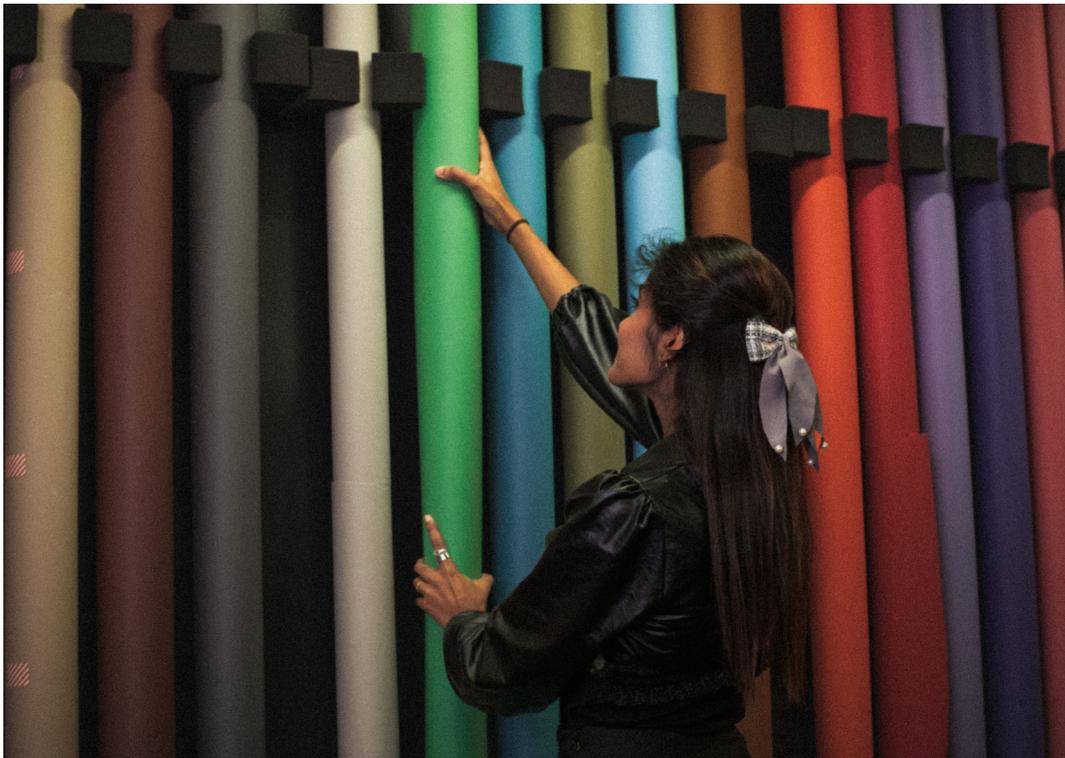


The most recent Creative Diversity Network *Diamond Report* (2025) tells us that in terms of racial and ethnic diversity in television production there are still inequalities at play:

“Latest figures (August–December 2024) show off-screen representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups falls below the UK workforce estimate (17.0%) across all genres. Factual programmes (11.8%) are currently the least representative of people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.” (Creative Diversity Network, 2025: 13)

Broadcasters are aware of these enduring issues for racial equality as evidenced in their most recent public facing diversity reports and websites, where all key players expressed a desire to tackle these issues (BBC 2025; Channel 4 2024; ITN 2025; ITV 2024; Sky 2025).

Additionally, David Lee’s research into the attitudes of White UK television professionals towards current diversity and inclusion agendas, highlights that not everyone is on board with attempts to make the television industry more diverse. Through interviewing television professionals from the dominant group (i.e. Non-disabled, White, cisgender men from middle- and upper-class backgrounds) he found that there was a “disturbing disjuncture between the official values of EDI in the British television industry, and the attitudes of pockets of disaffected and / or privileged actors within it” (Lee,2025:675). This was evidenced through “an antipathy to diversity talk, policy and practices within a particular privileged milieu of British television production” (675). Thus, the backlash to EDI, seen more broadly in the political climate of populism, is also reflected in the industry.





Notably this context for television production crosses over with journalism, a profession which a recent study by Neil Thurman et. al. has concluded employs an alarmingly homogeneous workforce:

“Some 90% of journalists are White, 91% are university educated, and 71% are from a privileged background based on their parents’ occupation. Only 12% grew up in a working-class household. Female and ethnic minority journalists decline in numbers after the age of 50, while men generally earn higher average salaries and are more likely to be permanently employed and hold a top management role.” (Thurman et. al. 2025: 1)

Significant research exists into diversity issues for UK journalism (Al-Kaisy 2023; Douglas 2022; Saha 2018; Thurman et. al. 2025) and UK television production (Henry and Ryder 2021; Lee 2025; Mullen, et. al. 2025). To date however, little work has been done to triangulate if any diversity issues are specific to national television newsrooms – at the intersection of both professional contexts. Our work therefore is specific to television national newsrooms. Our decision to focus on national rather than regional contexts was due both to the way regional demographics vary significantly, and the way that national news is central to representing ideas of national identity. This focus also enabled us to consider disparities between national and international coverage as it relates to race.

Methodology

This research was undertaken to address the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of racially minoritised people working in UK television newsrooms?
2. How have diversity initiatives implemented by UK television newsrooms since 2020 impacted racially minoritised people working in these contexts?
3. What can be done to make UK TV newsrooms more inclusive workplaces for racially minoritised people?

In order to explore these questions thoroughly the decision was taken to use a two-stage approach to data collection. This enabled us to capture some wider contextual information from a survey stage before following up with more detailed one to one interviews. This approach provided an opportunity to capture some indicative quantitative data (about career routes, experiences of discrimination, and attitudes towards diversity initiatives) as well as rich qualitative data that provided detail regarding individual experiences of UK TV newsrooms from varied subject positions (related both to identity - i.e. race, gender, age, religion, disability - and professional role).

The survey (stage one) was designed using Microsoft Forms and asked a series of questions related to respondent's professional context and ethnicity. Questions contained within the survey were divided into sections on career development and training, experiences of diversity initiatives over the last five years, attitudes to working in national television news, and experiences of discrimination. Closed multiple choice questions and open-ended questions were used to collect responses, as well as Likert scales to measure attitudes to specific statements.

Of the 80 who responded to the full survey 33 volunteered to participate in a 1-1 interview about their experiences as part of stage two of the research. As a significant number of survey respondents volunteered to be interviewed, we were unable to interview everyone and had to sample interviewees. We made our selection as to reflect the percentages of ethnic background, ages, religion, gender and educational background across the survey as a whole. We invited a number of people who were unable to get back to us, and so the final sample was also based on who returned our correspondence. This has meant that we have a slight over-representation of British Asian respondents in our interview sample. We conducted 10 interviews with people online, recording and transcribing these conversations. Both members of the research team were present for each online interview. Interviewees were provided with information and consent forms in advance and were able to ask questions before agreeing to participate. Every interviewee had a right to withdraw up to two weeks after the interview took place and were given access to a draft of relevant sections of the report before publication.

The interviews were semi-structured and aligned with the life-world interview approach outlined and interrogated by Toft et. al. (2021). Rohit's own lived experiences as someone from a minoritised racial background and working within the contexts under discussion was central to the process. Questions were chosen to enable participants to elaborate further on their answers to the survey, and to illuminate further detail about their personal experience using their own words. We used similar questions with all participants to start conversations, and this enabled us to compare responses across the overall cohort of interviewees. We also allowed interviewees to speak about any topic they felt important if it related to the central focus of the research.

We selected the pseudonyms for each interviewee (to ensure they did not accidentally choose the name of another participant) and everyone was able to confirm they were happy with the selected pseudonym as part of review before publication. All interviewees were current employees of national newsrooms working in on and off-screen roles, with some being in their first national newsroom job and others having been working in these contexts for significant periods.

We undertook a reflexive approach to this project (informed by the writing of Mitchell Nicmanis [2024] on reflexive content analysis) and considered how our individual subjectivities informed the questions we asked, how we asked them and how collectively we interpreted the answers. We discussed potential power imbalances between the research team and interviewees and considered the specific skills and experiences we both brought to the project. We gave interviewees the option to speak to either Rohit (as the person with experience of TV newsrooms and as a person from a minoritised racial background), or Ellie (who as a White woman has not experienced racism and has not worked in TV news). We understood that Rohit's expertise would make for a better fit in terms of interviewer, and we did not want to replicate the harms caused historically by White researchers engaging with communities to which they do not belong. At the same time, we wanted to ensure that any participants who wanted to speak with someone external to the industry, as Rohit still works within the contexts being discussed, had that opportunity. All participants were interviewed by Rohit, and the data was analysed by both researchers. We also contemplated how Rohit's existing networks and experiences (whilst central to the project and extremely beneficial) might present challenges when ensuring interviewees did not overshare information they would not have done in other circumstances – or with a researcher outside of the industry. These subjectivities and positions were factored into our data analysis and played a key role in our construction of the themes that we present in this report.

We decided to use the term 'racially minoritised' in our report because this acknowledges that both a process of minoritisation occurs, and that people may indeed be from a background that is a global majority. We have also capitalised White and Brown as they relate to ethnic and racial identity, rather than only the term Black. This is to avoid invisibilising or normalising Whiteness as a racial identity from which others deviate.

Findings

3. Findings

This research addressed the following key themes: Getting in, Getting on, Attitudes to Diversity Schemes and initiatives¹ Workplace Culture, Impact on content.

An overall spread of the genders, ages, ethnicities, religions, and disability of survey respondents can be seen in Figures 1 - 5.²

Figure 1: Gender of survey respondents

Gender	Percentage
Female	58%
Male	36%
Non-Binary	0%
Prefer not to say	6%

Figure 2: Ages of survey respondents

Age	Percentage
16-24	5%
25-29	17.5%
30-34	20%
35-39	11%
40-44	14%
45-49	7.5%
50-54	12.5%
55-59	1%
60+	4%
Prefer not to say	7.5%

¹ The term diversity scheme is used across the report – e.g. when discussing recruitment participants used the term 'diversity scheme' to discuss approaches to explicitly recruiting from minority groups – the usage however is not limited to recruitment focused activities and also includes wider initiatives, such as those recording data on who is present on screen.

² Note that we have combined categories used at the survey stage (such as South Asian) to ensure individuals cannot be identifiable from more specific information. We used the more nuanced and specific identity categories to inform sampling for the interviews.

Figure 3: Ethnic groups of survey respondents

Ethnic group	Percentage
Black / African / Black British - African	15%
Black / Caribbean / Black British - Caribbean	10%
Any other Black / African / Caribbean / Black British background	1%
South Asian / British South Asian	40%
East Asian / British East Asian	2%
Any other Asian / British Asian background	4%
Multiple ethnic groups - White and Black Caribbean	6%
Multiple ethnic group - White and Black African	4%
Any other multiple ethnic group background	4%
Arab	2%
Prefer not to say	6%
Other ethnic group	6%

Figure 4: Religion of survey respondents

Religion	Percentage
Atheist	8%
Buddhist	2%
Christian	25%
Hindu	14%
Jewish	1%
Muslim	19%
Sikh	2%
No religion	16%
Prefer not to say	13%

Figure 5: Disability of survey respondents³

Disability	Percentage
Yes	19%
No	80%
Prefer not to say	1%

We note that while more women than men completed the survey (58% women, 36% men) we achieved a good spread of responses across ages, ethnicities and religions. Additionally, the percentage of those identifying as having a disability in our survey (19%) was significantly higher than the percentage recorded in the most recent *Diamond Report* by the Creative Diversity Network (2025), which identified that 9.5% of off-screen contributions to factual programming were made by disabled people.

³ Disability categories included are physical disabilities, non-visible disabilities, sensory disabilities, learning disabilities, mental health conditions, and / or neurodiversity).

We were also keen to ensure that class background was addressed and as such we used two questions related to class to capture this. The responses to the class measure questions, on educational background, and free school meals uptake, can be found in Figs 6-7.

