

# What makes an effective ally?



# Introduction



**The commercial reasons for developing more inclusive workplaces are clear. There is a wealth of evidence demonstrating that inclusive organisations, comprised of people from diverse backgrounds, consistently perform better.**

However, I find the moral case to be much more compelling. We should strive for a society where everyone can be themselves and feel able to reach their full potential, regardless of their identity or background. Sadly, we are still a long way from this.

Studies indicate that people from minority ethnic backgrounds are consistently more likely to have faced negative everyday experiences, frequently associated with racism, than white people. A poll conducted by ICM in December 2018 indicated that 57% of people who identify as Black, Asian

and Minority Ethnic (BAME) feel they had to work harder to succeed in Britain because of their ethnicity, and 40% say they earn less or have worse employment prospects for the same reason.

By engaging with experts on BAME inclusion and listening to diverse voices from the BAME community, we have made some progress in challenging the systemic barriers faced by people from minority ethnic backgrounds. We are, however, conscious that more needs to be done in terms of creating a fully inclusive workplace for BAME people. People from minority backgrounds are still underrepresented at senior levels at the firm but we are working hard to create a workplace where everyone can thrive and reach their full potential.

It is not the responsibility of people from minority groups to create a fairer society but rather that task sits on the shoulders of allies and others in positions of influence. This is why

we are committed to harnessing the potential of allies at the firm, and the wider business community, to accelerate progress.

This booklet is not intended to be a comprehensive guide on what it means to be an ally, instead it should act as a prompt for further conversation and an opportunity to share ideas and good practice. The tips outlining effective allyship in this booklet have been developed in consultation with members of the BAME community and are based on principles outlined in industry and government reports on BAME inclusion (*see referenced works for more detail*).

I hope this booklet gives you food for thought and inspires you to take action to become a visible, influential and effective ally.

**Kathleen Russ**  
Senior Partner

**An ally is any person that actively promotes and aspires to advance the culture of inclusion through intentional, positive and conscious efforts that benefit people as a whole.**

Anyone has the capability to be an ally, regardless of their ethnicity. An ally recognises that, although they are not a member of a particular marginalised group they support, they should make

# What is an ally?

a concerted effort to better understand the obstacles which individuals from marginalised groups face. Because an ally might have more privilege (and recognises the resulting advantages), they are powerful voices alongside marginalised ones.

When discussing allyship in this booklet, we will be referring specifically to the actions people can take to become better allies for the BAME community.

# What is allyship?

## Allyship is:

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- a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency and accountability with marginalised individuals and/or groups of people
- an opportunity to grow and learn about ourselves, whilst building confidence in others
- amplifying the voices of people from minority groups.

## Allyship is not:

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- a badge of honour or a title
- a vehicle to "save" or "liberate" BAME people
- an expectation to be praised for your actions
- only being an ally when there is a BAME audience
- using your own voice or power at the expense of others
- permission to speak on behalf of BAME people.

## What makes an effective ally?

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To become an ally your words and actions must be in sync. Effective allies:

- lift others up by advocating
- share growth opportunities with others
- recognise inequality and the systems which foster them, and realise the impact of micro-aggressions
- believe and appreciate underrepresented people's experiences
- listen, self-reflect & change.

Learning to be an effective ally is not a linear process of education with a graduation or certification at the end. It is a continual process full of experimentation, humility, challenge and growth.

# Getting started

Below are some steps from industry and government reports to help you get started on your journey towards effective allyship. This is not a comprehensive list of actions, nor is there a requirement that you follow them in order, but instead should act as a prompt to help you navigate your own path towards becoming an effective ally.

## 01

### Educate yourself

**Do not expect to be taught or shown. Take it upon yourself to use the tools around you to learn and answer your questions. As a starting point, read the key government-backed and industry-led reports on BAME inclusion.**

Race in the Workplace: The McGregor-Smith Review is a comprehensive summary of the issues facing BAME people at work, including the challenges faced by businesses to improve BAME inclusion and the role businesses and business leaders should play in improving BAME inclusion. In addition, the Investing in Ethnicity Group maintains a helpful resource

page with summaries of the key reports on this topic and links to the reports.

