

BLACK FURTHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP GROUP

5th August 2020

Open letter to address systemic racism in further education

Open letter to: Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson, Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. Gavin Williamson MP, Secretary of State for Education, funders of further education colleges; regulatory bodies & further education membership bodies.

We, the undersigned, are a group of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) senior leaders, and allies, who work or have an interest in the UK further education (FE) sector.

The recent #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM) global protest following the brutal murder of George Floyd compels us all to revisit how we address the pervasive racism that continues to taint and damage our society. The openness, solidarity and resolve stirred by #BLM is unprecedented and starkly exposes the lack of progress made in race equality since *'The Stephen Lawrence Enquiry'*. Against a background of raised concerns about neglect in healthcare, impunity of policing, cruelty of immigration systems – and in education, the erasure of history, it is only right for us to assess how we are performing in FE. Only by doing so, can we collectively address the barriers that our students, staff and communities face. The personal, economic and social costs of racial inequality are just too great to ignore.

At a time of elevated advocacy for FE, failure to recognise the insidious nature of racism undermines the sector's ability to fully engage with all its constituent communities. The supporting data and our lived experiences present an uncomfortable truth, that too many BAME students and staff have for far too long encountered a hostile environment and a system that places a *'knee on our neck'*. It is self-evident that we will not accept this moving into the future.

Sadly, the real achievements of the ground-breaking work of the *'Commission for Black Staff in Further Education'* (2002), backed by the Network for Black Professionals and the sector, and the Black Leadership Initiative have not been sustained due to lack of support and political will. Indeed, the FE sector has gone backwards over the last few years in terms of the numbers of Black Principals, leaders, middle tier managers, teaching staff and governors. There is no longer any systematic monitoring, training or positive action in place to address this. Critically, there remain significant attainment gaps for black students when compared with their peers. Alongside this, the lack of a structured approach to measuring the extent of the issues faced by BAME communities inhibits progress. There is no baseline data on ethnicity profiles across all levels of sectoral leadership. There is no analysis of student and staff referrals to disciplinary processes. There is no evaluation of the extent of the barriers faced by black students and staff in accessing job and career progression opportunities.

The need to act is urgent. Anti-racism must be a central tenet of the new FE White Paper. It must be enshrined into changes to post-16 and post-18 education and funding, building on the recommendations arising from the Augar Review. It must be explicit within the blueprint emerging from the Independent Commission on the *'College of the Future'*.

We believe FE is vital to the Government's economic recovery plan, but until the issues outlined in this letter are understood and addressed, the vision for a 'levelling up' of society will remain an aspiration. Furthermore, the adverse impact of Covid-19 on BAME communities threatens to exacerbate pre-existing inequalities. Never has there been such a need for a clear strategy and investment in skills development and training to narrow the gap.

This is a particularly critical juncture for FE and it is also a crucial moment for us, both as black people directly and deeply affected by these issues and as people who can positively impact on the future of all students. We stand ready to play our full part, as leaders, as expert practitioners and as role models to enable the FE system to 'step up' to its responsibility for addressing racial inequality. Unless we collectively confront the issue of race equality in FE, we will not realise a new vision for '*people, productivity and place*'.

We seek to work *in partnership* with sector colleagues to address these challenges. The critical task of re-skilling the workforce and supporting competitiveness must harness the full potential of black and white communities to enable social and economic resilience. Towards that end, this **call for action** comprises the following **10 proposals**:

Curriculum

1. **A radical revision of FE curricula and qualifications to reflect contemporary British values, incorporating the importance of colonial history and its influence on society, historically and now; the impact of racism on black and white communities; the contributions made by black people to society.**

Culture

2. **All teacher training, professional development and leadership programmes to include, as a central component, the consideration of racial equality; and for teacher training, the inclusion of anti-racist pedagogy.**
3. **All Colleges to annually publish student performance, staff and governor profile data by ethnicity, including actions to address identified gaps.**
4. **All regulatory bodies, funders and membership groups to publish workforce, leadership and governance profile data by ethnicity, including actions to address gaps.**
5. **All sectoral committees, boards or advisory groups established to address racism and inequalities to be led by and made up of those with real insight of these issues, or expertise in these areas.**

Climate

6. **College recruitment processes, including the deployment of recruitment companies, to proactively address imbalances in the diversity of leadership at all levels.**
7. **Ofsted and other quality assurance bodies to evaluate the effectiveness of pedagogy and curriculum practice in promoting race equality, alongside strategies to address attainment gaps through college inspections reports and their own annual reports.**
8. **The FE Commissioner's annual report, diagnostic assessments and structural reviews to include data on BAME leaders, managers and governors against the profile of college student populations and local demographics.**
9. **FE regulatory bodies, development organisations and unions to collaborate with colleges to design and implement a common framework to share best practice in the advancement of racial literacy and justice across all modes of learning.**

Communications

10. **All organisations with an investment in FE (*whether statutory, regulatory, representative or commercial*) to ensure fair and positive treatment of BAME students, staff and communities, in terms of optics, content and impact.**

Yours sincerely
List of signatories.