Figure 6: Eligibility for free school meals (post 1980)

Free school meals recipient	Percentage
Yes	30%
No	56%
Not applicable (left school before 1980 or was educated overseas)	9%
I don't know	4%
Prefer not to say	1%

Figure 6: Eligibility for free school meals (post 1980)

School type	Percentage
Non-selective state run or state-funded school	70%
Independent or fee-paying school	16%
Independent or fee-paying school, where I received a means tested bursary covering 90% or more of the total cost of attending throughout my time there.	4%
Attended school outside the UK	5%
Prefer not to say	5%

Notably the number of respondents who received an education in non-selective state schools, and / or received Free School Meals (when educated after 1980) was higher than Thurman's (2025) observations regarding the current make-up of the overarching journalism profession. Unsurprisingly due to the locations of national newsrooms, most respondents lived in London and Southeast England, in commutable distance to their workplaces.



Following on from the survey phase we conducted 10 interviews. Note that in the table below we have intentionally conflated racial categories so that individuals are not identifiable by how they described themselves in the survey. Any similarity between the selected pseudonyms used here and real people is purely coincidental (Fig. 8).

Figure 8: Interviewee demographics.

Name	Age	Gender	Racial background
Amrit	30-34	Male	South Asian / British South Asian
Ray	50-54	Male	Black / Multiple ethnic groups
Leela	30-34	Female	South Asian / British South Asian
Sana	50-54	Female	Asian / British Asian background
Nazirah	30-34	Female	South Asian / British South Asian
Nate	25-29	Male	Black / Multiple ethnic groups
Anum	25-29	Female	Other ethnic group - West Asian
Kavita	50-54	Female	South Asian / British South Asian
Souraj	50-54	Male	South Asian / British South Asian
Vik	60+	Male	South Asian / British South Asian

Our findings pull together data from both the survey and interview stages of this research and illuminate the current context for racially minoritised people working within national TV newsrooms.

3.1 Getting in: entry points into TV newsrooms

TV newsrooms operate at a nexus between elite occupations – journalism and television production. As observed in relation to social class “there has long been a perception that many high-status occupations in the UK, such as law, medicine and journalism, are exactly that: professions that have traditionally been, and remain today, stubbornly elitist” (Friedman and Laurison, 2019: 29). This ‘elite status’ has been maintained not only through class divides related to the backgrounds of new entrants but through racial and gendered exclusions too. Television production, as part of the creative and cultural industries also labours under inequities in terms of access (Brook, O’Brien and Taylor, 2025). As such people looking to get into television news are impacted simultaneously by the elitism of journalism and television production, both professions that rely heavily on social networks for recruitment. One of the issues explored by respondents to the survey and interview phases was the difficulty of getting into the industry for racially minoritised people:

“The news recruitment process is opaque and prohibitive to minorities in so many ways.” (Respondent 16)

“When roles are advertised hiring managers often have ‘someone in mind’ already” (Respondent 18)

Television and journalism are well known as professions that have a significant amount of intergenerational take up, where children follow in their parent's or older relative's footsteps. Due to the existing Whiteness of both television and journalism this directly benefits White applicants, as parents (or existing social contacts) can:

“pass on specific forms of knowledge and guidance about what is valued in their own profession (the ‘rules of the game’ [...]), as well as providing valuable professional contacts and even directly leveraging opportunities (through organising internships or entry-level jobs, for example) that then give their children a particular advantage.” (Friedman and Laurison, 2019: 35)

Often organisations, when attempting to address some of the issues of homogeneity created by existing recruitment practices, append specific wording to entry level schemes to encourage applications from minority groups. Many of our survey respondents and interviewees had direct experience of entry-level traineeship schemes run by all the major British television news organisations (some historically when applications to specific schemes were only accepted from minority groups, and some more recently when general recruitment schemes have explicitly encouraged diverse applications). These entry-level schemes were often relied upon as a primary route into the industry. An example of a recent scheme that was explicitly framed around ambitions to broaden representation and encourage greater diversity is the ITV Academy News Traineeship, which in 2025 offered 12 positions across ITV newsrooms nationwide. The advertising for the traineeship stated that it was “particularly keen to receive applications from those who are from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, disabled people and those from lower socio-economic groups as we recognise that individuals from these groups are currently underrepresented in our industry” (ITV Careers, 2025).



Diversity schemes that foreground a focus on recruiting diverse staff into the newsroom were highlighted by our respondents as problematic in multiple ways. By channelling non-White applicants into specific schemes (explicitly or implicitly), arguably workplaces are enabling a culture where people can easily be pejoratively termed the 'diversity hire'. As such some people felt these recruitment schemes had a negative impact on their careers:

"I've not benefited from any of these [diversity] schemes. The opposite if anything. People assume you're a diversity hire when you're there on hard work and merit. It's a double-edged sword." (Respondent 13)

The sentiment of the term 'diversity hire' is broadly that a person has not achieved their position based on merit but instead has been appointed to meet a diversity quota. Across multiple employment contexts it has been considered "a problematic hiring approach used to fulfil mandates to diversify that often fails to reflect a more robust understanding of diversity and the richness it can bring to a hiring institution" (Hughes, Horner and Ortiz, 2012: 596). The term can apply across multiple intersecting lines relating to individual identity, including race, gender, disability, sexuality and social class and informally declaring someone a 'diversity hire', even in jest, acts as a way of belittling the contributions of those who deviate from the dominant group in a workplace. As Kavita observed this can be applied both when entering the newsroom but also when allocated specific jobs or stories too:

"There's an assumption sometimes that they only got their job because of the colour of their skin or they're deployed on this story because they're female, or they're Asian, or you know. I think that is an issue because it's undermining for them and the perception of them in the newsroom."

The consequences of this labelling can have long term implications for people entering the industry. Therefore, while pushes to include more diverse entrants may indeed improve the numbers of racially minoritised staff within newsrooms, unless cultures of exclusion and undermining are addressed it can impact individuals' mental health and be a key factor in any decision to leave.

Sana recalled that when starting out several decades ago in a previous workplace there was a "unit that was nicknamed 'Black and Crap' and that was just like everyday language that people would just openly say in the office. Oh no, that that story has been given to 'Black and Crap'. It mattered not who the individuals were". She believed that while the shocking language would be challenged in the contemporary context some of the sentiment around 'diversity hiring' practices were still operational.

Leela, a much more recent entrant to the industry reflected on how diversity schemes can create self-doubt:

"I've kept like every single application I ever made to try and be a journalist, and I'm so grateful to the training scheme that actually took me on this placement. [...] And it's so disheartening to me that it took a diversity training scheme in a way. It's disheartening that it took a diversity training scheme to say yes for me to get in the door, even though I'm way more than that, and I know that."

This process of belittling can be experienced through direct and overheard comments about themselves and others, body language, divisions in physical spaces of the newsroom (all of which will be explored in forthcoming sections of this report). This not only makes the lives of incoming racially minoritised staff harder, arriving under intense pressure to prove their worth, but it also breeds resentment from White colleagues who believe the 'balance' has been tipped away from what they perceive to be a meritocracy. Many respondents stressed that they viewed diversity as rooted in meritocracy, yet resistant colleagues in their newsrooms often saw diversity and meritocracy as being in conflict, interpreting any push for the former to be an erosion of the latter - a perception that had not been sufficiently challenged by their employers. Meritocracy, as Jo Littler insightfully observes, is a deeply flawed concept as "the 'fair' neoliberal meritocratic dream rests on the idea of a level playing field, conveniently ignoring systematic inequality, social location and the head start accrued by the children of those at the top or high up the social ladder" (Littler, 2018: 3). Let us be clear here, the idea that any previous approach to television journalism employment practices was solely meritocratic is an illusion, one that people who did well within the biased system (e.g. White, male, able-bodied people) have an existential stake in maintaining.

As Sana commented in relation to how these ideas of meritocracy play out in her own context:

"I think for some it's a hard pill to swallow because for them from their point of view, it's seen as if the balance has completely shifted. So now that if you're from an ethnic background, if you are a person of colour, then [it is seen as] you're automatically at an advantage."

This new (perceived) racial advantage does not however (in the view of our respondents) seemingly provoke reflection on the kinds of advantages (racial or otherwise) at play in previous recruitment systems.

A further issue identified by respondents, is that recruitment schemes that foregrounded diversity often streamline new entrants into spaces where they are competing against other racially minoritised individuals, and this can inflate a sense of competition not comparable to White applicants entering these workplaces through general entry points. For Leela, who entered the industry via a diversity scheme, the competition to get into TV news remains fierce:

"It's just the foot in the door, but even getting to the foot in the door, there's a million barriers and people might say, oh, you'll be fine because there's like diversity funds now and there's diversity schemes now, but so many people are applying for those"

As a survey respondent commented "A lot of the time having one person of colour means they've ticked a box, and they don't think about hiring another person of colour, so there are fewer opportunities" (Respondent 30). Making racially minoritised people compete against each other in specific schemes, without also addressing the barriers to entering through all possible entry points, unfairly inflates competition between racially minoritised candidates and creates the sense that there can only be one person representing each racial or ethnic identity (not an issue experienced by White contemporaries).

In general, across the responses, it was felt that many of the diversity initiatives implemented by broadcasters over the last few years focused disproportionately on bringing new people into the industry and identifying new talent. As respondents progressed in their careers, however, some perceived that the enthusiasm for diversity which had characterised their early experiences in the profession diminished as they moved beyond entry-level roles.

3.2 Getting on (stalling) within TV newsrooms

In 2020, a number of UK broadcasters and news organisations issued public statements expressing their commitment to improving access to the industry for racially minoritised groups. In June of that year, following the killing of George Floyd, the BBC's Director-General Tony Hall, Director of Creative Diversity June Sarpong, and Director of Content Charlotte Moore released a joint statement declaring that "We need to step up." They further emphasised: "The BBC is impartial, but we are also unequivocal: there is no impartiality when it comes to racism" (BBC, 2020). Alongside such wide-ranging declarations, organisations pledged to reform workplace structures and processes to support the career development of racially minoritised employees already within the industry. ITN's Diversity and Inclusion Report (2020) provides an example of this. Within the report, the then Chief Executive, Anna Mallett, similarly described the aftermath of George Floyd's murder as "a critical moment". The report acknowledged a 20.8% median ethnicity pay gap, attributed to "lower BAME representation in more senior roles", and, in line with the wider industry rhetoric, outlined initiatives such as "inclusion training" and further measures to "mitigate unconscious bias in selection processes" (ITN, 2020). In its 2020 Impact Report, Sky pledged to increase workplace diversity, setting a target for 20 percent of employees in the UK and Ireland to be from Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic backgrounds by 2025. "This target includes at least 5% Black representation and applies to all levels of our business, including our leadership teams" (Sky, 2020).



Taken together, these examples illustrate a common pattern across the sector, in which public commitments to racial equity were closely tied to pledges for structural reform. Yet, despite such commitments, our research found that racially minoritised people working in British television newsrooms perceive progress to have been limited. Five years on, participants consistently reported that their experiences of pursuing a career in television news remained markedly different from those of their White counterparts. Overwhelmingly respondents to the survey felt they still, in 2025, must work harder in their workplace because of their race, with 67% (n=54) agreeing or strongly agreeing with that statement. Feeling the need to justify one's own inclusion into the workplace came up repeatedly in survey responses and at interviews:

"From the moment I joined the Newsroom I have felt the need to prove myself, at first to get some form of pay parity which was years in the coming."
(Respondent 7)

"The 'Black tax' and having to constantly over-achieve to prove my worth"
(Respondent 17)

"It's embarrassing the way myself and other colleagues consistently can't put a foot wrong and have to prove ourselves years on end only to see much more junior zero experienced White Oxbridge entry level producers get given opportunities on a plate." (Respondent 16)

"20 years on and I am still trying to prove myself and my worth. It is exhausting." (Respondent 25)

"You're often made to feel that you've got the job you've got due to your race and so there is added pressure on you to continually prove yourself. It's painful." (Respondent 30)

"Always feel that I have to work harder and mistakes are judged more harshly."
(Respondent 82)

Souraj was very clear that, in his newsroom, there remained a stark divide in how White colleagues and their racially minoritised counterparts were treated — a perception that stood in contrast to the sense among editorial leaders that such issues had already been resolved.

