



Ethnic Equity in Education

FE REPORT
MARCH 2024



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1. Background

- 1.1 Over three years ago, the Black FE Leadership Group's Open Letter (published in August 2020) highlighted two major concerns: the continued under-representation of Black* staff at all levels of the college workforce and the stubborn and significant attainment gaps for Black students when compared to their peers. We believed then, and still do, that there is a correlation between these two phenomena. A worrying element of this situation was that, prior to our Open Letter, this was not universally seen as a particularly urgent issue by the FE system. This complacency was in part driven by the fact that if organisations had the requisite suite of EDI Policies and Procedures, they were largely immune from challenge or accountability by the regulator, or intervention by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.
- 1.2 How did we get to this position? Part of the problem is that the FE system believed that it could solve challenges like entrenched systemic racism without consulting those with lived experience of it, including their students. It happened because organisations and institutions focussed on meeting these challenges through generic EDI policies and procedures – but not actions – and by simply complying with the minimal legal requirements of the Equality Act they could do what was necessary to avoid reputational damage or litigation, but not change the status quo in any meaningful way. Not surprising, then, that Black students and communities had been left underserved by FE colleges, and Black staff under-represented at all levels. It is also arguable that a decade of austerity measures has taken its toll on the education sector's capacity or inclination to act.
- 1.3 Responses to our letter from system and college leaders ranged from silence, through to action in signing our letter, which eventually reached a figure of 500 sector professionals and others willing to have their names added. Largely, and unfortunately, system leaders were slower to respond and when they did it was largely in the form of performative statements and soundbites. It's fair to say that the immediate, concerted, systemic response we were seeking has been lacking. Many stopped short of action beyond simply signing the letter when it's clearly everyone's responsibility.

2. Why is this Important?

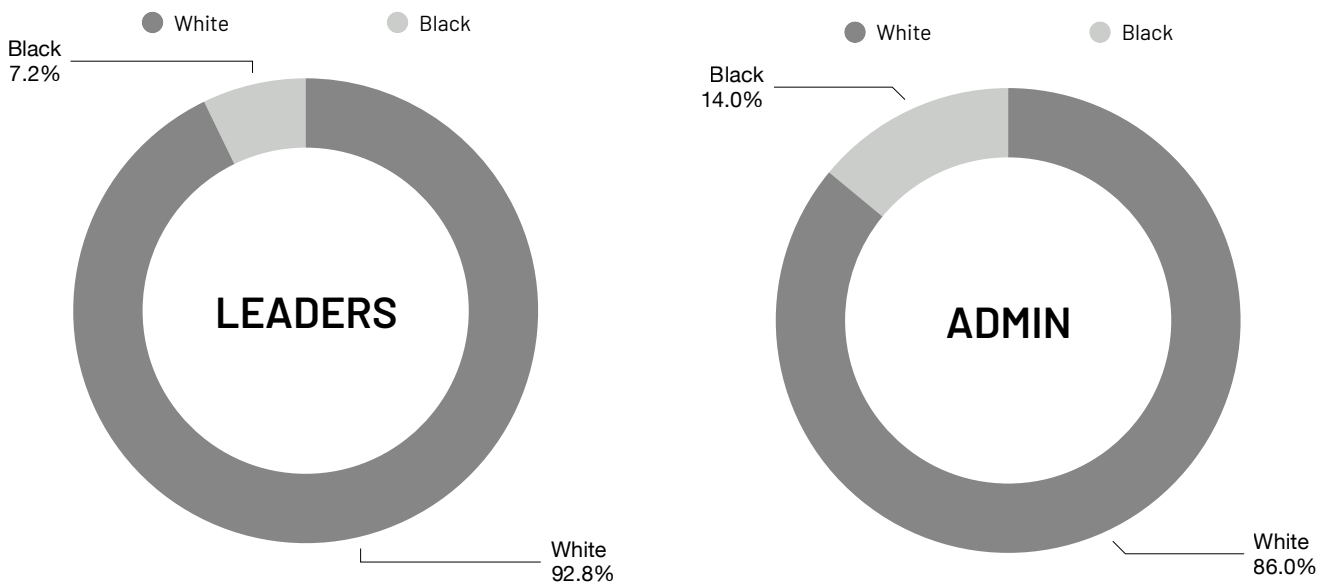
- 2.1 The demographic trends for the UK are clear. Like most mature economies, we have an aging population profile, and the lowest birth-rate for decades.
- 2.2 If this continues “the already shrinking working age population would shrink even further in the years ahead”, said Anthony Travers, professor at the London School of Economics. “That will mean certainly greater tax demands on those who are in work.” The falling number of births also means demand for public services would continue to grow as the median age of the population rises and increase the “need for more migration”¹. Simultaneously, a ‘hostile environment’ has taken hold in all areas of public life that have targeted migration as the cause of our economic woes, when in reality it forms a part of the solution, and in turn had a chilling effect on some of those who might otherwise have acted.
- 2.3 The irony of this challenge is that the birth-rate of Black British communities is still relatively high, reflecting their lower average age. Rather than targeting migration, a greater emphasis should be placed on ensuring that the entire UK talent pool is properly utilised. However, the current situation shows that Black British communities have much higher unemployment rates, and this is particularly notable in the 16-24 age group, with an unemployment rate of over 40%. The McKinsey Report ‘Diversity Wins’ indicated that by 2051 young Black people will account for one in three of those aged under 24. If we continue down this path, instead of a socially cohesive, economically prosperous UK, we will have a divided and impoverished society. This stark choice should make all of us sit up and take action to ensure we don’t miss our chance to lay the foundations for a successful society..