The following list of signatories comprises current and former Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) senior leaders, staff and allies, who work or have an interest in, the UK further education (FE) sector:

Ruth Abban	Childline Counsellor	NSPCC
Felix Adenaike	Former College Principal/Finance	Professional
Emmanuel Agyemang	Assistant Principal	Christ the King SFC
Abbad Ahmad	Engineering Lecturer	Nottingham College
Asma Ahmad	Head of Faculty	Lambeth College
Munnas Ahmed	Head of Technologies	Haywood Academy
Dan Akeroyd	Deputy Principal	Barnsley College
Khaled Al-ankar	Head of E-Learning/Library	Hull College Group
Jim Aleander	Former Principal& CEO, MD	The College Doctor Ltd
Natalie Alleyne	TLA Support Manager	BMet
Paula Amony	Assistant Principal	Christ the King Sixth Forms
Eli Anderson	Master Storyteller	South London Theatre That
Alison Andreas	Principal & CEO	Colchester Institute
Claire Andrews	Lecturer of Business	Havant & South Downs College
Elizabeth Andrews	Chief Executive	Fuse Developments Ltd
Dr Jason Arday	Assistant Professor	Durham University
Soumaya Arfa	Media Lecturer	Activate Learning
Dr Bolatito Ariyo	Head of School	Morley College
Anila Arshad-Mehmood	Head of Student Services	EH&WLC
Matt Atkinson	Chief Executive	FE Associates
Jai Atwal	Head of Sales & Engag't	BKSB
Amrik Aujla	Freelance MIS Specialist	
Kam Aujla	Student Records/MIS Team	Bradford College
Nadia Ayub	Freelance Education Consultant	
Zayn Azam	Network Engineer	Qubic Group plc
Faizah Azeem	Marketing & Press Officer	Stratford-upon-Avon College
Imtiaz Aziz	Human Resources Director	HCUC Group
Afshan Baksh	Learning & Skills Specialist	Evolve Global Solutions
Mandy Bahra	Head of Construction	EH&WLC
Martyn Baldock	Lecturer of Art & Design	Havant & South Downs College
Anifat Balogun	Maths Lecturer	Bury College
Louise Banahene MBE	Director, Educ. Engagement	University of Leeds
Julie Barnes	Deputy Chief Executive	City of Liverpool College
Cordella Bart-Stewart OBE	Director	Black Solicitors Network
Haroon Bashir	Equality Manager	Halesowen College
Kaussar Bashir	Assistant Director	South & City College Birmingham
Amarjit Basi	Former Principal & CEO	
Dan Beale	Vice Principal	Havant & South Downs College
John Beaty	DP Corp. Relationships	Burton & S Derbyshire College
Jane Bedois	Head of Standards & Reg.	Ind. Press Standards Org.
Chris Beech	Assist. Principal/Dean	Burton & S Derbyshire College
Sarah Benjamin	IT Lecturer	EH&WLC
Neil Bentley-Gockmann OBE	Chief Executive	WorldSkills UK
Andy Berry	Principal & CEO	Bridgwater and Taunton College
Leona Berry	Vice Principal	Havant & South Downs College
Tom Bewick	Chief Executive	Federation of Awarding Bodies
Jev Bhalla	Director	Jev Bhalla Associates
Alan Birks	Former Principal & CEO	
Mark Bolton	Principal & CEO	Yeovil College
Colin Booth OBE	Principal & CEO	Luminate Group

Nirmal Borkhataria	Finance Director	Goldsmiths University
Dame Lorna Boreland-Kelly FRSA	CEO & Managing Partner	Bokell Associates
Elaine Bowker	Principal & CEO	City of Liverpool College
Pete Bradley	Lecturer of Media	Havant & South Downs College
Helen Bradshaw	Learning Support Assistant	Havant & South Downs College
Anthony Bravo	Principal & CEO	Basingstoke College of Tech.
Beverley Brennan	Lecturer	The Manchester College
Rachel Bowen	Director, Policy & Pub. Affairs	ColegauCymru
Nana Brew	Head of Section	Kingston College
Dean Britton	Director for Inclusion	Haringey SFC
Katy Broomfield	Head, Customer Experience	Burton & S Derbyshire College
Liz Bromley	Chief Executive Officer	Newcastle Colleges Group
Denise Brown	Principal & CEO	Stoke on Trent College
Wally Brown CBE DL	Former Principal & CEO/Co-founder of NBP	
Ben Browne	Chief Operating Officer	De Montfort University
Beth Brownlee	Head of Quality, SS & LR	West Lothian College
Pete Budd	Learning Manager	Havant & South Downs College
Yola Burgo	Curriculum Lead	Central Beds. Council
Everton Burke OBE	Chair of Governors	Burton & S Derbyshire College
Nick Burnham	Principal & CEO	Cardinal Newman SFC
Olivia Bussey	Head of Qual. & Compliance	NCC Education
Aamir Butt	Director, Student Services	City of Liverpool College
Sobia Butt	Head of English & Maths	Ealing Hammersmith & W Lond.
John Callaghan	Principal & CEO	Solihull College & Univ. Centre
Rosemary Campbell-Stephens MBE	Education Consultant	
Jacqui Canton	Principal & CEO	Abingdon and Witney College
René Carayol MBE	Leadership & Keynote Speaker	
April Carrol	Former Principal & CEO	
Pat Carvalho	Principal	Harrow College
Julian Cawkell	Lecturer of History	Havant & South Downs College
Louis Chamberlain	Assistant	Havant & South Downs College
Richard Chambers OBE	Former Principal & CEO	
Manrouf Chanfi	Modern Languages Teacher	Wicklea Academy
Brian Channer	Parliamentary Assistant	Office of Jane Daby MP
Denise Charles	Head of Curriculum	EH&WLC
Sami Chaudhary	Maths Lecturer	New City College
Neena Chauhan	Staff Governor/Project Mgr	Fircroft College
Gary Chin	Interim FD	Burton & S Derbyshire College
Tiwonge Chipeta	EDI Manager	Luminate Education Group
Nav Chohan	Principal & CEO	ShIPLEY College
Ahmed Choonara OBE	Former Principal & CEO	
Catherine Chungu	Social Worker	Airedale General Hospital
Dean Clarke	Lecturer of Music	Havant & South Downs College
Fadia Clarke	VP - Training, Skills and HE	Croydon College
Charlotte Claydon	Access/Participation Coord.	BIMM Institute
Marcus Clinton	Principal & CEO	Reaseheath College
Andy Cole	Principal & CEO	Gateshead College
Shirley Collier	Former Chair of Governors	York College
Chanay Collins	Student Ambassador	Aston University
Deborah Collinson-Bolles	Head of SEND	Havant & South Downs College
Shariel Condappa	Exec. Office Manager	Croydon College
Sandra Connor	Head of English & Maths	Windsor Forest Colleges Group
David Cook	Lecturer of Media	Havant & South Downs College
Paul Cook	Principal & CEO	Hereward College