“It’s like an apartheid newsroom. You look left and there’s disproportionately too many people [of colour] because everyone’s on the lower rung. And you look on the other side, it’s like, everyone’s almost White. And then everyone obviously on the lower incomes and the lower rungs of the ladder, which is where most of my ethnic minority colleagues are, are doing the kind of slog [...] they’re not given being given the same opportunities. I don’t think.”

He argued that examining the positions occupied by minoritised colleagues within the newsroom’s hierarchy, rather than focusing solely on numerical increases, provides a more nuanced account of inclusion. Although greater racial diversity may be evident on paper (something organisations are eager to promote both internally and externally) he emphasised that significant barriers to equitable career progression remain. As a result, ethnic minority colleagues are disproportionately concentrated in the lowest-paid and least-respected roles, often left to stagnate in junior or middling positions. That these concerns were still being raised five years after newsroom diversity first became a prominent issue, he suggested, highlights not only a lack of tangible progress but also the performative nature of his organisation’s approach—prioritising the optics of diversity, or “box ticking,” over meaningful structural change.

The amount of time it takes for racially minoritised people to achieve pay parity was also considered by respondents. Sana reflected that:

“I will never know whether that was to do with my Gender or my skin colour or a perfect storm Venn diagram of the mixture of the two when I joined the organisation. [...] Even when I’d served my time in there, two years, been there five years, done some of the big stories, where all I’d got was praise for my work, no problems with my work. I still wasn’t getting paid anywhere near people doing the same role and I have to stress I wouldn’t have ever expected to be at their level, I wasn’t asking for the same pay, but the figures were so different.”



The sense that people still have to fight for equal pay was highlighted in several responses, with particular reference to the 2020 case in which BBC presenter Samira Ahmed successfully brought an employment tribunal against the BBC, after claiming she had been underpaid by £700,000 for hosting *Newswatch* compared with Jeremy Vine's salary for *Points of View* (Waterson and Marsh, 2020).

Moving on from the bottom rung was seen as difficult in responses, and in general there was a real sense that opportunities for development were not equally distributed, with 70% (n=56) of survey respondents stating that they did not feel they have enough opportunities to progress their careers. This was experienced more keenly by our women respondents, 76% (n=46) of whom said opportunities were insufficient, over 62% (n=18) of male respondents. The lack of opportunity for career progression was considered a significant issue for retaining talented people at all levels of the newsroom's operations. Amrit commented that "You have to retain them [diverse talent] and if they can't see people who look like them or sound like them in positions of responsibility, then it's a really difficult place to try and build a career." This sentiment was echoed in many survey responses:



"I work for one of the biggest news broadcasters in the UK. I've seen a succession of young, diverse talent leave in recent years with no attempts made by management to keep them. Not only is young, diverse talent leaving; there is a glaring lack of diversity and range in the editorial output." (Respondent 9)

"Minorities are resented by peers and progress is extremely poor compared to White staff." (Respondent 16)

"I worry about all the young Black and Asian people who are brought into our newsroom so the optics look good at times, but not enough is done to keep them train them and nurture them." (Respondent 6)

"There is not enough career progression given to women of colour, most newsroom remain white, and most opportunities are given to non-diverse staff" (Respondent 75)

“If anything, it’s digressed in recent years. I’ve never met the director of my organisation. They’ve never come to meet my team - which is responsible for a lot of output. That says a lot about their engagement with talent across the organisation. Without tangible development opportunities, how can people progress? Middle management are fearful about losing their jobs, so they neglect to really engage upcoming talent. Lack of leadership across the board means that young, diverse talent are the least prioritised. I even had a senior manager confess that to me.” (Respondent 9)

Recent research undertaken in partnership with Black Leaders in TV, into Black professionals experience of working in the wider UK television found that there is “a lack of opportunity for Black Established professionals, with a lack of clear pathways to promotion, which is compounded by a lack of support, and an opaqueness about how the industry works ‘as a club’” (Mullen et. al. 2025:17). Tackling racial diversity in television news presents greater challenges than in other areas of broadcasting. The entrenched White male traditions of journalism, a profession which pre-dates television itself, are often deeply embedded and therefore more resistant to change. Unlike drama or entertainment, news carries the unique responsibility of interpreting events and scrutinising governments in real time – an essential function in any democracy. For this reason, diversity in news should be addressed separately from diversity in television more broadly, in recognition of the distinct responsibilities and structural barriers that shape the field.

Anum had recently left her previous workplace as the lack of opportunity, combined with what they believed were racialised issues with reporting on the current conflict in Palestine made her position untenable:

“I [just] left the channel because of my mental health and just because I just hated being there. I felt like yeah, I just felt like coverage of Gaza really for me was [...] it just kind of solidified how I thought that senior staff in that workplace view people of colour. And then that for me was like, you just don’t see people of colour as equal humans. So that was really affecting my mental health. And then I think I just came to the conclusion that I knew that if I stayed there I wouldn’t grow. Because I just felt like people didn’t really see me and there’s no kind of like conscious effort to like for development training.” (Anum)

In very few cases did respondents to the survey say they felt their opportunities were comparable to their White colleagues. In these instances, responses spoke to a neoliberal sense that hard work is a leveller:

“If you are friends and work hard there’s is opportunity for all” (Respondent 40)

“The only person stopping me from moving up was myself. There were never any internal barriers” (Respondent 7)

What was apparent from the perspective of most respondents was that hard work does not guarantee recognition, even when that recognition is achieved externally, through awards schemes. The ever-changing goal posts being set for racially minoritised people to be promoted, to achieve pay parity, or to have more say over their assignments, was something that respondents addressed directly:

"I am a multi-award-winning reporter, but it appears that job opportunities have stagnated. Typically peers with the same accolades would have progressed to a specialist role but I am struggling to find that. These job opportunities are even less available for diverse women from working-class backgrounds"
(Respondent 56)

"In the newsroom it is easy to see that some journalists have their careers curated for them by the editors and planners. Whereas Black journalists are often not given the same opportunities, pigeonholed on topics around race or even have their exclusive interviews given [away] to prop up the work of White journalists. I've had my experience patronised or undermined in order to save money, i.e. not pay me the same rate as the specialists. Despite being an award-winning journalist." (Respondent 34)

In interviews with both Leela and Souraj the impact these changing goalposts have on a sense of self-worth became apparent:

"That [self-doubt] has always been at the back of my mind. [...] Like, why am I not getting on? Is it because I'm not good enough? Am I just here because they want to tick a box? You see some people lavished with praise and lavished with stuff, and then you think, God, I am being treated differently." (Souraj)

"You're constantly feeling like you need to justify yourself being here. [...] The bar, the posts are always constantly moving. The bar is being raised and even though maybe I've hit that target, it is then 'but what about the next thing'? And there are different bars depending on what you look like. I definitely think that." (Leela)

Due to these changing goal posts respondents commented that there was a sense that racially minoritised people will never make it to the very top of the career ladder— only to the second level or 'side kick' positions. Nazirah commented that:

"If we take the top, top jobs, for example. So you know the old boss left and he basically chose his right-hand man to take over. [...] So, from my perspective, it seems like there's a very, very tight food chain. And the pool is very, very small and limited. [...] And there's no senior women of colour in the newsroom. There was one [...] she left about 18 months ago." (Nazirah)

“Black and Brown journalists must work harder to tell stories. We are still paid less. We can’t become editor, or political editor, or even Middle East editor. The system is still skewed for us to aspire only to the second tier of roles.”
(Respondent 41)

When opportunities for advancement do present themselves, many respondents felt there was a lack of transparency as to how these were allocated or highlighted how favouritism would creep into decision making processes.

“I feel that opportunities are blocked by commitments to issues that sit outside of meritocratic process. For example, someone’s length of service is often cited but it’s used at whim and differently for different people. I feel, particularly, that women of colour are overlooked and disappeared in newsroom structures regardless of contribution, length of service and talent and commitment.” (Respondent 1)

“My editors acknowledge how good I am, but I’ve never seen or had any help in being promoted permanently. In the meantime, people I have trained, or helped make their first reports for, have had jobs created for them, been promoted on the grounds of a fair interview but I believe the interview process is broken.” (Respondent 5)

“I’ve had good opportunities. But progress has been comparatively slow although it has happened. I started a year earlier than a White male colleague of similar age within 18 months he was earning 2.5 times more than me and was a specialist for roles he didn’t have to apply for. He was just promoted.” (Respondent 27)



Respondents noted that the current economic climate for broadcasters means opportunities for progression are increasingly scarce. They also felt their careers risk being squeezed between waning enthusiasm for diversity and inclusion in wider society, a belief within the industry that progress has already been achieved, and the structural decline of linear television — factors they believe make managers less likely to take the kind of bold steps on diversity promised in 2020.

“The reality of being from a racially minoritised group makes career progression difficult anyway, the current financial dynamic exacerbates this struggle.” (Respondent 19)

“As TV News sees a decline in viewership, bosses seem far less keen to promote and develop employees” (Respondent 28)

“There are frequent redundancies and a lack of substantial roles” (Respondent 29)

Unsurprisingly, due to journalism’s status as an elite profession, as explored in the previous section, class barriers were a recurrent theme of respondents’ observations about their workplaces, and the systems and structures within them. 34% (n=27) of survey respondents identified that they had experienced class discrimination themselves. The way that class intersects with racial diversity to make navigating the newsroom even more complex was commented on by many:

“My rise alongside counterparts who have years less experience than me has been a lot slower. Class I feel also plays a big issue.” (Respondent 35)

“But in-terms of getting promoted, it is heavily skewed to suit a certain type of individual or anyone who was raised to do interviews i.e. public schoolboys / girls. You can get promoted by how well you can talk, not by your skill level.” (Respondent 75)

“Intersection of class and race is a big thing in media. Perceptions of what a person can do judging by the school and way they speak rather than bothering to look at a person’s CV or ask them what they can they do.” (Respondent 16)

“Class is one of those things [...] you know, navigating like those meetings and stuff, but also just like networking internally, I feel like it comes much more naturally to certain people if you’ve got the same interests and backgrounds, or if you go on holiday to the same place, or if you go skiing, those sorts of things.” (Nazirah)

The way that several aspects of identity intersect to create multiple barriers was something that Anum had reflected on:

“If you’re like already feeling awkward at work because you don’t feel like you can talk, speak up, then as a woman as well, you’ve got like the additional layer of like feeling awkward at work. And you know, news is so male orientated, it’s so White, everyone’s so posh. So if you’re if you don’t have any of those three [identities], you’re just much more likely to hold yourself back a bit.”

It is notable that 48% (n=22) of women who completed the survey had experienced sexism. Thus, the way that sexism and racism overlap means that women of colour can experience multiple forms of exclusion simultaneously in these environments that labour under expectations of male-ness just as much as Whiteness.

Over half of survey respondents, 51% (n=41) stated that they had experienced favouritism in their workplace. Anum saw issues of favouritism creating long term problems and division in her workplace:

“Those people who always went on deployments also then became friends because they’d always be working together. So, then it just became like a group of people who all really know each other, and then everyone else, who’s just kind of there as an employee and just goes home.”

Not only does this impact on morale and a sense of exclusion, but it also means that these informal networks block opportunities for others.