If your organisation has a BAME network or group, this can also be a great source of recommendations, as they are likely to be aware of the most relevant and up to date articles, books, podcasts, films and other materials relevant to your company's culture, industry and type of business.

Educating yourself is the first step, not the only one. It is not possible to learn 'everything' about every BAME experience through any particular resource, or from any one person. However, this step will give you a solid foundation to be a more effective listener and therefore ally.



What makes a great BAME ally is someone willing to take the time to educate themselves on BAME experiences, from the history of race relations to the current state of racism in the UK. Allies need to be well informed on BAME issues in order to make better decisions for inclusivity.

**Devinya Thomas, Artist**



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A good ally is self-aware. They are able to reflect and recognise their own unearned privileges in different aspects of their lives and in response support others who do not benefit in the same way.

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**Kwaku Dapaah-Danquah, Programme Manager, Your Startup, Your Story**



## 02

### Recognise your privilege

**Many of us have privileges that are not afforded to everyone. Men, white people, heterosexual people, able-bodied people, those from a comfortable socio-economic background, for example, are granted benefits and advantages which are not available to people outside of these groups.**

These privileges are often invisible and it is important to understand the extent to which these benefits affect your daily life, your career, your education, your health, and your relationships with authority in the public and private spheres (among other things).

The idea is not to create a hierarchy of oppression but rather consider how each of our unique set of privileges have an impact on our personal and professional lives.

Understanding and recognising privilege within our own lives can be a daunting and uncomfortable task. Being self-critical and honest with yourself, understanding the systematic discrimination which you may have benefited from, even when you did not ask for it or notice it, is eye-opening. It is a difficult process, and it is common to instinctively feel defensive about the areas of your life that you feel are not privileged. However, to be an effective ally it is vital to understand how the world perceives, and therefore benefits, you, before you are able to support those that do not have the same types of privilege that you do.

Recognising your own privilege is not about feeling guilty, but instead about being able to act responsibly from a more informed position.



# 03

## Get comfortable

**One of the key findings from a survey of over 24,000 people, conducted by Business in the Community, was that employees from all ethnicities in the workplace said that their employers and colleagues were generally not comfortable talking about race.**

The survey found that conversations around age, gender and sexuality were perceived as being easier to have than conversations about race. Being uncomfortable and not talking about race in the workplace prevents the ability to have open conversations to identify challenges, opportunities and create innovative and practical solutions.

A common concern cited by those experiencing difficulties talking about race is fear of making a mistake or saying the 'wrong' thing when discussing race. However, it is important to acknowledge that the language and terminology used when discussing race is complicated. We have referenced a few documents on how to thoughtfully and respectfully talk about 'race' in the workplace in the Referenced Works section of this booklet.



The most effective allies embrace the discomfort of talking openly about race and work hard to be familiar with appropriate language and terminology. Talking about race as an ally can be hard but allies don't always need to get everything right, they just need to be comfortable with listening, acknowledging their mistakes and continuing to support marginalised people.

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**Ben Hurst, Head of Facilitation and Training, Good Lad Initiative**



The BAME community is broad and diverse, and the experiences of BAME people can vary immensely. An ally's ability to recognise and understand this is crucial in ensuring that the diverse voices from that community are heard and acknowledged. My name sounds more "ethnic" than I look and I appear "too white" for the religion that people may assume I practice. Including myself, everyone makes assumptions about people based on their visible markers of identity. The most effective allies for the BAME community however recognise that assumptions can be misleading and that there is a huge amount of diversity and variance, not just in relation to skin colour, but also within that community.