Phil Cook	Principal & CEO	Education Training Collective
Pavita Cooper CMgr CCMi	Race Chair	Chartered Management Institute
Sacha Corcoran MBE	Principal	Big Creative Education
Wendy Coy	Chair of Governors	Loughborough College
Professor M J C Crabbe JP	Chair of Governors	Central Bedfordshire College
Matt Crilly	President	NUS Scotland
Nicola Crooks-Ramgeet	Senior Curric. Manager	New City College Hackney
David Crosby	Chair of Governors	Hugh Baird College
Gillian Cross	Co-ordinator	Wessex Group of SFCs
Stella Dadzie	Author/Director	Front Line Training & Cons. Ltd
David Daley	Lecturer, Elec Engineering	Dudley College
Peter Daley	Former Recruitment Specialist	
Sue Daley	Former Principal/Governor	West Suffolk College
David Dangana	Director of Quality	Capital City College Group
Susanne Datta	Ex Director, HR & Cent Serv.	Capel Manor College
Kit Davies	Principal & CEO	Hart Learning Group (NHC)
Geraint Davies	Deputy Director Curriculum	Burton & S Derbyshire College
Iestyn Davies	Chief Executive	Colegau Cymru
Sam Day	Learning Manager	Havant & South Downs College
Tony Day	Principal & CEO	Joseph Chamberlain SFC
Janet Dean	Governor	York College
Kam Dehal	Vice Principal	E Surrey & John Ruskin College
Stephen Paul Delsol	Director	ABC Int. Ed. Consultancy Service
Satwant Deol	Principal & CEO	The Henley College
Biram Desai	Former Finance Director	
Zulakha Desai	Head of HE & Higher Skills	Kirklees College
Dr. Darrell DeSouza	Principal & CEO	Uxbridge/Harrow College
Jaspal Dhaliwal	Head of Eng, Maths & Dig.	Westminster AES
Sardul Dhesi	Deputy Principal	South & City College B'ham
Suki Dhesi	Vice Principal	Havant & South Downs College
Balvir Dhillon	Director	Golden Ethics Ltd
Sally Dicketts CBE	Principal & CEO	Activate Learning
Elton D'Souza	Chair of Governors	West Suffolk College
Karen Dobson	Principal & CEO	Newcastle & Stafford Colleges
Ebrahim Dockrat MBE	Dir. of Commercial Services	Calderdale College
Professor Martin Doel CBE	Visiting Professor	UCL Institute of Education
Gloria Dolan	Former Senior HMI	
Kirstie Donnelly MBE	CEO	City and Guilds
Dr Christina Donovan	Education Studies Lecturer	Manchester Met University
Sarah Dorneye	Trustee	Homefield College
Louise Doswell	Principal & CEO	Preston's College
Sarah Drew	AP, Corp. Relationships	Burton & S Derbyshire College
Professor Vicky Duckworth	Education Department	Edgehill University
Angela Dunn	People Services Manager	Havant & South Downs College
Rob Dunn	Independent FE Consultant	
Vaughan Dyche	Director, IT & Estates	Burton & S Derbyshire College
Isaac Dziya	Flood Resilience Manager	Calderdale MBC
Dr Frank K Dzokoto	Director of Engineering	Bedford College Group
Paul Eeles	Chief Executive	Skills and Education Group
Peter Ejedewe	English Tutor	Aspire-igen Group
Dr Marlene Ellis	Freelance Copy writer	
Salsabil Elmegri	Vice President FE	NUS UK
Nadia El-Atrash	Senior Business Manager	Morgan Hunt
Laila El-Metoui	Founder & CEO	Pride in Education