Another significant impact on morale was noted in the form of witnessing high-profile, successful colleagues of colour leave organisations, often citing unequal treatment as contributory factors in their decisions. Some respondents noted that such exits prompt speculation among junior colleagues about who their organisations would truly fight to keep, and increases despondency about their own prospects, as Nazirah and Anum, who were amongst our youngest interviewees commented:

“It’s disappointing and a bit dejecting and quite frustrating [when people leave] because you know, you think that by now we would have kind of gone past all of this. I found it quite upsetting.” (Nazirah)

“When I do hear things like that [about senior people leaving], I’m just like, damn, if they’re even sick of it, then it must be really hard. And like, even though I’ve never worked with them, never spoken to them, they do not know I exist, it feels a bit like you’ve lost an ally.” (Anum)

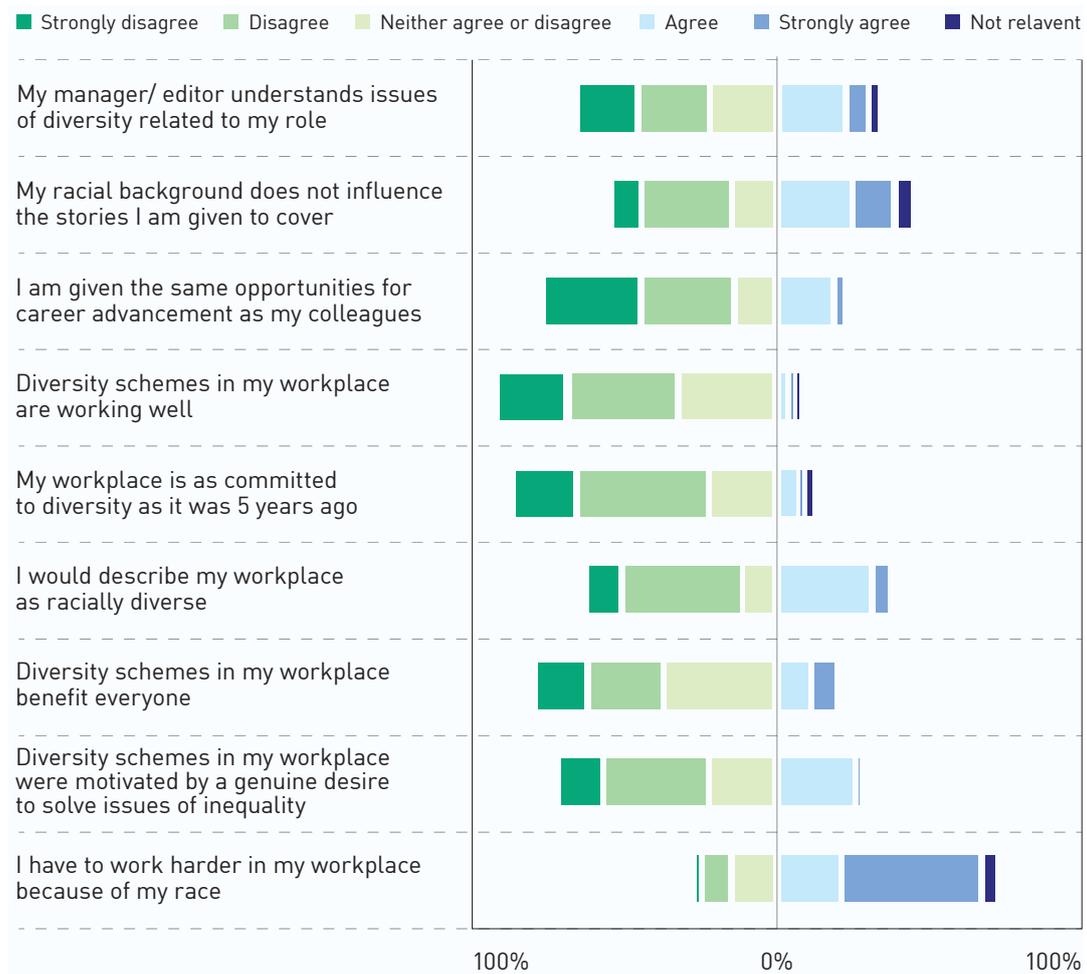
Our research therefore identified that both getting in and getting on in TV newsrooms remains difficult for racially minoritised people. This is in direct contrast to many of the professed objectives of diversity initiatives of the last five years. It is attitudes towards these initiatives, and the impact they have had on newsrooms to which we now turn.

3.3 Attitudes to diversity initiatives in TV newsrooms

Diversity initiatives are complex to design and deliver. However, employers often foreground the intentions of any actions over their actual impact — or lack of it — relying on claims of good will rather than evidence of change. Sara Ahmed’s research into the way diversity initiatives, and diversity work, are organised and valued within large institutions serves as a stark warning about how often “solutions to problems are the problems given new form” (Ahmed, 2012:143). We were keen to establish as part of our research how people on the receiving end of these initiatives (i.e. not those who designed or implemented them), understood their implementation, any impact they felt these initiatives had on them individually or on their workplaces, and whether these initiatives had inadvertently continued existing inequalities, or created new problems for racially minoritised newsroom staff (see Figure 9).



Figure 9: Survey responses to attitude statements



Survey data showed us that 60% (n=48) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement ‘diversity schemes in my workplace are working well’. Only 9% (n=7) of respondents believed these schemes were working well in their workplace. Significantly, elsewhere in the survey, when asked how the diversity initiatives of the last five years have impacted them individually, 66% (n=53) said they had had no impact. Only 23% (n=18) said these schemes had had a positive (18%) or very positive (5%) impact on their working lives.

Omega Douglas, in her examination of the experience of Black and Brown journalists in mainstream news institutions found that inclusion was inconsistent and, in her interviews the term “‘Hypocritical’ was used to describe such institutions where interviewees felt / feel peripheral, and their experiences of institutional racism run counter to organisational diversity policies.” (Douglas, 2022: 2100). She concluded that “in Britain there’s a disconnect between expressed organisational commitments to diversity and experiences of black and brown journalists. This disconnect is due to the way a focus on the market detracts from attending to ethical concerns centred on dismantling racial disparities” (Douglas, 2022: 2109). This aligns with our research findings as in many responses the intent of an employer was acknowledged, whilst a discrepancy between intention and impact was described:

“[Diversity] goes out the window every day. [...] I just think people talk a good game, but in reality, they don’t play it well.” (Souraj)

“All talk, these initiatives. Not much action. Initiatives are a fig leaf to mask utter failure to tackle deep rooted issues” (Respondent 13)

“They did bring in that they wanted to do these like diversity meetings every few months. Those have just kind of fallen off a cliff. I also felt like they were very much listening sessions, which is really nice and important, but I didn’t really see much happening off the back of them” (Nazirah)

Kavita talked about how in her workplace a specific ‘diversity’ role had been created but this had not been very helpful, as it made management feel something had been achieved simply because someone was in post:

“So, I think the appointment was well meaning. I think it was someone who was quite detached from the newsrooms. But I think it allowed management to say, to abdicate responsibility to that person. So, I think it allowed them to feel that they had fulfilled their duty. We’ve made this hire, now over to you” (Kavita)



There are, of course, issues here around how people employed into diversity roles are in many instances women of colour themselves, who enter into positions wanting to enact change; only to discover that the institution or organisation within which they work will not grant them the power (or budget) to enable this. Whilst Kavita was thoughtful and nuanced in her understanding of how that role worked in her context, often individuals employed in diversity roles can be used by organisations not only to avoid other structural changes, but also as a scapegoat when targets are not met. As such people in diversity roles often attract criticism that would be more usefully directed at the organisation. Notably some interviewees (working for different broadcasters) could not point to any examples of EDI being promoted in their workplace:

"I literally just didn't see anything, which is just pretty bad. [...] I just don't think it's really on anyone's radar" (Anum)

"I've got to be honest with you people keep saying, oh, you know, George Floyd was a kind of wake-up call for everyone. I didn't see it in my newsroom. I mean, maybe it's skipped me by completely, but hand on my heart, that phase of kind of, you know, minority renewal or greater diversity or impact, that passed me by. [...] I'm a bit baffled because I'm like what are you talking about? [...] I genuinely don't think that my newsroom changed at all. There was lots of diversity initiatives in terms of making sure the programmes are balanced and blah blah blah, but that to me is kind of bog-standard reporting as opposed to something special." (Souraj)

Amrit's response was notable in the sense that it deviated from all other responses at interview. He could see some positives to the diversity initiatives in his workplace, perhaps in the way people more readily report or challenge overt bigotry, whilst still acknowledging that perhaps the underlying issues have not gone away:

"[Diversity schemes] have been positive. You know you hear things, you hear senior members of staff like 'oh, well, you know, they're only hired because of the colour of their skin or because we haven't got any of XY or Z in the newsroom at the moment'. But that's an archaic way of thinking, and it's becoming far less common. I've heard it quite a lot when I first started working in news. I hear it much less now, and I think it gets called out. I think bigotry gets called out quite readily."

Respondents clearly felt that without managerial level change the opportunities for diversity to be fully understood, and to be taken as seriously as is required to make the big changes pledged in 2020, would be impossible.

“Diversity schemes do not benefit the senior level of staff and therefore the decision making.” (Respondent 10)

“Over 30 years, I have found institutionalised prejudice exists within management - not just racially but also equally class, as decision makers have not changed, and do not wish to change” (Respondent 77)

“The diversity stuff is massively tick-box. Because we kind of on air you know tick boxes and then behind the scenes nobody really cares. [...] you kind of wonder how the Conservative Party, for example, is much more diverse than national newsrooms, which is just a bit mind boggling.” (Souraj)

The motivations of employers when setting up diversity initiatives were questioned multiple times across the survey and interview responses. In the survey, 49% (n=39) of the respondents stated they had experienced tokenism in their workplaces. When so many people working in this context feel there has not been any positive impact on themselves or their newsrooms, yet management continues to celebrate these initiatives it is unsurprising that this questioning of motivations takes place. Several respondents highlighted that the initiatives in their workplace felt like knee-jerk reactions to wider cultural events, and as such were not well thought-through, or designed to do anything more than make surface level change.

“There are moments when a fear of cancellation engulfs a newsroom - a fear that things are ‘looking too White’. And those moments—and only at those moments—are the talents of Black and Brown people recognised. Five years ago it felt like wrongs were being righted. Soon it felt that too many White people were being upset by this correction, and the momentum disappeared.” (Respondent 36)

“At that time [2020] not being alive to diverse issues was affecting businesses bottom lines, so all of a sudden there was a financial incentive to take these issues more seriously. I think there was bad press about what was actually happening on screen. So then again you’ve you forced into a position to take these matters seriously.” (Sana)

"I think there was a genuine will to sort of ride that wave. There was a momentum and I think partly there was a sense that, oh, we have to get on board with this because what will we look like if we don't? But also I think there was a genuine OK, this is now in this public arena, this national dialogue that really has captured people's imagination across the board. But I think it was quite binary. I don't think that meaningful conversations perhaps were had or trying to understand. [...] it was just very much going with [...] the momentum rather than sort of discussing the nuances, the underlying layers, that it's much more complicated [than tearing down the Rhodes statue]."
(Kavita)

"I feel managers keep diversity schemes in place because they need to be seen to be doing that, not because they have a genuine commitment. It's shows time and again. And yes they promote some staff, but again I feel because they need to be seen to." (Respondent 12)



One of the key themes to which respondents returned repeatedly was the way surface level diversity was being achieved in their organisation without wider institutional change. Again, this reminds us of Ahmed's observations that in the contemporary environment often:

"Diversity becomes about changing perceptions of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of organizations. And we can see a key difficulty here: even if diversity is an attempt to transform the institution, it too can become a technique for keeping things in place. The very appearance of a transformation (a new, more colorful face for the organization) is what stops something from happening. A new policy can be agreed upon without anything changing. A new policy can be agreed upon as a way of not changing anything."
(Ahmed, 2017: 105, our italics)

At this level of surface change "Diversity is thus increasingly exercised as a form of public relations" (Ahmed, 2017: 105). In the television industry this may even take the form of literal public relations work for the broadcaster, filming promotional material, being put on public discussion panels, being photographed for publicity material. Many of our participants gave specific examples of how this played out for them and undermined their sense of self-worth. Occasionally, Leela "felt like a bit of a poster child" being used in high profile situations to draw attention to the diversity of a team, when in reality the team wasn't as diverse as it looked from the outside: "They're happy to have you be the face of the brand, but they're not necessarily putting in the work to champion you inside the brand or behind the scenes". She worried that her managers were seeing her "purely through that lens", one of identity, rather than the quality of her work. Ray, working in a different context and broadcaster felt similarly having also been "pushed to the front a bit [for promotional material]. But when it comes to the programme, we were at the back".

There are significant consequences for individuals who feel they are being used as part of any 'diversity as public relations' attempt. Sana spoke extensively about the impact this has had on her career:

"I think they did see me and think this person's worth giving a try, but it became evident within a week of stepping foot into the place that they had an agenda. Their agenda was to get me to effectively be the voice of this new signing that was somebody that was of Asian heritage or, you know, Brown or Black skin colour. And that made me feel really uncomfortable because I'd never experienced this in my career before. And then I was even more uncomfortable because it was made quite clear to me that this wasn't a choice. This was something I had to do."