¹ Financial Times, August 2023

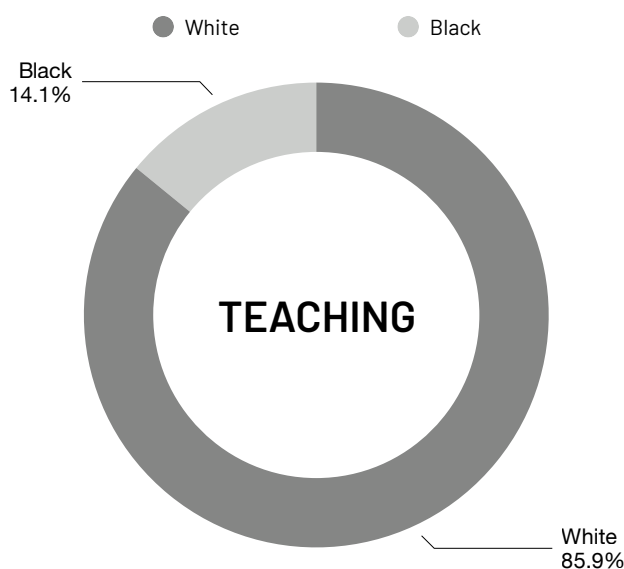
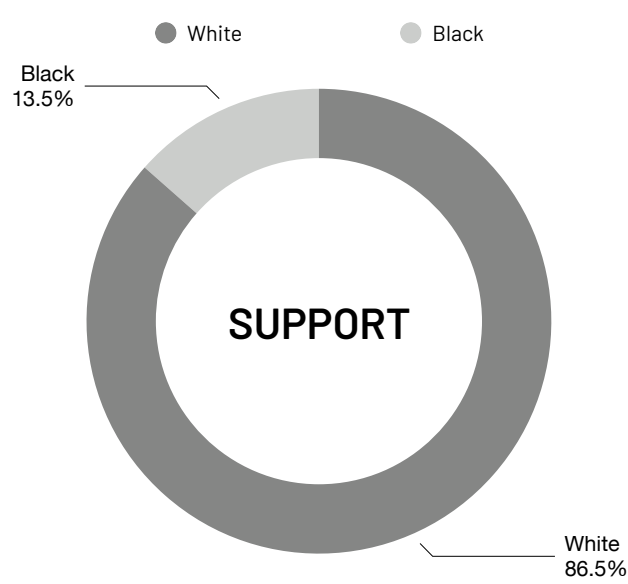
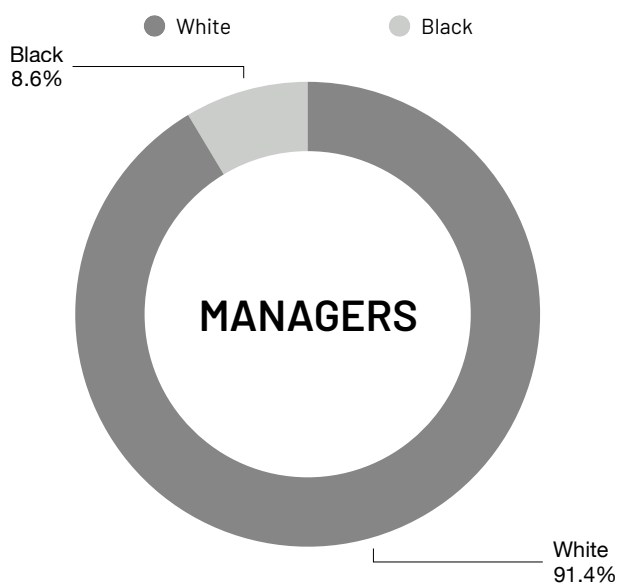
3. The DfE Workforce Data Collection Exercise 2021.