Kerry Elverstone	Lecturer of Animal Care	Havant & South Downs College
Teresa Esan MBE	Freelance Education & HR Specialist	
Dawn Evans	Phd Student	University of York
Dr Rupert Evenett	Chair of Governors	Christ the Kings Sixth Forms
Nordeen Fahmy	Head, External P'ships	Westminster AES
Kelly Fard	Lecturer, Catering & Hosp.	Havant & South Downs College
Eileen Fearon	President	NUS-USI
Amanda Fisher	Add. Learning Support Asst.	Havant & South Downs College
Hannah Fletcher	Finance Director	Burton & S Derbyshire College
Andy Forbes	Principal & CEO	City of Bristol College
Kate Ford	Lecturer of Business	Havant & South Downs College
Tracey Forman	Principal	Homefield College
Allan Foster	Chair of Governors	Myerscough College
Simon Foster	Lecturer of Economics	Havant & South Downs College
Angela Foulkes	Principal & CEO	The Sheffield College
Sharon Foy	Business Lecturer	Havant & South Downs College
Ann Francis	Health Care & Social care Freelancer	
Calista Francis	Freelance Trainer & Coach	
Dennis Francis	Group Manager, EDI	Capital City College Group
Ann Francke OBE Cmgr FIC	CEO	Chartered Management Institute
Professor Clive Fraser	Economist	University of Leicester
Carol Frater	Former College Manager	
Dr Daveth Frost	Former Principal & CEO	Holy Cross College, Bury
Pooja Furniss	Director, People Supporter	
Ade Gachegua	Subject Lead for Higher Ed.	Pearson
Grant Gallacher	Lecturer of Public Services	Havant & South Downs College
Imelda Galvin	Chief Operating Officer	Milton Keynes College
Parminder Singh Garcha	Head of 14-19	Birmingham City Council
Rav Garcha	Strategic Business Advisor	Denarius International
Janet Gardner	Principal & CEO	Waltham Forest College
Natalie Garner	Head, Creative Arts	Croydon College
Celeste Gaskell	Learning Manager	Havant & South Downs College
Mike Gaston	Principal & CEO	Havant & South Downs College
Rebecca Gater	VP Curriculum & Quality	Solihull College & Univ. Centre
Andrew George	President	National Black Police Assoc.
Dr Karl George MBE	Director	The Governance Forum Ltd
Robin Ghurbhurun	Managing Director	JISC
Mandeep Gill	Principal & CEO	Newham SFC
Satnam Gill	Former Principal & CEO	
Marie Gilluley	Principal & CEO	Kirklees College
Adam Goldstein	Chair of Governors	Barnet & Southgate College
Kirri Gooch	National Account Manager	Google
Matthew Gordon	Chief Executive	Spectra First
Trevor Gordon	Performance Improvement Consultant	
Dr Andrew Gower	Principal & CEO	Morley College
Diana Grannell	Principal & CEO	Bournemouth & Poole College
Robin Greenaway	Deputy CEO	South Thames Colleges Group
Jeff Greenidge	Coach, Leadership Mentor	
Jackie Grubb	Principal & CEO	City of Plymouth College
Hillary Gyebi-Ababio	Vice President Higher Ed.	NUS UK
Ali Hadawi CBE	Principal & CEO	Central Bedfordshire College
Lois Halbert-Pearce	Volunteer	Havant & South Downs College
Ryan Halford	VP, Curriculum & Quality	Burton & S Derbyshire College
Helen Hammond	Principal & CEO	Working Mens' College