She went on to comment on how she had pushed back against this additional agenda that had been thrust unknowingly upon her:

"I'm not being this person. [...] I can't be just about that. I want to operate in a meritocracy. I always felt like I had done, and I don't want to be judged on 'well she's only here because of the colour of the skin', because that makes everything every day in the office so much harder."

Sana's experience speaks to not only the way these agendas can play out negatively and overshadow the hard work of an individual, but also the additional labour expected of people of colour to shoulder the representational work of being 'the voice' of their ethnic or racial identity. This is not work that falls on White colleagues – we would never expect a White person to be representative of all White people, yet in these instances an individual racially minoritised person is made to feel as if they have an additional representative function. This simultaneously benefits the organisation (who gets to appear more diverse) to the public, whilst penalising the individual by continuing racial inequality through othering them as different from their White contemporaries. Learning that she had been placed on a project because of her skin colour was undermining and had consequences for how Sana viewed her employers. We are quoting this in full because we believe this testimony clearly sets out the discrepancy between institutional intention and personal impact and thus is something that needs to be better understood by newsroom managers:

“When I feel like I’m shoehorned into a project just because of my skin colour. And I hear after the event that unbeknownst to me, I was fighting for that gig with somebody else who is of similar skin colour. And so it was, it was always the case that they needed somebody who was Brown or Black to be in that squad and then it was a case of who wins that fight between the two people who didn’t know they were involved with it and also are only there because of their skin colour. [...] I felt devastated. I felt like the bosses at the time had solid, good intentions about making sure the coverage wasn’t all White. This wasn’t coming from a place of bad, you know, malice or any kind of racism. But the personal impact when you realise that’s why you were picked for a gig [...] you just question every minute you’ve given to the organisation, every word you’ve written, every broadcast you’ve been involved with, every project, every programme, because you were not there because they thought you’d earned it.”



The perceived gulf between on-screen and off-screen diversity was repeatedly made clear to us by interviewees:

"I haven't seen a lot of push for that to be reflected off screen and you know, that's where a lot of the decisions get made. So I think it's really important. It also makes you kind of question their motivations because it's like, are they doing it because they actually really care about it, or is it are they doing it because they want to be seen to be doing it? I feel like that that's quite a mismatch of kind of efforts on screen and behind the scenes." (Nazirah)

"I do feel awkward at times, and I've been in meetings and stood around people. I'm thinking you're only doing this because you want a Brown face on it or a vox pop or God knows what and I'm like, look around you in the newsroom behind the scenes [...] it's kind of hypocritical in a sense." (Souraj)

"I think it was about four years ago [...] it was really evident to me that there was a kind of a 'Black Friday' thing going on in terms of the presentation. So and it was clear [...] you would have Caucasian faces Monday to Thursday and then sometimes on every single programme, so lunchtime, evening, and the late programmes, it was somebody who was Asian or Black. And it was like this was kind of the acceptable face of diversity that, Oh yeah, we're really diverse, but Oh yeah, can you stay in your lane, you guys, because you can only do the day that we care a little bit less about. I just thought this is all done for the wrong reasons and it feels to me like it's all done simply to tick boxes." (Sana)

There was also a sense that perhaps due to the wider cultural discussion of EDI and waning enthusiasm, that diversity was being de-prioritised. When asked whether they felt their workplaces were as committed to diversity as they had been five years ago, 65% (n=52) of survey respondents disagreed (44%) or strongly disagreed (21%). When asked for further comments, responses included:

"I do occasionally feel like diversity schemes and plans of action are lip service. When push comes to shoves or managers get 'busy', diversity is easily overlooked and forgotten about." (Respondent 14)

"Although there has been some progression now, the feeling among White colleagues is Brown people only get promoted as a tick box exercise not because we deserve it." (Respondent 22)

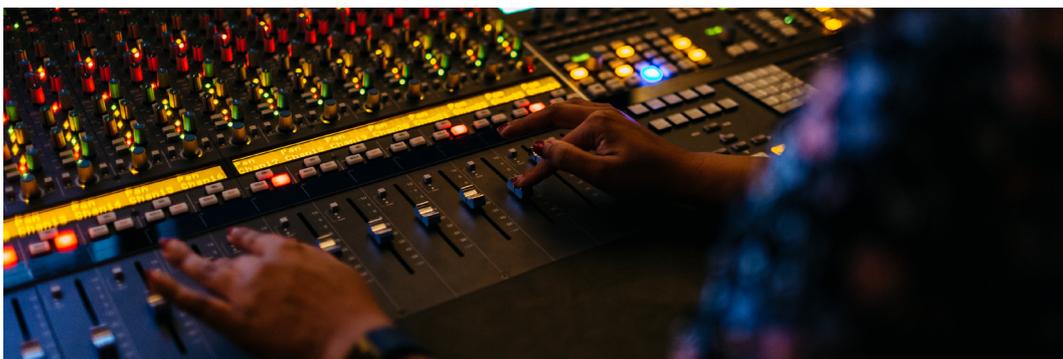
"The same managers who wanted to propel us five years ago have now gone silent". (Respondent 4)

Several participants also argued that promotions intended to showcase diversity sometimes ignored merit. They felt that a small number of colleagues of colour were elevated too quickly, not because of proven ability but so managers could be seen to act. Sana observed that:

“It opens up a really kind of toxic, sinister environment where it is this ‘them and us’. So if a person of colour messes up in their role [...] you then overhear conversations or are party to conversations about “that person’s only there because of you know what”. [...] If that person was given the gig for the wrong reasons, [...] that’s not going to fix it. And that makes the situation worse. It makes the situation worse for the individual who is not experienced enough to carry out that role and it makes the atmosphere much worse because then that kind of resentment breeds.”

Therefore, in practice, poorly realised diversity initiatives can directly foster division: some talented Black and Brown staff were overlooked for progression, while others were rapidly accelerated and left carrying the stigma of being seen as ‘the diversity hire’. As Sana reflected, “that’s where we’re at because everybody is being questioned about whether they rightly should have got that job, and I don’t think that would have been questioned in the same way 6-7 years ago. I think it has got worse”. Far from building confidence in inclusion, these cases often provoked resentment, with those promoted becoming figures of ridicule and their success dismissed. This not only damaged individuals but also undermined the credibility of diversity initiatives themselves, reinforcing the perception that they were hollow, performative, and incompatible with fairness. Sana summarised the situation, and the impact this has had on herself and colleagues as follows:

“Whatever the drive, motivation, push for all those [diversity] issues to be discussed more openly [...] individuals I know right now in 2025 are feeling damaged, traumatised, questioning their own self-worth, questioning on a day-to-day basis. Certainly I feel like how have I allowed my self-esteem in the workplace to be impacted by my skin colour? [...] And so anything that they’ve tried to do in that period has been an absolute abject failure because individuals, whether it’s myself or other people, feel all of those negative things. So if it wasn’t to empower the workforce and members within it, then what was it for? [...] So yeah, all of this stuff seems to have backfired as far as I’m concerned.”



3.4 Workplace cultures within TV newsrooms

Despite more racially minoritised people working within the TV newsroom context we repeatedly heard stories in interviews, and through the open-ended questions of the survey, of how many behaviours continue to constitute forms of exclusion explicitly and implicitly. In the survey 63% (n=50) of respondents stated that they had experienced racism while working in television news contexts. Issues ranged from unintentional behaviour or ignorance, with harmful consequences for both individuals involved and wider workplace cohesion, through to intentional lack of support for minoritised colleagues and undermining practices.

While in 2025, news organisations may think that, especially with the additional focus on diversity initiatives, newsrooms would have moved beyond many of the following problematic behaviours, the testimonies of our participants told a very different story. We were given several current examples of where White colleagues got names wrong, did not make the effort to learn people's names, and confused colleagues with similar ethnicities. All of these behaviours combine to make a workplace feel unwelcoming:

“Again, it’s been subconscious and that is actually the most worrying thing, because it wasn’t something that was meant to be insulting or rude. But I’ve been in newsrooms and got my lunch from the fridge and the ‘oh, is that Curry you’re eating?’ [...] or being called names of other Asian colleagues. And again, these are just sort of genuine mistakes, but it’s really indicative of what is going on in people’s minds and often a lot of cultural assumptions. [it makes me] Really sad and disappointed and frustrated and again [...] it’s so deep rooted and it’s a mindset and a culture shift that needs to happen.” (Kavita)

“I feel Black masculinity is not always perceived positively or perhaps a misperception that’s probably why there are few Black men in the industry. Discrimination will never be said verbally but it is expressed. In my experience sometimes it’s looks and stares that speak more than words.” (Respondent 35)

“They [White senior staff] wouldn’t really even say ‘Hi’ to staff as they come in. It was quite toxic I think, or maybe not toxic, but I would say it was quite a non-friendly atmosphere. And yeah, like a lot of like getting names wrong and like getting people confused. [...] I wrote an e-mail to complain about some coverage [...], and then the editor came to pull me [aside] for a chat but then pulled the wrong person [selecting another woman of colour instead]. I’d been there for like a year and I was like, guys, this is so bad. [...] But it just obviously reinforces like, oh, you guys do not even like acknowledge me as a person. That you can’t remember, like after a year, you still don’t know my name.” (Anum)

When asked if they thought that the same would happen to White colleagues at the same professional level as them, Anum responded “I don’t think that would happen, they all would know each other’s names”. Anum pointed out that this was not just her experience but one that other colleagues had shared with her too, for example “[colleagues have said] The assistant editor I work with every day calls me Mohammed when that’s not my name and just things like that”. This led her to the conclusion that she and her ethnic minority colleagues were not valued in the same way as their White contemporaries saying, “That’s like a kind of small example of how you guys, how you view me.”

In addition to the pernicious sentiment around the term ‘diversity hire’ as explored the previous section respondents discussed many examples of belittling, mocking or demeaning racialised terminology being used as part of discussions about Black and Brown colleagues:

“There’s been 3 White men that have been brought in [recently] and you know you’ve had jokes like ‘They’re not just going for the brownies anymore then’. [...] They [colleagues] feel able to joke about it then, but in quiet corners [...] I noticed that’s happening a bit more” (Leela)

“Used to have jokes about being brought in to add to the ‘Brown count’ or to meet the ‘diversity quota’ but that I’ve proved my worth. Further comments that ‘they’ll never get rid of you, they need to keep at least one of you guys.” (Respondent 64)

“White middle-aged men publicly mock diversity initiatives in my newsroom every single week. The narrative has been set that ‘people were being progressed because of the colour of their skin’ or ‘White men were being held back’. This is the fault of managers managing the schemes. Motivated by their White saviour obsessions, they propelled tokenistic candidates and have left talented Black and Asian people to pick up the pieces.” (Respondent 4)

Our findings here echo those of Aida Al-Kaisy’s 2023 research for the Ethical Journalism Network. She found that Black journalists working across print, online and broadcast media regularly experienced various microaggressions and that there was “an overwhelming agreement that bigotry is not taken seriously in the newsroom” (Al-Kaisy, 2023: 7).

Sana noted that in her workplace one consequence of underlying resentment about increased diversity, which often expresses itself through these racially charged jokes, can be observed in the stark differences in the way teams work (or do not work) together. She said;

“I’ve seen it with individuals [of colour] where they’ve been given the gigs and then I can see members of the team around them not supporting them in a way that they would support somebody else. It’s almost that kind of sense of give them enough rope and they’ll hang themselves because there’s presumably that kind of resentment building that that person shouldn’t really have that gig.”

Here we can see that by withdrawing support from a colleague of colour, increasing the opportunity that they will make a mistake, is one way of pushing back against diversity initiatives. This means that again racially minoritised people have to work harder, in this instance to compensate for a lack of support from colleagues.

Many organisational pledges on diversity include the sentiment that where racism is witnessed or experienced it will be dealt with. What became clear to us during this research however is how comments within newsrooms create a sense that any critique related to race will be ignored or seen as an attack on colleagues – and this does not create the kind of atmosphere were people are likely to come forward to complain. Especially when, as one survey respondent observed, “Black and Asian people [...] are particularly vulnerable to the allegation of being ‘troublemakers’”.