3.1 After a false start in 2021, when a voluntary exercise had to be abandoned, the DfE published its first data collection of the further education colleges workforce for over ten years. The headline figures below show a workforce that better reflects the 2011 Census returns than the 2021 exercise. At no point in the FE workforce is there a reflection of the UK Black population, and despite the exponential growth of Black student numbers, few get to see people who look like them at the front of their lecture rooms, and fewer still see themselves reflected in managerial and leadership roles. Representation matters. HE Students report the negative impact of not having a teacher 'who looks like me' has on a sense of belonging and aspiration, engagement and attainment . It stands to reason, then, that school pupils and college students should have similar feelings..

Fig.1 DfE Workforce data by Ethnicity (headlines)



2 Source: UUK/NUS Report



***National Black population 18.3% (Census 2021 England & Wales)
Black FE Students 30.5%. (AoC Key Facts 2021/22)**

3.2 The bad news is that the number of Black CEOs in 2020 – 17 of a total of 244 (7%) will fall to 13 (5.77% of 225) by the summer of 2024. In London the total of 4 Black principals in 2020 has fallen to a single individual – in our hyper-diverse capital city, home to roughly 50% of the Black population of the UK. The DfE FE Workforce data was published in September 2023 and confirmed our worst fears about the state of the broader workforce in the colleges sector. It confirmed our suspicion that the decline in representation was not solely at the apex of leadership but includes all employment types. In the face of this decline there is no funded strategy in place to halt or reverse the trend.

- 3.3 AoC Data tells us that only 8.3% of senior leaders in general FE colleges (GFEs) are Black – the most likely talent pool for principal vacancies, and only 9.7% of GFE managers are Black. In Sixth Form Colleges, the picture is worse, with 7.9% of senior leaders Black, and 7.6% of managers. This parlous state of affairs graphically sets out the scale of the challenge to repair or rebuild the Black talent pipeline.
- 3.4 What we also know for certain is that across all phases of education in England the common denominator is that Black pupil/student intake is at or around 30% - one in three of the totals in all phases. Representation matters, and no more than in education. If we can't get this right in education in all three phases, the chances of an economically successful, socially cohesive UK cannot be achieved. It would seem sensible, then, to address this challenge simultaneously in all sectors, using similar mechanisms and interventions.