Steve Hammett	Volunteer	Havant & South Downs College
Zoe Hancock	Principal & CEO	Oaklands College
Atta Hanfi	Governor	Holy Cross SFC, Bury
Darren Hankey	Principal & CEO	Hartlepool College of FE
Craig Hanlon-Smith	Centre Principal, N. Ken	Morley College
Fiona Hanson	Director of Quality	Burton & S Derbyshire College
Corrie Harris	Principal & CEO	Moulton College
Stephanie Harvey	Volunteer	Havant & South Downs College
Carol Harvey-Barnes	Drama Consultant	
Howard Haughton	Visiting S. Research Fellow	King's College, London
Dr Jennifer A Hawkins	Psychologist & Professional Artist	
Grace Haynes	OD Specialist	
Lynsi Hayward-Smith CBE	Chair of Governors, Former head of Adult Learning	
Tom Hazell	Music Lecturer	Havant & South Downs College
Julia Heap	Principal & CEO	Hopwood Hall College
Kate Heaton	Lecturer of Business	Havant & South Downs College
Jackie Heaton	Deputy Director Curriculum	Burton & S Derbyshire College
Brian Henry	Principal	Learning & Enterprise College
Kate Heston	Lecturer of Business	Havant & South Downs College
Michelle Hewison	College Lecturer	
Jane Hickie	Chief Executive	AELP
Sue Higginson	Principal & CEO	Wirral Met College
Esu Hill	Managing Director	The Training Brokers Ltd
Janet Hillier	Lect. Catering & Hospitality	Havant & South Downs College
Stella Hine	Site Librarian	Chichester College Group
Clive Hodge	Assistant Principal	Farnborough College of Tech.
Shaun Hope	AP - Curriculum& Standards	Hartlepool College
Steven Hope	Head of Indep. Learning	Leeds City College
Mike Hopkins	Principal & CEO	S & City College Birmingham
Dr Bernard Horsford	Executive Chairman	The Strategic Enterprise Group
Bina Howard	School of Computer Science	Oak Academy School
David Howard	Trustee	Homefield College
Mike Howe	Chair of Governors	Basingstoke College of Tech
Emma Hunt	Trustee	Homefield College
Pamela Hurley	Bus. Partnership Manager	South Thames Colleges Group
Altaf Hussain	Principal & CEO	Luton SFC
Abid Hussein	Experienced Interim Manager	
Anna Ifejika FCCA	Former Financial Controller	South Thames College
Errol Ince	Vice Principal, STEM	London South East Colleges
Sharon Isaacs	Partnerships Manager	Nottingham College
Andrew Jackson	Lecturer in Photography	London College Of Communication
Fatou Jagne	HE Access Coordinator	City of Liverpool College
Padma Jain	Teacher & Researcher	
Swapna Jare	Curriculum Leader	The Henley College
Jo Jarman	Trustee	Homefield College
June Jarrett	Former Principal & CEO	
Efejona Jatto	Manager, IQA	Southwark College
Gary Johnson	Curriculum Team Leader	Newham College
Magdalena Johnson Cmgr MCMI	VP Student Achievement	Newham SFC
Tony Johnston	Chair	United Colleges Group
Rebecca Johnstone	Lecturer, Social Sciences	Havant & South Downs College
Bill Jones	Deputy CEO & Principal	Luminate Group/Leeds City Coll
David B Jones OBE DL	Experienced Chair/NED	Qualifications Wales
Gerald Jones	Principal, Waterloo Centre	Morley College

Joseph Jones	Managing Director	EduGrowth Ltd
Mervyn Jones	Chair of Governors	Hereford College of Arts
Rachel Jones	Lect. F'ndations for Learning	Havant & South Downs College
Agnes Joseph	Head of Business	Croydon College
Reetu Kansal CMgr FCMI FRSA	Chair	University of London R.E. Group
Bally Kaur	Educational Researcher	University of Derby
Edward Keene	Chair of Governors	Hartpury University and College
Larissa Kennedy	President	NUS UK
Rachel Kent	Social Value Advisor	Social Value Portal
Asif Khamisa	Associate Director/FE Lead	AA Projects
Ayub Khan FRSA FCMI	Chief Executive	Citizen's Advice Harlow
Sara Khan	V. President Liberation & Eq.	NUS
Dame Asha Khemka DL OBE	Former Principal & CEO	
Neelam Khosla-Stevens	Registrar & Secretary	Royal Academy of Dramatic Art
Carol Kitching	Principal & CEO	New College Swindon
Yiannis Koursis	Principal & CEO	Barnsley College
Natasha Kumalo	Senior Associate	Financial Conduct Authority
Raj Kumaran FBCS	Director, Ed. & Partnerships	Mindful Education
Ashish Kundi	Head of Department	Bridlington School
Guy Lacy	Chair	ColegauCymru
Ruth Lacey	Lecturer of Art & Design	Havant & South Downs College
Earl Laird	Director	EBL Consulting
Sage Lal	Int. Man Dig./Cyber Security	Burton & S Derbyshire College
Anita Lall	VP Curriculum & Quality	Craven College
Robin Landman OBE CCM	Co-founder & Former CEO	Network for Black Professionals
Ethelinda Lashley-Scott	Curriculum Manager	Edinburgh College
Russ Lawrance	Principal & CEO	Haringey SFC
Rob Lawson	Chair of Governor	Educ. Partnership North East
Lynette Leith	Interim Assistant Principal	Newham SFC
Melanie Lenehan	Principal & CEO	Fircroft College
Michael Leslie	CL, Games Development	Havering College
Penny Lewis	SEND Lecturer	Waltham Forest College
Lily Lin	Governor	Harlow College
Paul Loder	Lecturer of Music	Havant & South Downs College
Dr. Leroy Logan MBE BSc	Former Superintendent	Metropolitan Police
Rosie Lowe	Trustee	Homefield College
Simon Lucas	Managing Director	Society
Jo Maher	Principal & CEO	Loughborough College
Shaid Mahmood	Chair of Governors	Luminate Group
Dr Jesvir Mahil	Director	University for Life Consultancy
Gavin Maitland-Smith	Chair of Governors	Abingdon & Witney College
Dee Majek	Freelance Education & Training Consultant	
Alyson Malach	Director	Equality & Diversity UK Ltd
Kausar Malik	F&HE Executive	UAE
Nabila Mallick	Claimant Barrister	No 5 Barristers' Chambers
Harmesh Manghra	Director, Quality & Imp.	Sandwell College
Rajinder Mann DL OBE	Former CEO, NBAP & BLI Director	
Sunaina Mann OBE	Principal & CEO	Jeddah Female College
Neil Manning FRSA	Curriculum Manager, Art	Edinburgh College Russell
Marchant	Principal & CEO	Hartpury University and College
Monica Marongiu	AP Curriculum & Innovation	Lambeth College
Shakira Martin	Former President	NUS
Indy Matharu	Assist. Faculty Director	Leeds College of Building
Peter Mayhew-Smith	Group Principal & CEO	South Thames Colleges Group