When interviewing Ray he recalled a recent example of the undermining of discussions of racism from his own newsroom. A Black woman guest had briefly discussed on air the racism they faced in their high-profile creative profession;

“And then in the meeting afterwards, the [White female] presenter said ‘It was really good because she didn’t moan and go on about racism’. And the [White male] Editor said ‘Yes, it can be a real microaggression when they go on about it, can’t it?’ . [...] The only way I can see what that means is that White people find it a microaggression when Black people moan about racism.”

Here we can see how the language of antiracism is being co-opted to actually prevent people discussing racism, the message this comment sent, from a very senior member of staff, was that they didn’t want to hear about racism, or that to discuss it was an ‘aggression’ against White people. As Ahmed observes “There is an implicit injunction not to speak about racism to protect whiteness from being hurt. Speaking about racism is thus heard as an injury not to those who speak but to those who are spoken about” (Ahmed, 2012:148). What Ray’s example evidences is a lack of willingness by White colleagues to even listen to reports of racism, this impacts not only editorial content of news, but the ability of racially minoritised people to feel that they will be listened to if they speak about racism in their workplace. By suggesting that the mere discussion of the issue of racism is an attack on White people (a microaggression), or would hurt feelings, it limits this discussion: “Because hurt feelings [...] can be a way of not hearing, a way of making something about oneself, a way of not listening to others” (Ahmed, 2017: 178). As listening is the first step towards making change, this kind of wilful silencing by foregrounding senior White news professionals’ discomfort of these conversations, is extremely problematic – any newsroom professing a desire to be more inclusive needs to reflect on how issues can be raised and dealt with if comments such as these by managers and senior colleagues are so easily expressed in professional meetings. This sentiment, that White colleagues’ feelings often get in the way of anti-racist progress was echoed in the following survey response to the question of whether diversity schemes had achieved any impact:

“What changes my answer from ‘No Impact’ to ‘Negative Impact’ was the death of George Floyd. Myself and my Black, Brown, Asian and Minority Ethnic colleagues had to be the representatives for our groups, explain to our majority White colleagues very personal and uncomfortable stories - some of which was traumatic - but then we felt the need to reassure our White colleagues that they aren’t the ‘bad guys’. The focus then became about [White colleagues] own feelings, not why we were called in to the meeting rooms in the first place. I know from experience and from the generations before me that change / progress is slow. It’s not a sprint, it’s not a walk, it’s a crawl - and the people that need to come with you aren’t always willing to come with you. [...] I do not wish to repeat that process EVER again. I’m very sensitive to performative politics and the fact I felt the need to play along - and witness my colleagues reopen old wounds - made me extremely angry.” (Respondent 69).

This respondent is describing two key issues for workplace anti-racist practice. Firstly, the burden placed on people of colour to explain racism to their White colleagues, and the way this in and of itself can re-traumatise people. As Reni Eddo-Lodge argues people of colour

“don’t have the privilege of approaching conversations about racism with the assumption that the other participants will be on the same plane as you. Raising racism in a conversation is like flicking a switch. It doesn’t matter if it’s a person you’ve just met, or a person you’ve always felt safe and comfortable with. You’re never sure when a conversation about race and racism will turn into one where you were scared for your physical safety or social position.” (Eddo-Lodge, 2018: 66)

Secondly, the way that the discomfort of White colleagues is prioritised, or made the focus, of any attempt to discuss racism and this does not enable honest or productive dialogue on how to address racism. This would be an example of what Robin DiAngelo (2019) has termed ‘White fragility’ in that the emotional response of White colleagues erects a further barrier to addressing inequality. As Kavita observed:

“I think there’s a fear. I think that’s the underlying thing. It’s a fear of getting it wrong, getting told off. There’s a lack of education for want of a better phrase, that leads to people being terrified of doing the wrong thing or saying the wrong things.”

Fear operates here in both directions, there is a fear from White colleagues of not knowing enough to address the problem, and a fear from racially minoritised people that they will say something that triggers an emotional response from a White colleague, which shifts conversation away from the underlying issue of racism.

Respondents and interviewees also commented that when issues of racism were raised, they often felt these were not dealt with properly.

“I also wish [all newsroom bosses] would understand that racism can be subtle and not overt and not gaslight us when we say it’s happening and finally I wish they would listen first and comment later instead of defending their own on the rare occasions, junior or senior staff, do go to them with concerns.” (Respondent 47)

“We’re just always, if we complain about something, we’re just being angry or being a bit difficult, and just generally [...] seeing you as [...] you’re a bit more incompetent.” (Anum)

Multiple respondents highlighted the issue of covering racist anti-immigration riots over the last few years and how they had complained to managers about how this was handled in terms of the practical safety of colleagues. One workplace decided to let people work from home if they felt they would be impacted by events planned close to their places of work. This was not however enacted at a practical level, with managers not letting members of staff change shifts or facilitating shift changes that would have kept people safe. Respondents felt that the organisation at the top had made a positive choice and thought about the impact, but below that business needs were put first over the safety of colleagues when easy fixes were available. Nazirah explained:

“So like a Black man travelling to work at 2PM on a day where there’s going to be planned racist protest, for example. Like, is anybody thinking about that? No. Are they thinking about how they’re going to get home after work? No. Or how they’re going to feel? How do they feel travelling when this is all going on? [when they complained to a manager] It was just like, I felt like banging my head against the wall because they [the manager] just could not understand. They could not relate to that situation in any way, shape or form. And I was like, are you kidding me? I found it so frustrating. And they were like, well, you know, this person, she needs to be in the office for this shift. She can’t do that from home. And I’m like, well, why didn’t we see if she can swap it with someone else? You know, there’s so many things that could be done. [...] That experience made me feel like leaving the industry because it just made me feel like this is so futile, like this requires so much work that I just, I don’t know if I can do it.”



Nate agreed that when complaints were made people were quick to dismiss them, and that general attitudes to diversity were poor:

"I think some of it will be, you know, newsrooms are very busy, fast-paced places. [...] The rest of [current workplace] has time to do team building activities and fill in corporate forms and you know, go and do compliance training. Whereas with us any minute the biggest story of your life could land in your lap, and I think that sometimes people [...] think that it's a kind of an HR thing and something that they just don't have time to do because they have important journalism to be getting on with."

What was clear from responses was that the workplace culture of national TV newsrooms has not caught up to an increased diversity in the workplace. A key way this manifests is how very little space is actively made for new voices. It was felt that the people who dominate editorial meetings are still White and male, there is just a more diverse audience within the room for those ideas now that more racially minoritised people have been brought into the system.

"I think people are open and willing to listen, but I think sometimes there's kind of structures in place which make it hard for you to be heard [...] It's kind of the confidence that comes with being able to just sit in a big meeting, talk to people of all different levels. You've got some people who are much more confident doing that, for example, older White men. It's just sometimes if you walk into that room, in that space, you're kind of a bit like, I don't know, like where to sit. I don't know when it's my time to speak, those sorts of things." (Nazirah)

Infiltrating spaces where certain voices are privileged can be difficult, especially when speaking from a position that is minoritised in terms of race and gender and class, and this can prevent people from having their say.

"I still find it intimidating and I think it's a part of it is like imposter syndrome as well. Like that's a big part of it. If you're going into a space where you don't look and look like other people that can affect your confidence and make you feel like you shouldn't be there. [...] It's just like navigating those meetings. It's like learning a whole new way of communicating [...] because I feel like people just say things that actually don't mean anything. They just want to talk to be heard." (Nazirah)

Staff networks, which the survey and interviews directly asked about were broadly seen as very positive developments, providing a space to share frustrations and in certain instances make positive changes to workplaces.

"I see them as a way to speak up for those of us who can't independently. I see them as a safe space and think they are extremely important for minorities who are new to the field and face challenges." (Respondent 11)

A key role these networks can play is in the sharing of information about experiences within an organisation. Too often negative experiences can be seen as a personal issue, rather than systemic and taking individual action is far less effective than that of a collective:

“The more I join the dots and the more I see just how collectively we’ve all been treated and that’s been a shocking revelation to some of the, you know, the best people in the industry that I’ve worked alongside and admired and I just hope there are solutions out there and we can kind of make sure that people that follow us don’t have to endure any of this, but the more you delve, the more you see, and the more hurtful it is” (Sana)

The limitations of these networks were also reflected on:

“At my organisation the staff network has been game-changing. But it angers me that responsibility for propelling people of colour falls to it, rather than the senior leadership” (Respondent 4)

The way that networks can be used poorly by management as a way of not doing anything themselves was reinforced by others too. One survey respondent for example said that the purpose of staff networks are “So organisations are seen to be doing something (without actually doing something)”.

There was a distinction made between staff networks run and organised by employers, and informal groups (or group chats) that sat outside of formal processes. This again reinforces the findings of Al-Kaisy whose research into structural racism in UK newsrooms found that for her respondents, staff networks that were “considered successful were mainly informal” (Al-Kaisy, 2023: 8). Despite the informal groups being seen as particularly helpful for support, one respondent noted that unless there is significant engagement with decision makers change is hard to achieve and this prevents groups being effective, saying “I’ve not found them to be very useful. The change must be a concerted effort from the highest editorial decision makers”. A further respondent made the astute point that “It’s the only route there is for us to safely raise concerns. Their very existence is a sign of the extra lengths that ethnic minority staff must go to, to be treated fairly”.



One key question for news organisations to ask themselves is whether this labour (the work of making a workplace more diverse and more inclusive) is distributed fairly, supported through work loading or remunerated? If the organisation is benefitting from the new more diverse workforce (even if only on a public relations level as previously explored), and through improved more inclusive content of journalism they platform, who is doing the work (because it takes work) of making that possible? If all the additional meetings or workstreams to achieve diversity are being done by people of colour, and this work is not valued, that sends a message about the underlying commitment of an organisation to the process and motivation for diversification. As Eddo-Lodge observes:

“The perverse thing about our current racial structure is that it has always fallen on the shoulders of those at the bottom to change it. Yet racism is a white problem. It reveals the anxieties, hypocrisies and double standards of whiteness. It is a problem in the psyche of whiteness that white people must take responsibility to solve. You can only do so much from the outside.” (Eddo-Lodge, 2018: 140)

Diversity should be everyone’s responsibility otherwise the problem of solving racial inequality and racism becomes solely the work of those who are disempowered by racial hierarchies.

Outside of staff networks, several respondents talked about how much they appreciated the work older and more established colleagues of colour checking in on them, taking an interest and using their position to push back on things that newer members of a team may not feel comfortable doing. Responsibility came up multiple times, both from younger respondents who benefitted from the actions of their more experienced colleagues, and within conversations with more established respondents who spoke of how they felt this sense of responsibility for effecting change. Ray reflected on how, when observing pushback against discussing racism in his workplace, not saying something had played on his mind ever since:

“I kind of felt really responsible as an older person, older Black person, with the younger Black person in the team. I don’t know. I just felt a bit of responsibility. I should have said something even if they weren’t there. I should have said something. I didn’t.”

It is this kind of additional emotional and cognitive burden, to be the representative of a minoritised group and to have to constantly battle back racism, especially from people who are in positions of power over your career, that can have such a negative toll on mental health. Navigating a career through a very complex inequitable system takes significant emotional labour, this is then coupled with this perceived responsibility for in-coming racially minoritised colleagues, this can very easily wear people down. This informal mentorship or championing of new talent by established colleagues from racially minoritised backgrounds is seen as beneficial and appreciated by younger colleagues. Organisations and employers, however, need to recognise this as an additional aspect of emotional labour undertaken by senior colleagues from minoritised backgrounds. Omega Douglas's research into the wider UK news sector also observed, the importance of staff networks, stating that

“recommendations generated via such networks must be engaged with by those in positions to instigate systemic change so ethical rationalities informing diversity take precedence over economic rationalities. A failure to do so will lead to recurring racism, continued attrition of black journalists” (Douglas, 2022: 2110).

Despite a more racially diverse workforce being in place, the workplace culture of UK TV newsrooms is yet to adjust to a more equitable system.