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**Gökhan Tanrıöver, Artist**

## 04

### **Recognise the diversity within the BAME community**

**Grouping all BAME people together as one homogeneous group prevents us from appreciating important variances between and within ethnic groups.**

The experiences of BAME people, and how they experience racism and racial biases, vary wildly. For example, an Afro-Caribbean man, a Bangladeshi woman and a mixed race person will experience discrimination in very different ways, yet they are all considered part of the BAME community. Even two people with common characteristics (such as the same ethnicity and gender)

will not have identical experiences, and therefore it is important to actively listen to people's unique life experiences. Although there will be commonalities and some shared experiences amongst those within the BAME community, it is counterproductive to attempt to be an effective ally, whilst also making assumptions based on someone's ethnicity.

Being an effective BAME ally is about appreciating the diverse cultural and social values across the BAME community and demonstrating a willingness to listen to diverse voices from that community.

# Step up

## 05

### Show up and be visible

Attend events, seminars and conferences aimed at promoting BAME inclusion. As the purpose of these events tends to be to educate and inform, they are one of the best places to go and be pro-actively curious and to ask questions. After any such events, talk to your colleagues and peers (regardless of their ethnicity) about what you heard or learned.


You should also consider sharing more widely why you have chosen to commit to becoming an ally for the BAME community. This can be done by writing internal communications within your organisation on why BAME inclusion matters to you and what you are doing to be an effective ally, or by sponsoring BAME-related events and sessions, including those organised by your own organisation.



To be an ally is more than just knowing or saying that you support BAME inclusion – allyship is about being visible and going out of your way to show support. Sometimes that support means amplifying the voice of your BAME colleague, but sometimes it also means being the voice that champions BAME inclusion on their behalf, particularly in situations or spaces where they may not have a seat at the table.

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Alex Leon, LGBT+ activist and human rights campaigner



“ My most effective mentoring relationships have been driven by people who have really taken the time to listen to me and to support me in my career, as well as give me uncensored feedback. Allies can play an important role in nurturing the careers of talented BAME people through not only mentoring, but also by opening up access to networks and other development opportunities.

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**Tamoor Ali, Originator, BP**

## 06

### Mentor and sponsor

Long-standing appraisal systems can often overlook skills, expertise or potential that may be more prevalent among minority ethnic employees, while overvaluing other qualities that may be more traditional, but have less applicability to the modern workplace.

A way for allies to counteract this personally is to consciously consider who to mentor and/or sponsor, both formally and informally. Look beyond those you might usually choose to mentor or sponsor and be open to supporting people whose backgrounds might be significantly different to yours. The Government has made it clear that it believes that mentoring and sponsorship schemes should be made available to anyone who wants them and there should be a greater focus on underrepresented groups. Reverse mentoring can also be effective for allies to gain an authentic insight about the experiences of BAME individuals in their organisation.

# 07

## Help illuminate career paths

While some employers have clear induction processes in place, many of these focus on the factual elements of any given role – such as what needs to be done, for whom and by when – rather than qualitative guidance on how to succeed in an organisation.

Leaders should be transparent about their own journeys so that anyone wishing to follow in the footsteps of those who have succeeded, regardless of privilege and pre-existing mentorship and sponsorship, can do so. Transparency on career pathways, and clear guidelines on how promotions work, is crucial in encouraging social mobility generally. Allies can play their part by publishing their job history internally across the organisation, showcasing their own career paths and the steps taken to achieve success.



One of the things I have noticed about effective allies is that they are open and honest about their own career paths. They not only recognise the importance of the opportunities that were afforded to them, but they are also willing to share the challenges they have faced and the lessons they have learnt. As leaders can only mentor and sponsor a limited number of people at any one time, publicly making their career history available across the organisation gives everyone the opportunity to learn from their experiences.

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**Angela Tang, Legal Designer**





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As an athlete I have been in a lot of dressing rooms that are full of casual racism. I have also been in many workplaces where this is also common practice. This unfortunately is an everyday experience not just for me, but for an alarming majority of BAME people. It is crucial that people know that being a bystander to this inappropriate behaviour is just as harmful as joining in. We need people to challenge this kind of behaviour and drive cultural change.