4. Our call to action

- 4.1 We proposed an agenda for real action. We convened a 'Crisis Summit' of stakeholders in July 2023 to set a Roadmap for Ethnic Equity in FE, for publication as soon as possible. By 'stakeholders' we mean Department for Education (DfE) officials, representatives of government agencies (e.g., Ofsted, FE Commissioner, IfATE); Black CEOs of colleges; CEOs of BLG affiliated colleges; sector membership organisations e.g., Association of Colleges (AoC), Sixth Form Colleges Association (SFCA), Education and Training Foundation (ETF); Trade Unions and student representative e.g., NUS and Leaders Unlocked & representatives of the recruitment agencies that work in the FE system.
- 4.2 This online meeting was intended to be action oriented, not a talking shop, nor an invitation to 'kick the can down the road'. Additionally, given the fact that we were approaching a General Election year, we should collectively work to secure a political consensus for the roadmap, so that there is no hiatus in implementation in 2024. In all, there were over 50 representatives from across the FE system, as well as representatives from the Schools and Higher Education sectors, where similar challenges prevail.
- 4.3 We were grateful to be able to draw on the work of Prof. David Mba, then Deputy Vice Chancellor of The University of the Arts, London, and his research team. Prof. Mba, a BLG member³, delivered a presentation⁴ on the Ethnic Representation Index (ERI) his team have produced, which clearly shows the attainment gap by ethnicity for every HEI in England and Wales and the correlating staff profile by ethnicity. This was hard work, requiring FOI letters to all institutions, but it gives the higher education sector all the information it needs to measure progress in closing attainment gaps and improving the ethnic representation of the workforce. The link to the ERI itself is here⁵. It is strongly recommended that you spend some time familiarising yourselves with this tool and reading the accompanying report.
- 4.4 Attendees at the Crisis Summit were impressed by the ERI and thought a similar exercise should be undertaken to produce an ERI for FE. Adopting this approach means we would have a tool that accurately and objectively measures student attainment gaps and workforce representation at the institutional level, and the ability to measure longitudinal changes.
- 4.5 It is vital to ensure that the focus for a representative workforce is not solely focused on colleges and institutions. System stakeholders should also be held to account in this regard, and annually report on the ethnic profile of their workforce by level, ethnicity pay gaps and steps they are taking to address any gaps. We know that stakeholder organisations perform poorly in this regard, and it would be inconsistent and unreasonable for them to escape the same levels of scrutiny and accountability that colleges are expected to accept.

³ Prof. Mba is now Vice Chancellor of Birmingham City University.

⁴ The link to Prof. Mba's presentation to the Crisis Summit is here: <https://swiy.co/eripresentation>

⁵ <https://swiy.co/eri>

5. We know what works.

- 5.1 What's clear is that what little that has been done by FE system leaders and stakeholders since 2010 has fallen far short of being adequate. The debate at the Crisis Summit quickly led to the consensus that we know what works – we have a template in the Report of the Commission for Black Staff in FE 'Challenging Racism: further education leading the way', 2003, which led to a precedent-setting FEFC-funded 50:50 Cohort of the Senior Leadership Development Programme and other successful interventions such as the Black Leadership Initiative (BLI) and the 'First Steps to Leadership' proposed and run by the Network for Black Professionals and funded by the Centre for Excellence in Leadership.
- 5.2 These and other success stories established a black talent pipeline that was abruptly ended by austerity. We can reinstate modernised and streamlined versions of these interventions without significant amounts of new money. We now need to set about repairing or rebuilding that black talent pipeline and do that sustainably.