3.5 Impact on reporting / coverage

Diversity decisions made behind the closed doors of Human Resources departments impact who is sent into the field, who sits behind the studio desk, who speaks in the editorial meetings, and what the country comes to see as news. While the visible make-up of newsrooms has changed, several respondents argued that the content their newsrooms produce has not. For example, as one survey respondent put it, “The current newsroom is the most racially diverse newsroom I have been in” – yet even this visible diversity, they argued, has not always translated into meaningful changes in editorial content. In this section we will explore how the diversity of who makes the news impacts on the content audiences see on screen.

During her interview, Sana described how, in her newsroom, efforts to improve diversity often prioritised optics over the substance—the coverage. Initiatives tended to address how programmes looked superficially, rather than the content or stories being told. Often decisions about inclusion were reactive—even reshuffling running orders or adding Black and Brown on-screen staff at the last minute to avoid an all-White line-up—rather than tackling deeper structural issues in editorial decision-making.

Like Sana, many felt frustrated that changes in visible diversity had not reshaped editorial culture and content. However, Kavita reflected: “In my newsroom I think there have been things that have gone backwards, but I think there is a sense that there is genuine will to try and change things”. Much of that change is due to the increasing willingness of many racially minoritised journalists to challenge entrenched stereotypes related to the way their organisations cover the news. Several participants described 2020 as a turning point that made it easier to challenge coverage and assignment decisions. Amrit reflected on this shift in his own experience:

“I think my change in view was the pandemic. [...] Like when some of the reporting that was done out of India was showing footage of bodies being burnt, and I had like multiple family members, some of whom I haven’t spoken to in a long time, being like I don’t think your programme should be doing this. [...] There’s the spiritual aspect of this like it’s, you know, it’s their last rites. But there’s also the just moral aspect of it. And it raised questions. Because of like, well, hang on a second. Are we only doing this because we don’t perceive Indians in India to be of the same qualitative value as we would White people in Hampshire that we’re reporting on.”

Nazirah provided another example, recalling how she challenged her editors about the use of violent imagery in stories involving Black and Brown victims of crime—images, she argued, that would never be shown if the victims were White:

“I was just thinking, like, if that was a woman from the UK who had been shot, you would just never show that image. You would just never do” (Nazirah).

However, for some, this advocacy felt like an unfair additional burden. As Sana noted:

“There is this unconscious bias against some stories involving people of colour. [...] I found myself in more recent times campaigning to get those stories on. [...] And then I kind of look back and analysed my own behaviour and just thought, have I missed loads of opportunities to be [challenging this]?”

The gap between increasingly diverse newsrooms and largely unchanged output was laid bare in 2025, when a major broadcaster commissioned a feature marking the fifth anniversary of the COVID lockdown. Despite the pandemic’s deeply racialised impact, the fifteen-minute film included not a single image or contribution from a Black or Brown person. One of several respondents who raised this example described this omission as “a slap in the face”. They reflected: “I think that was the moment where I thought I’ve completely misunderstood where we are in terms of [diversity].”

For many participants, examples like this signal more than oversight. A blindness that limits who tells the story is damaging; one that narrows whose lives are deemed newsworthy is devastating. As Amrit recalled:

“There’s one example that always comes to mind, there was [a big accident] in Turkey, and as we went on air [...] 72 people were dead. And [...] the fact that we will do live hits about like Joe Biden having a meeting with someone of minimal significance, or we’ve done a live hit about a storm in the US where no one had died. [...] It feels like it’s essentially in a really kind of crude way - It’s Brown people.”

The growing willingness of Black and Brown journalists to speak openly about racial bias in newsroom content and coverage has had a significant unintended consequence: it has exposed them not only to resistance, but to the realisation that opposing views, often verging on racism, continue to influence decisions about coverage and content. For example, Nate described the overt pushback of some White colleagues who equated diversity with lower standards:

“[They say] Like, is it necessary? Is it necessary for us to be doing this? You know, shouldn’t the quality of guests come first? As though you can’t have both, as though you can’t have high-quality guests that are from a non-White background.”

Even in the coverage of racially sensitive issues, senior managers were frequently reported to exclude junior colleagues from racially minoritised backgrounds when their lived experiences were relevant. Nazirah recalled an incident where she was left out of a sensitive editorial decision about the use of racist language:

“Literally people stood next to my desk, talking about this, whether they should show the P word or not. [...] They were like, we could just put a warning saying ‘warning contains offensive language?’ But they still showed it, and it was quite shocking.”

Respondents noted that resistance and tokenism surfaced unevenly across the news agenda. In social affairs reporting, race and representation were often treated superficially - spotlighting moments of outrage but ignoring causes of consequences. Sana pointed to the 2020 Child Q case, where initial coverage was extensive, but the 2025 dismissal of the police officers involved drew little notice:

"..it got a lot of coverage, the story, the protests, everything about it. Fast forward to a few weeks ago, a few months ago, and there's a big report into Child Q and I had to fight to get it onto the programme that I was working on. ... We're thinking of covering it as a [news in brief] ... We're not going to do it properly? [...] The awareness that this stuff is happening to people of colour every day, different stories, different experiences."

Nate observed a recurring pattern in reporting on racially minoritised people: while stories about White subjects are often framed through class or circumstance, those about non-White subjects are framed almost exclusively through race.

"I think especially when it comes to class. When it comes to like Black youth violence, quote unquote, and those types of stories that we will sometimes do I question whether there's an understanding that a massive chunk of that will be a class problem. I mean when it comes to stories that get done about like White working-class kids have committed this type of crime, I think that our coverage won't make a this is a problem with White boys. It will be like a this is a problem around working-class boys. Versus when it's Black working-class kids in London, you know, it's like, well, it's Black kids who are doing this rather than, well, it's working-class kids who are doing this. [...] I think they struggle to be able to understand where things intersect and interlock and how one thing might have an influence on the other, or how an issue might not be related to the thing that you think it's about."

This unconscious bias risks reinforcing perceptions that the struggles of the White working-class and those of Black and Brown people are opposing rather than interconnected.



Across the interviews, assumptions about credibility and neutrality surfaced repeatedly. Participants noted that White colleagues were more readily seen as embodying the clear-eyed objectivity prized in television journalism. In practice, however, this notion of objectivity often reflected alignment with dominant editorial perspectives rather than genuine neutrality. These dynamics were most often expressed in relation to foreign coverage—particularly of the war in Gaza — and in UK political reporting, where racially minoritised journalists said they found it hardest to influence decisions, advance in their roles, or build sustainable careers. In these areas, it was felt that those whose views most closely mirrored those of senior editors were perceived as the most trustworthy and impartial:

“I think there is a specific tension for Arab journalists in the newsroom due to the political climate and the assumption that many senior staff will hold about your personal and professional beliefs that is not encapsulated in the survey. Because your access to a language and culture means you are given opportunities to work on a certain story, but you are then not trusted to be impartial” (Respondent 11)

“I think it goes back to that thing of like whether someone’s got too much stake in the game and I think that at [current workplace] we are starting to learn gradually that throwing a random White person into a situation does not always necessarily create the best journalism. And the stories of the world at large, can sometimes be improved by having somebody in a situation that is potentially from that background and from the community that is being reported on.” (Nate)

“There’s just an assumption that they [White people] they’re more knowledgeable or that they’re more trustworthy and that they’re more serious and I think like, you know, there’s a lot of tropes about people being angry. If it’s something that’s kind of applicable to you [relates to your cultural identity], I think maybe in their head they can dismiss you more because it’s just like, ‘Oh well, you’re obviously gonna see it like that’. I think when it comes to race or like diversity, even though we’re the ones who experience it, we would be deemed to [...] like not be playing the race card because it’s not necessarily that, but just more like we’re exaggerating, or like we don’t see it properly or maybe just they’ll be a bit more like condescending about it.” (Anum)

Participants described foreign assignments as amongst the most prestigious opportunities in their newsroom and key markers of professional status. Several respondents, however, felt that international coverage remained dominated by White journalists. Our respondents offered a stark explanation: it is specifically because such assignments are so coveted, that they were often — consciously or not—reserved for White journalists, reinforcing a worldview seen through a White prism.

Kavita attributed diversity problems in the foreign news division of her organisation to the fact that so many key decisions are made by long-time expatriates who have become detached from changing attitudes towards diversity and inclusion back home:

“Perhaps on some foreign assignments, it’s felt probably that it doesn’t apply to them in a way because they’re not within the framework of the domestic editorial framework. So, it’s almost it doesn’t apply to us because we’re out here and I guess almost it’s that idea that, we’re out of the UK. Therefore, the diversity box has been ticked already because we’re not in the UK, so hey. [...] I think sometimes it’s sort of seen as a headache rather than it’s something we should just be doing like we do everything else.”

The sense of marginalisation was aptly illustrated in reflections on coverage of the crash of Air India Flight 171 in June 2025. The disaster – when a London-bound Boeing 787 Dreamliner struck a medical college shortly after take-off from Ahmedabad, killing 241 people, including 52 returning Britons – marked the highest number of British fatalities in an air disaster since the 9/11 attacks of 2001. Interviewees observed that, despite the tragedy’s scale and the number of British lives lost, the story faded fast—pushed aside the next day by Israel’s assault on Iran. Many believed this reflected an unspoken hierarchy of empathy: British Indian victims counted for less. Some wondered how differently editors might have responded had the victims been White, or the story unfolded in America. Amrit and Vik both had very detailed thoughts on the coverage of this story:

“There are 200,000 Americans living in this country. There are millions of South Asians and West Africans and people from the Caribbean who actually watch the programme!” (Amrit)

“Even the Air India crash. The first output got the name of the city wrong. Ahmedabad spelling wrong. And a second thing, they went to the family [of the one survivor whose brother had died in the crash]. [If they were] White the coverage would have been different. The way the things were covered would have been different. You wouldn’t have gone to the family’s house. The interview was cringing. [...] This was the biggest disaster in British terms to Lockerbie, these guys, I don’t think they would have had the same sort of impact flailing around chasing a family if it was if it was a White family.” (Vik)

Respondents described contrasting approaches to coverage of the disaster between different newsrooms—although there was no consensus on what the right approach should be. In some organisations, South Asian staff said they were overlooked in favour of White colleagues when assignment decisions were made, reflecting entrenched newsroom hierarchies and prejudices. They thought their own cultural affinity was considered less important than White colleagues’ experience of foreign reporting.

"I think like the Air India crash like that was just like one big miss. [...] when the call comes or when you have to make these calls, you make the wrong one [send the wrong people]." (Souraj)

But in other newsrooms, South Asian staff were relied upon almost exclusively. This received some praise but raised concerns about perceived tokenism:

"All the stories [about Air India] were covered by people of colour. None of the big correspondents got involved. White correspondents. After October 7th, the Israeli attack, various different correspondents [got involved]. The chief Political, chief Home Affairs correspondent got involved. Various different correspondents got involved including the special correspondents." (Vik)

"A rival organisation had all Brown faces reporting on that story. And I also don't think that that's the answer because in a polarised society, the optics of that was this is a story about Brown people that's happened in a Brown country, and it's being presented and reported on by Brown people. If you're not Brown, this doesn't matter to you. [...] we shouldn't be giving viewers an excuse to go. 'I don't need to be interested in this. It's just about Brown people' and I feel as if the other organisation did that." (Sana)

Aside from foreign reporting, many respondents said the Westminster bureau was among the hardest parts of their news operations for racially minoritised staff to enter. Several noted that White journalists were often rewarded for their cultural proximity to key Westminster figures — their ability to talk the talk — a sharp contrast to the approach taken in foreign news. The Westminster lobby, the group of accredited political journalists across all news organisations, remains disproportionately White. Reporting of politics and government policy sits at the core of television newsrooms' public service remit, where editors were said (in the views of our respondents) to be more risk averse when making appointments. As Nate observed:

"Politics has become a priority and because it's seen as important, it's like, well, we have to give it to the people who are really, really trusted. And I think that there is still a leftover stigma attached to that that. [...] Can I necessarily trust Non-White people to be able to tell these politics stories?"