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**Darren Cheesman, Talent and Performance Coach, Royal Belgian Hockey Association**

# Take action

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**Don't be a  
bystander**

**People in privileged positions have the power to call out unacceptable behaviour towards minority ethnic individuals without responses or assumptions being made based on their own ethnicity.**

The McGregor-Smith Review indicated that two thirds of BAME individuals have experienced racial harassment or bullying in the workplace in the last five years. Allies have a crucial role to play in calling out inappropriate language, behaviour and micro-aggressions, regardless of whether such actions are due to conscious or unconscious bias. It may feel awkward or uncomfortable, but allyship involves being an active sponsor, challenging the status quo and encouraging others to do the same.



09

## Lobby for change

**Use your position of power to challenge systems and processes within your business which may be unintentionally biased against BAME people. Ask your BAME network group for any suggestions and speak with colleagues in your HR team to see if dress code or leave allowance policies, for example, are as inclusive as possible.**

Consider whether existing recruitment practices allow for unconscious bias and encourage fairer and more objective ways of hiring talent and offering work experience/internships – the McGregor-Smith Review contains a number of recommendations in this area as a starting point. Speak to your procurement team or review procurement policies to help ensure that contracts are awarded to suppliers who show a real commitment to diversity and inclusion.

The Government has already taken steps to encourage diversity and inclusion within companies in its supply chain and hopes all employers will follow its lead in this area. Effective allies take time to understand the systems in which they operate and make a concerted effort to change them to be more inclusive.



Institutional racism remains intertwined in many of our organisations, systems and institutions. Allies, and those in positions of power, need to use their influence to help dismantle biased systems. Engage with those involved in developing policies, both in the workplace and beyond, to make sure they are developing systems which are as inclusive as possible.

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**Chrisann Jarret, Co-CEO, We Belong**



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To me, ally is a verb, not a noun. It is as much the job of an ally to speak out about exclusion as it is to be quiet and listen to the voices of those from minoritised communities. It's therefore your responsibility to challenge negative assumptions and utilise your own power to speak to those in your world about the reasons for prioritising inclusion.

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**Bilal Khan, Organisational Facilitator, Fearless Futures**

# 10

## Engage with the wider community

**The Department for Work and Pensions is working in collaboration with Business in the Community to increase the engagement of young BAME talent with businesses.**

As part of their work, they recommend that businesses participate in the 'unemployment mentoring circles model' in 20 specific areas in the UK, to raise awareness of how to access career opportunities within certain organisations and industries. Consider whether it is appropriate for your organisation to be part of this project.

More informal engagement could also include reviewing the community

impact work being done by your organisation and considering whether the benefit of such work impacts underrepresented groups fairly. Personally being involved in such projects is another way to listen and learn from those with different backgrounds and experiences to yourself, and such connections may be more comfortable in sharing their full experiences than those that work directly with you.

Engagement with the wider community should be seen as a part of being an effective ally and should complement the work being done by your organisation in improving diversity within your business.

# Referenced works

*Be Brave with Language: Glossary*, 2018, Investing in Ethnicity.

*Bias in Britain BAME Polling*, 2018, ICM Unlimited: The Guardian.

*Delivering Diversity: Race and Ethnicity in the Management Pipeline*, 2017, Chartered Management Institute.

*Ethnic Diversity of UK Boards: The Parker Review*, 2017, Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy.

*How we write about statistics and ethnicity*, 2017, Gov.uk

*Investing in Ethnicity & Race in the Workplace: Maturity Matrix Toolkit*, 2018, All Parliamentary Group for Governance and Inclusive Leadership.

*Investing in Ethnicity: Ethnicity Pay Gap Reporting*, 2019, All Parliamentary Group for Governance and Inclusive Leadership.

*Let's Talk About Race – A Pocket Guide to Getting Conversations Started*, 2017, Business in the Community.