6. Some Genuine Progress

- 6.1 At the AoC Conference 2023, members of the Ethnic Equity in FE Consultative Group presented a breakout session. The representatives comprised Anthony Bravo OBE, (Basingstoke CoT) Karen Redhead OBE (West London College) and Sara Russell (Peter Symonds College). They were supported by AoC Policy team members: David Holloway, Eddie Playfair and Jo Taylor, and the BLG was represented by Robin Landman OBE.
- 6.2 This group was able to make a compelling case for a concerted strategy to address these two key challenges, and the data presented by our AoC colleagues was compelling⁶. The data was supported by the three principals giving powerful personal testimonies setting out their reasons for taking up these challenges.
- 6.3 This Breakout session shows us that we need to take this approach out to the regional groupings in a rolling roadshow, using broadly the same format, so that we can unpack the national data by region, and through that, enable colleges to develop their own strategies in their localities.
- 6.4 In addition to this successful template being established, an exciting development was that the ETF chief executive, Katerina Kolyva committing to support the work of the EEE Campaign, and specifically undertaking to support the development of a Ethnic Representation Index for FE. In a subsequent meeting, Prof. David Mba also undertook to support the development of an ERI for FE, so we are well set for some sustainable progress to be made. Certainly, having the active support of AoC and ETF for this work gives us a strong chance to make some real progress.

⁶ <https://swiy.co/aocw24>

7. A lost opportunity or a fresh start?

- 7.1 The 4th anniversary of the George Floyd murder is imminent and provides a timely opportunity for a stocktake on what – if anything – has changed, and whether the specific red flags in our Open Letter were heeded and acted upon.
- 7.2 The persistent attainment gaps remain, and black students find themselves over-represented in colleges, but under-represented in apprenticeships and in the workforce, at a time of a profound post-pandemic labour shortage. There is no plausible explanation for this that does not feature at least some level of discriminatory practices by institutional 'gatekeepers' in colleges, other apprenticeship providers and employers.
- 7.3 Encouragingly, the response at institutional and organisation level has been far more positive. The 10 Points in our Open Letter formed the framework for the 10 Point Plan Diagnostic Toolkit co-designed by Amarjit Basi and Stella Mbubaegbu CBE, which we launched as an integral part of the BLG Affiliation proposition in February 2021. A growing number of colleges across the four nations have signed up and have embarked on their own bespoke anti-racist process, and we are working with the Welsh government on implementing their world-leading Anti-Racist Wales 2030 ambition. Affiliates have spread beyond FE colleges to incorporate private companies, charitable organisations, MAT schools and national organisations.
- 7.4 We know that this is a General Election year, and we also know that the Labour Party has made a public commitment to a new Race Equality Act which would impose a duty on public services to collect and report on staffing, pay and outcomes by ethnicity. While we know that legislation alone cannot eliminate systemic inequalities, a politically astute sector would wish to be 'ahead of the game', rather than adopting a wait and see posture. It would be a great outcome if FE was once again, quoting the title of the Black Staff in FE Report, 'leading the way'.
- 7.5 We now all collectively know the scale of the challenge: We must halt the decline in the number and proportion of Black CEOs; we must repair and strengthen the Black talent pipeline and increase representation in governance and staffing at all levels, and we must simultaneously tackle the persistent attainment gaps that prevent Black FE students reaching their potential at a cost to themselves, and depriving UK PLC of a significant part of the talent pool needed to fuel our economic recovery. We need to approach this challenge with a collective determination to do the right thing..

8. Ethnic Equity in Education Campaign

- 8.1 The Ethnic Equity in Education (EEE) Campaign is envisaged as a national campaign encompassing all three parts of education: Schools, Colleges and Higher Education providers. All three sub-sectors face the same, or very similar challenges when it comes to tackling workforce under-representation and attainment gaps by ethnicity. It makes logical sense, then, for us as education professionals to work together, share good practice and work collectively to better serve our students and all our staff. Doing so would offer clear benefits, including opportunities for a more seamless transition from one phase to another, when all sectors are pursuing similar interventions.
- 8.2 At the Black Leadership Group's Annual Conference 2024 we today launch the first phase of the EEE Campaign, the FE campaign. We aim to then launch the Higher Education phase, and finally complete the triad with schools in the future. We believe that this Campaign has the potential to galvanise a wide range of support from parents, business and industry, and the wider public sector, and generate a positive national debate and some real action.



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Contact Details

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