William McAdoo	Head of Faculty	United Colleges Group
Nicola McCarthy	Lecturer of Psychology	Havant & South Downs College
Marie-Therese McGivern	Former Principal & CEO	Belfast Metropolitan College
Stella Mbubaegbu CBE	Former Principal & CEO	
Tony Medhurst	Principal & CEO	Hertford Regional College
Janet Meenaghan	Principal & CEO	Inspire Ed./Stamford College
Darren Mepham	Chief Executive	Barnet & Southgate College
Rebecca Mercer	Senior Technician/Instructor	Havant & South Downs College
Bill Meredith	Principal & CEO	Bishop Burton College
Charlie Miller	Learning Manager	Havant & South Downs College
Professor Paul Miller	Leadership Development & EDI Consultant	
Dr. Julie Mills OBE	Principal & CEO	Milton Keynes College Group
Philip Mills	Director	Building Pathways
Jafar Mirza OBE	Former Chair of Governors	
Caireen Mitchell	Principal & CEO	Croydon College
Jackie Mitchell	Group Director of Curriculum	New City College
Adepele Mobaolorunduro	Head of Faculty	Lewisham College
Simon Mobbs	Lecturer of Art & Design	Havant & South Downs College
Alia Mohamud	Interim Business Manager	Pearson
John Moline	Lecturer of Music	Havant & South Downs College
Rani Moorcroft MBE FRSA	Managing Director	ZedGeneration CIC
Laura Moore	Head of Academy	Harlow College
Jannett Morgan	Director	JM Learning & Skills Ltd
Raheem Mu Khepera MBE	Founder	Prime Unltd
Kate Mulleady	Managing Director	Click CMS
Gary Murrain-Meade AMITOL	Managing Director	New Business Success Ltd
Mary Murphy	Principal & CEO	Riverside College
Hanna Myles	Cust. Exp. Manager	South & City College B'ham
Sunita Nahar	Managing Director	Placing People Direct
Stuart Naidoo	Senior Group Manager MNS	Global Services
Naz Najib	Chief Executive	Lifeskills Centres
Kam Nandra	Education Consultant	
Indra Nauth	Programme Manager	BTEG
Zahid Naz	Curriculum Manager	Lewisham College
Lois Neale	Learning Manager	Havant & South Downs College
Cathy Newbury	Interim Manager in FE	
Nichola Newton	Principal & CEO	Warrington & Vale Royal Coll.
Luke R Nicholson	Academic Course Director	Keynote Educational
Sarbdip Noonan	Principal & CEO	Stanmore College
Ndumiso Nsingo	Curriculum Manager	Loughborough College
Dr Rónán O'Beirne	Head of IT & Library Serv's	Solent University
Dayo Ojunjobi	Principal Consultant	Information Asset M'gt Solutions
'Lola Olaleye	Researcher	Queen Mary, Univ. of London
Luke O'Neill	Education Director	Morgan Hunt
Yvonne Orton	Executive Assistant	Burton & S Derbyshire College
Roy O'Shaughnessy	Chief Executive	Capital City College Group
Angela O'Donoghue	Principal & CEO	South Essex College
Dick Palmer	Former Principal & CEO	
Tony Palmer	Head of PE	UAE
Shivender Parmar	Teacher of English	Activate Learning
Jane Parr	Chair of Trustees	Homefield College
Dr. Sam Parrett OBE	Principal & CEO	London South East Colleges
Anastassia Parsons	ED&I Manager	The Bedford College Group
Janak Patel	Former Principal & CEO	