Some warned that a lack of diversity in political reporting is having consequences for the way policy is being understood by the audience at a time of significant change.

Many interviewees returned to coverage of the UK riots in summer 2024 and the subsequent political debate surrounding migration. They voiced concern that Britain's television newsrooms were struggling to report fairly on the highly charged issue of migration in ways that acknowledged public anger without reinforcing racist narratives.

Some recalled their fears of acknowledging how affected they were by the 2024 summer riots, feeling that drawing on their personal experiences during the editorial process might expose them to allegations of bias, rather than enhance the coverage:

"I mostly just spoke about it with colleagues who are like ethnically diverse [...] we would all just talk about how bad it is [...] people would just be a bit nervous talking openly about things like that, whether they're White or ethnically diverse, because we're bound by impartiality and people get a bit scared about what they can say." (Anum)

"Last summer when it was the riots, I found that very, very hard. That was a very upsetting story to cover and work on being a British person of colour, I think anyone would have found these pictures and scenes upsetting. [...] Then also obviously having to work on things as journalists you're so much more involved in at a different level than someone who can kind of just switch the feeds, change the channel or goes on the app, goes off the app." (Nazirah)

Black and Brown journalists felt they were frequently perceived as being too close to the story—positioned as stakeholders who risked bringing 'anger' and 'emotions' to reporting—assumptions which were not applied in reverse to their White counterparts. Some also highlighted a marked hesitation to use the term 'racism' when appropriate. Respondents expressed a sense of urgency to clarify the way that racism should be defined and reported on, given attempts by political groups and online movements to reshape the range of subjects and arguments considered acceptable to the mainstream population.



During the research period, a succession of stories exposed television newsrooms' reluctance to report or identify racism, even when it lay at the heart of the issue. When Prime Minister Keir Starmer described Reform UK's proposal to deport thousands of legally resident migrants as "racist," for instance, coverage focused less on the policy's implications than on whether potential voters had been unfairly criticised. In September 2025, when US President Donald Trump told the United Nations General Assembly that "they want to go to Sharia law" in London — linking the city's Muslim mayor, Sadiq Khan, to supposed threats of Islamisation — most networks avoiding describing the remarks as racist; only one evening news bulletin, ITV's, came close, calling the comments "far right falsehoods". Similarly, in relation to the anti-migration protests of 2024 (and again in 2025), respondents observed that reporting often centred on explaining the grievances of political extremists, while giving comparatively little attention to the views of moderate protesters or the fears of Black and Brown communities.

"I found covering [the 2024 riots] quite hard because of things like the terminology we were using. You know, we were calling them like anti-immigration protests, but [some of them] were racist protests, for example."
(Nazirah)

According to those who contributed to this research, public discourse has shifted faster than newsroom cultures. As language and sentiments once considered racist becomes part of mainstream debate, the challenge for the next five years will be whether broadcasters can adapt. The box-ticking approach described by participants over the past half-decade will not be sufficient to meet the demands of this new landscape.



Conclusions

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Five years after the murder of George Floyd — and the wave of diversity measures that followed in British television newsrooms — our research finds that many of the people these initiatives were meant to support now see these measures as superficial efforts, driven more by reputational anxiety than conviction. Newsroom diversity policies are viewed as treating the symptoms of inequality while leaving its causes — the biases beneath them — largely untouched. Rather than dismantling injustice, they have bred new hostilities that threaten even the modest progress achieved so far. There is a broad sense that enthusiasm for diversity has faded and has been replaced by resentment from colleagues.

Both our interview and survey data demonstrate that racially minoritised journalists sought fairness from the initiatives deployed since 2020, not favours — a genuine meritocracy in which talent alone could carry them into senior roles. Instead, today, 67% (n=54) of respondents believe they are held to higher standards than their White peers. Yesterday's good intentions are being repurposed by workplaces as a form of defence against criticism: proof of past actions is being used to excuse present stagnation, deflect scrutiny, and protect the status quo. From the perspective of our respondents, recent measures have simply replaced one unfair system with another, with box-ticking and tokenism at the heart of both. A fixation on outcomes — targets and quotas — rather than the processes behind them has produced some changes but without reflection: new initiatives built to show progress, not to think differently.

Across the industry, systems and cultures are often blamed for diversity failures (and these are of course central to sustainable change), yet the individuals making editorial or casting decisions are rarely asked to examine their own assumptions—why they reach certain judgments, whose standards they apply, and what those standards rest on. What makes Journalist A seem more promising than Journalist B? Why does Story X feel more appealing than Story Y? As a result, the mental habits driving these choices remain largely unexamined, and the supposed universality of a White, male worldview goes unchallenged. The self-scrutiny long required of racially minoritised journalists—constantly reflecting on how their perspectives are shaped by cultural and social experience—has never been expected of those whose subjectivities continue to define newsroom norms.

Many interviewees described experiences they found draining and distressing. For some, taking part in this research was emotionally challenging - evidence of how raw and unresolved these issues remain. Many reported that raising concerns about racism was fraught, requiring them to navigate the sensitivities of White managers and fears of professional retaliation.

While barriers exist at every career stage, they are felt most acutely mid-career, with only 18% (n=14) of survey respondents believing enough opportunities exist to progress their careers, and many reporting feeling like they have stalled. Career progression often seems to depend on problematic routes—conforming to majority White views on contentious issues, serving as uncritical ambassadors for diversity initiatives, or advancing through tokenistic pathways. Far from fostering inclusion, these patterns reinforce inequity. Racially minoritised staff also describe performing heavy, invisible labour—especially during periods of reputational anxiety—shielding managers from criticism, monitoring language, and anticipating cultural sensitivities.

Our research found that women of colour, particularly those from working-class backgrounds, face the greatest obstacles, as racial, gendered, and class inequalities intersect and reinforce one another. It was felt that too often, the limited space created by new diversity measures was absorbed by men of colour, leaving women feeling that their own progress had stalled once a single seat at the table had been filled. Survey responses also showed that women reported having more direct experiences of bullying in their workplaces than their male racially minoritised colleagues: 67% (n=31) of women said they had experienced some form of bullying across their careers, compared to 40% (n=15) of male respondents.

We found that perspectives on race are now more openly welcomed than five years ago — but in confined ways. Many participants feel pigeonholed: invited to comment on identity issues yet excluded from broader editorial debates. As such respondents reported feeling valued more as symbols than professionals, confined to second-tier roles. They felt further demoralised by the departure of high-profile colleagues of colour, which reinforced the sense that advancement to the top remains out of reach. Staff networks and group chats offer some solidarity, but others argue that these can seem limiting or monolithic.

Participants frequently described a backlash to the reforms of 2020. Some White colleagues were described to us as perceiving diversity efforts in line with populist rhetoric about EDI as ‘woke culture’, which have lowered standards and paved the way for “diversity hires”. The negative impact of this behaviour on colleagues of colour has not been recognised by their workplaces. A lack of clarity from leadership about the purpose and value of diversity has given prejudice a space to grow.



Many believe that the most prestigious newsroom roles — senior leadership, political reporting, foreign postings, and special projects — remain too closely guarded. Within these areas, a White lens is still seen as synonymous with objectivity. While White colleagues are felt to be rewarded for their social and cultural proximity in Westminster—their ability to “talk the talk” with those they cover — their racially minoritised colleagues often feel penalised, or sidelined abroad, for demonstrating the same familiarity with other contexts. Authority is still assumed to look and sound a certain way, and those who do not fit that template are, too often, shuffled into safer, less visible spaces. Editorial decision-making is seen as having escaped the scrutiny applied to recruitment. To progress in newsgathering positions, our respondents felt that they were compelled, in certain instances, to suppress their own lived experiences and adopt the worldview of a hypothetical White man. When choosing who should fill prestigious roles, prestige itself, many say, remains coded as White. As such entrenched biases continue to shape judgments about who is trusted, promoted, and heard; which issues are considered newsworthy; and what is deemed important, interesting, or appealing to the audience.

These failures in diversity policies unfold amid falling public trust, rising misinformation, and a growing resistance to EDI. Respondents point to coverage of the 2024 summer riots as evidence that racism is still minimised rather than named. Economic pressures in television news, combined with shifting political priorities, now threaten to make diversity a fair-weather concern — vulnerable to budget cuts rather than embedded as a core principle of good journalism.

Despite widespread frustration, there is also recognition that the path forward is not simple. The solutions demanded by participants in our research require a fundamental shift in the collective mindset of editorial leaders. The challenge is no longer awareness but accountability: translating good intentions into sustained, cultural change. To address the challenges — identified through survey data from 80 newsroom professionals and 10 follow-up interviews — we make the following recommendations to broadcasters.



1. Rigorously review the internal diversity measures and targets of the past five years, assess whether they delivered real change, and ensure staff of colour are central to that evaluation. Where necessary, broadcasters should update the diversity commitments in news, with an equal focus on the editorial purpose. These updates should articulate clearly the editorial value newsrooms attach to equality, diversity, and inclusion. Diversity should be framed not as a reputational exercise but as a journalistic principle that strengthens accuracy, fairness, and audience trust.
2. The concern of many of our respondents was less on the diversity schemes / initiatives or traineeships themselves, than on the wider negative response to these initiatives by colleagues. This evidences that bringing in an initiative to address diversity, needs to engage everyone at every level - awareness and commitment from White staff is vital to successful inclusion – as is honesty about past failures. Without this attentiveness resentment builds and the entire project is undermined. In any future measures to addressing workforce diversity, as much focus and effort should be on placed on ensuring workplace cohesion and addressing issues with wider work culture, rather than simply boosting the numbers from any minoritised background. Adding another scheme / initiative into the mix will not address the significant wider issues of workplace culture identified in this report. Systemic change is what is required.
3. Address the harmful impact that the backlash against EDI in newsrooms can have on racially minoritised staff. This should include the adoption of clear explicit policies to challenge and prevent the mockery of the objectives behind diversity efforts — whether expressed seriously or as humour, and irrespective of seniority of those involved. Language or behaviour that trivialises or undermines colleagues in relation to EDI (for example, references to “diversity hires” or “making up the brown count”) corrodes newsroom culture and directly harms racially minoritised colleagues. Employers should make clear that such behaviour is unacceptable and inconsistent with the organisations’ stated editorial and ethical standards. Whilst there should be a space for constructive criticism of any workplace initiative, in relation to EDI initiatives this should not be done in a manner that undermines the contributions of racially minoritised colleagues or ignores the reasons why such initiatives exist.



4. Establish safe and independent listening mechanisms — such as structured listening circles — where racially minoritised staff can speak candidly about how racial bias has affected their careers, with full assurance that doing so will not lead to negative repercussions.
5. Create a clear and protected mechanism for raising concerns about racial bias in coverage, ensuring that staff can challenge editorial decisions, patterns, or framing without jeopardising their careers. This mechanism should be transparent, taken seriously at senior editorial levels, and distinct from HR processes.
6. Managers should hold one-to-one meetings with staff of colour, modelled on the research process used for this report, to create a structured space for honest dialogue. These conversations should take place in an environment free from defensiveness and focus on four key areas: how racial bias is perceived to shape newsroom culture, editorial coverage, content decisions, and individual career progression. This approach would help managers understand lived experiences directly, identify patterns of exclusion, and avoid treating racially minoritised staff as a single, uniform group.
7. Ensure that any attempt at training a workforce in EDI is not reliant upon the unacknowledged labour of minoritised colleagues and does not retraumatise participants or inadvertently make them feel responsible for White colleagues' emotional responses to reports of racism. External providers with experience and awareness of the dangers of badly executed training should be commissioned to undertake any workplace culture training required. Changing a work culture requires investment, it cannot be facilitated by well-meaning, but untrained, colleagues in-house as the potential for additional harm for racially minoritised staff members is significant.

This report builds on existing media diversity research to set out vital new information about how racially minoritised people experience working in national television news contexts. We hope this report provides newsrooms with the insight they need to understand the problems with their current practices, and inspiration to make the changes required to enable more inclusive workplaces, where colleagues of all racial backgrounds are equally valued and respected.



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Dedicated to:

Kanai Lal Chatterjee
and
Violet Ethelga Blake

For all the first-generation immigrant parents who taught their children to speak up.