*Race Disparity Audit: Ethnicity Facts and Figures*, 2018, Cabinet Office.

*Race in the Workplace: The McGregor-Smith Review*, 2017, Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy.

*The McGregor-Smith Review One Year On*, 2018, Business in the Community: Race at Work 2018.

*Use of Language: Race and Ethnicity*, 2018, Equality Challenge Unit.

# A note on terminology

Throughout this booklet we have used a number of phrases relating to 'race' in the workplace. The referenced works also use certain terminology interchangeably. We acknowledge that there are limitations to every term and that different people have personal associations with the language used in this area. We hope the below encourages people to be considerate about the use of language.

## Race and ethnicity

**Race:** Many organisations that work in race equality now work from the assumption that 'race' is a social construct. One reason for this is that it has been found that genetic differences within ethnic groups are actually greater than the genetic differences between different ethnic groups. Therefore there is no biological basis for defining differences by 'race'.

**Ethnicity:** Race and ethnicity are often used interchangeably but it is useful to be clear about the difference. The House of Lords suggests an ethnic group has the following features, however there is no precise definition:

- a long shared history of which the group is conscious as distinguishing it from other groups and the memory of which it keeps alive
- a cultural tradition of its own including family and social manners, often but not necessarily associated with religious observance
- a common, however distant, geographical origin
- a common language and literature

It is important to remember that everyone has an ethnicity and 'white British' is an ethnic group. It is common in British culture for 'ethnic' to be wrongly used as synonymous with non-white or not-western, for example with 'ethnic clothes' or 'ethnic restaurants'.

## BME and BAME

BME stands for Black and minority ethnic. BAME stands for Black, Asian and minority ethnic. Both of these terms have their limitations, including that they imply that BME/BAME individuals are a homogeneous group and that both terms single out specific ethnic groups, which can be divisive and exclusionary. They can also be perceived as convenient labels that are placed on minority ethnic groups of people, rather than identities with which people have chosen to identify.

However, based on a survey by the Business in the Community, over half of those surveyed either do not mind this terminology being used, or prefer being referred to as BAME or BME.

## Minority ethnic or ethnic minority

'Ethnic minority' places the emphasis on ethnicity as the main issue. There can be a tendency in our media and language to see 'ethnic' as synonymous with 'not-white' and so the term could be perceived as implying the issue is with people being not-white, or non-white people being the issue. As a consequence the term tends to be reversed to refer to 'minority ethnic groups' to highlight the fact that everyone has an ethnicity and the issues being referred to relate to minority groups in a UK context and the discrimination and barriers that they face.

# Featured in this booklet

We are grateful to the people featured in this guide, along with other members of the BAME community, who have shared their views, experiences and stories relating to allyship and inclusion. Shown here are those featured in this booklet, along with a summary of their involvement with the firm's own BAME inclusion related initiatives.



**Devinya Thomas, Artist**

CSR Artist 2017–18 and  
"Diversity by Design" speaker



**Kwaku Dapaah-Danquah,  
Programme Manager,  
Your Startup, Your Story**

"Mitigating Racial Biases" panellist



**Ben Hurst, Head of Facilitation  
and Training, Good Lad Initiative**

"Examining Racial Biases" panellist



**Gökhan Tanrıöver, Artist**

CSR Artist 2017–18  
"Diversity by Design" speaker



**Alex Leon, LGBT+ activist  
and human rights campaigner**

"Examining Racial Biases" panellist,  
Just Like Us LGBT+ mentor



**Tamoor Ali, Originator, BP**

"Not just LGBT+..." Speaker  
Just Like Us LGBT+ mentor



**Angela Tang, Legal Designer**

"Examining Racial Biases" panellist



**Darren Cheesman, Talent  
and Performance Coach,  
Royal Belgian Hockey Association**

"Man on Side" speaker



**Chrisann Jarret, Co-CEO,  
We Belong**

"BAME Leaders" panellist



**Bilal Khan, Organisational  
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