Jasmin Patel	Governor	Colchester Institute
Ruksana Patel	Business Lecturer	Coll. Haringey, Enfield & N Lond.
Corriene Peasgood OBE	Principal & CEO	City College Norwich Group
Jason Pemberton-Billing	College Principal	Carshalton & Merton College
Johanne Penney	Equality and Diversity Consultant	
Nicola Perkins	HR Consultant/Founder	FE HR Hub
Susan Pesic-Smith	Trustee	Homefield College
William Pickford	Vice Principal	Thurrock Adult College
Kishan Pithia	Vice Principal	BSix SFC
Marion Plant OBE	Principal & CEO	N. Works/S Leicestershire Coll
Emma Plato	Lecturer of Art & Designs	Havant & South Downs College
Emma Porter	People & OD Partner	Havant & South Downs College
Kristina Preston MIRP	Head of Awarding & Skills	Peridot Partners
Amy Price	Lecturer of Business	Havant & South Downs College
Ian Pryce CBE	Principal & CEO	The Bedford College Group
Lee Probert	Principal & CEO	York College
Michelle Punt Chartered FCIPD	Head of Human Resources	Morley College
Sheila Rai	Assistant Principal	Coll. Haringey, Enfield & N Lond.
Harkesh Ram	FE Specialist – Construction, Engineering, Curric & Quality	
Kiran Rami	Head of Guidance & SS	Uxbridge College
Dragana J Ramsden	Head of Quality	City Lit
Paul Rana	Inclusive Learning Manager	West Suffolk College
Natalie Randall	Drama Lecturer	Havant & South Downs Coll
Rena Rani	Associate Principal	Newham SFC
Najma Razaq	Executive Director	Birmingham EEAS
Graham Razey OBE	Principal & CEO	East Kent College
Shireen Razey	Executive Principal	Christ the King SFCs
Karen Redhead OBE	Principal & CEO	EH&WLC
Ally Rees	Lecturer, Early Years	Havant & South Downs College
Wayne Reid	Professional Officer	BASW England
Paula Reid-L'esperance	Head of MIS	Barnet & Southgate College
Drew Richardson-Walsh	Director of Education	Peridot
Becky Ricketts	President	NUS Wales
Stuart Rimmer	CEO & Principal	East Coast College Group
Di Roberts CBE	Principal & CEO	Brockenhurst College
Dr Blaine Robin	Senior Lecturer	Leeds Beckett University
Alison Robinson	Principal & CEO	Myerscough College
Ben Robinson	Principal	Bede SFC (part of ETC)
Richard Rochester MREC	English Lecturer	Northampton College
Dr. Maxine Room CBE	Executive Coach/Former Principal & CEO	
Martin Rosner	Chair of Governors	Newham SFC
Ben Rouse	AppsEvents UK Director	Google for Education
Peter Ryder	Director	Rockborn
Ian Sackree	Chief Executive	Protocol
Paula Sanderson	Chief Operating Officer	Queen Mary University
Ravi Sahota	Strategic Advisor	World Wide Generation
Mandeep Sahotay	Interim Consultant	Barnet & Southgate College
Rochelle Saneria	Director	Rochelle Saneria
Dr. Sujinder Singh Sangha OBE	Former Principal & CEO	
Dr. Nikos Savvas	Principal & CEO	West Suffolk College
Janine Scobie	Learning Support Assistant	Havant & South Downs College
Monica Sealy	MA Student	University of Reading
Deborah See	Education Consultant	
Tracy Seraphin	Teaching & Learning Coach	Newham College

Jonathan Y. D. Service	Support Manager	Sir George Monoux College
Shagufta Shahin	Deputy Principal	Barnfield College
Jatinder Sharma OBE	Principal & CEO	Walsall College
Zara Sharma	Curric. Lead, Gaming & IT	Kidderminster College
Lesley Shepperson	MD, Shepperson & Shepperson Consultants Ltd	
Diana Shockness	Section Manager	Harrow College
Nathan Sibley	People Service Bus. Partner	Havant & South Downs College
William Sibley	e-Learning Manager	Nottingham College
Anshi Singh	Course Director, Computing	Basingstoke College
Dr Nivedita Singh	Head of Science	St Charles Sixth Form College
Palvinder Singh	Group Deputy Principal	Newcastle College Group
Ranjit Singh	Director, Health, Care & SS	West Thames College
Elizabeth Sipiery	Chair of Governors	South Essex College
Danisa Sithole	Teaching/Assessment Coach	West Thames College
Andrew Slade	College Principal	South Thames College (STCG)
Carl Smith	Independent Financial Specialist	
Professor Rob Smith	Education Department	City of Birmingham University
Graciano Soares	Learning Spaces Manager	University of Brighton
Asfa Sohail	Principal	Lewisham College (NCG)
Jasbir Sondhi	Vice Principal	Westminster Kingsway College
Andy Sparks	Principal & CEO	Chelmsford College
Will Sparrow	Lecturer of Business	Havant & South Downs College
Karen Spencer MBE	Principal & CEO	Harlow College
Caroline Stevens	Trustee	Homefield College
Emma Strange	Deputy Director Curriculum	Burton & S Derbyshire College
Mandie Stravino OBE	Principal & CEO	Derby College Group
Bibi Sultan	Lecturer	Waltham Forest College
Louise Sutton	Joint Head of Physics	Graveney & Tooting Schools
Janice Taylor	Career Coach	Blue Sky Career Coaching
Lisa Taylor	Director of Apprenticeships	Burton & S Derbyshire College
Sandra Taylor	Digital Training Consultant	
Bev Thompson	Lecturer	Bournville College
Graham Thompson	Principal & CEO	St Francis Xavier SFC
Mike Tiller	Lecturer of Business	Havant & South Downs College
Chris Todd	Principal & CEO	Derwentside College
Graham Topley	Senior Lecturer	Canterbury Christchurch Univ.
Mark Trinick	Chair, Curric. & Standards	London & S E Education Group
Aditi Tripathy	Computing Lecturer	West Lothian College
Prof. Maria Tsouroufli	Prof. of Further Education	Brunel University
Reece Turner	Manager Leadership Search	Morgan Hunt
Mike Tweedale	College Principal	Kingston College (STCG)
Bobby Upple	Former Chair of Governors	South Leicestershire College
Oliver Urquhart Irvine	Director, Library, Research	SOAS University of London
Amanda Usher	Visual Arts Teacher	GEMS Education, Dubai
Amrit Virk	Director of Curriculum	Burton & S Derbyshire College
Yvonne Walsh MA FCIPD	HR Consultant	
Kerry Wallace	Senior Researcher	Society Ltd
Ann Walton	International Manager	Burton & S Derbyshire College
Dawn Ward CBE	Principal & CEO	Burton & S Derbyshire College
Julia Ward	Trustee	Homefield College
Professor Paul Warmington	Dept. of Education	University of Warwick
Sharon Warmington	Director	Educ. Governance Solutions Ltd
Carolyn Webb	Volunteer	Havant & South Downs College
Chris Webb	Principal & CEO	Bradford College

Rachel Webley	Teaching & Learning Coach	BMet
Mark White OBE DL	Chair of Governors	The Educ. Training Collective
Meredith White	Head of Learner Services	Capital City Colleges Group
Rebecca White	Reprographics Technician	Havant & South Downs College
Craig Williams	Director	WRAT (part of Luminate Group)
Conor Wilson	Head of Schools & Colleges	Society
Easton Wilson	HR Consultant	The TEFL Academy
Isabel Wilson	Trustee	Homefield College
Ron Wilson	Founder & Director	Pacitas Ltd
Emily Wilson-Race	Work Experience Mentor	Havant & South Downs College
Ansel Wong CBE	Chair	Black Cultural Archives
Sam Woodland	Learning Manager	Havant & South Downs College
Andrew Wren	Principal & CEO	Furness College
Wayne Wright	Ed. Consultant	Cognition Education Ltd
Wanda Wyporska	Executive Director	The Equality Trust
Laura Louise Yates	HR Business Partner	Newcastle College Group
Chris Yiannakou	Company Director/Governor	YOU Trust
Nicki Youern	Former Chair of Gov's/CEO	Havant & South Downs College
Alice Young	Lecturer, Soc. & Criminology	University of Exeter Bus. School
Oliver Young SFHEA FCMI	Chief Diversity Officer	

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Editorial Notes: [updated – 25/09/20]

The [*Macpherson Report \(1999\)*](#) on *The Stephen Lawrence Enquiry* resulted in the 'Commission for Black Staff in FE' being established, supported by all sector organisations.

The Commission set out a comprehensive set of recommendations for the FE sector through its report "[*Challenging racism: further education leading the way*](#)" (2002)

The [*Foster Review \(2005\)*](#) challenged colleges to do better on Race Equality. It also directly resulted in the formal recognition of Network for Black Managers (later the NBP) as the independent voice representing Black staff in the FE sector, and the role of the Black Leadership Initiative (BLI) in growing the talent pool of future Black leaders in the sector.

Black and minority ethnic (BAME) student representation in further education has continued to climb, and is currently at **30% (of 2.2 million students)** nationally (source: Association of Colleges data for 2019/20). This compares with an overall UK black and minority ethnic population of 14%. BAME representation amongst students and staff is typically much greater in cities and urban conurbations. For instance, some London colleges comprise in excess of 70% BAME learners and 35%+ BAME staff. In contrast, BAME student representation on Apprenticeships stands at only 11% according to latest government figures. There is unequal attainment amongst BAME students studying FE courses. For instance, the latest data confirms that Black and African Caribbean consistently underperform their peers.

Given the role that FE plays in delivering and feeding into university level courses, the findings of the [*Universities UK Report 'BAME Student Attainment at UK Universities; Closing The Gap' \(2019\)*](#) are important. The latest statistics show a 13% attainment gap for BAME students. BAME staff are poorly represented in both senior academic and university leadership roles.

The [*World Skills UK Report 'Championing Difference for a Better Workforce' \(2020\)*](#) confirmed that in 2018 90% of WorldSkills UK competitors were White, while only 8% were BAME. These differentials extend to judges (8%) and training managers (7%). The follow through of this means that there is next to no BAME representation on World Skills Team GB selection lists.

Black and minority ethnic representation in senior college leadership positions has decreased sharply, from 13% in 2017 to *circa* **5%** now. There is no data for second tier and below because the sector decided some years ago that it too onerous to collect it. Nor is there data on ethnic representation on College corporations.

Most of the FE sector's national representative and regulatory organisations comprise 100% White leadership teams. For instance, the Association of Colleges, Education & Training Foundation and Society for Education and Training have always had 100% White leadership teams, and historically near non-existent Board level representation, with the exception of AoC's current (and laudable 7%). AoC has never had a minority ethnic President.

The FE Commissioner's senior team also has no BAME representation. Whilst Ofsted, which is responsible for inspecting colleges, reported that only 5% of all its inspectors (HMIs) were from BAME backgrounds in 2018.

Over the past five years, a number of hitherto successful and publicly recognised minority ethnic principals have been driven out of the sector by unsubstantiated public smears by sections of the sector press. All these cases were met by silence, most notably from 'the voices of the sector'.

Within this context, many BAME principals - including their White peers - prefer to keep a low profile in raising their concerns, so the BAME representative voice in FE, is further suppressed.

BFELG Contact details:

Email: blackfeleadershipgroup@gmail.com

Twitter: @FeLeadership

