



**DCLG Tackling Race Inequalities:
A discussion document**

UNITE the Union Response

May 2009

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Introduction

This response is submitted by Unite, the union. Unite is Britain and Ireland's largest trade union with 2 million members across the private and public sectors. As the union's members work in a range of industries including manufacturing, financial services, print, media, construction, transport, local government, education, health and not for profit sectors, we have extensive experience of representing men and women workers who are faced with race discrimination.

The following evidence is complementary to the TUC response:

1) We welcome this discussion document especially at the time that many organisations do not make race equality a priority but in our experience racial inequality is still rife and effecting black, Asian and ethnic minority workers in their daily lives.

2) Trade unions play a very important role in tackling race discrimination and promoting race equality. We are therefore disappointed that there is trade unions are not included and referred to in the discussion document.

3) Whilst it is important to address multiple disadvantages, race equality is an over-riding agenda that must be a primary concern. Being black 'and' i.e. a woman exacerbates the discrimination that can be faced, but often it is the 'minority' aspect of being black that takes precedence.

4) We support TUC response regarding institutional racism and the need for public and private sector organisations to have strong measures to tackle race discrimination.

We recognise that the introduction of a Single Equality Duty in the Equality Bill provides the opportunity to extend this important positive measure beyond gender, race and disability to sexual orientation and age, as well as to strengthen the existing duties. We would be concerned, however, if the Equality Duty does not recognise the requirements of distinct areas of equality and the differences between them. It is important not to lose the focus necessary for addressing issues specific to each area of equality through over-general commitments rather than specific measures to address particular barriers.

The Duty should also include issues of multiple discrimination and the inter-relationship between areas of equality - ensuring for example, discrimination against black, Asian and ethnic minority women is covered.

The role of trade unions in supporting the implementation of the Single Equality Duty, which is currently included in the Race Equality Duty needs to be part of the new Duty. Trade union shop stewards, safety reps, union learning reps and union equality representatives can all have experience of tackling discrimination and promoting equality and involvement of under-represented sections of the workforce, which is essential if the duty is to be effective, is to make a difference, and is to win support across all in the workplace.

We strongly support the call to strengthen the duty for implementation, including monitoring action holding the authority to account, and requiring a written equality scheme and the measurement of outcomes through Equality Impact Assessments for example, as the way forward. Most importantly, as our experience shows, without real enforcement, the single duty can amount to yet another “paper exercise”.

We believe that procurement is key to ensuring that poor practice in the private sector cannot be used to undermine good practice introduced in the public sector in response to the Equality Duty, and that equality should be taken into account in all public functions. The importance of addressing the responsibilities in the private sector is clearly stated in the government’s pamphlet “Buy and make a difference”. This includes the opportunity to ensure private and voluntary sector organisations adhere to and promote equality when they are carrying out public functions, as well as to award a contract specifically to eg a black business or a women’s project in a way that is not in conflict with the requirements of EU law.

We have been consistently calling for the duty on the public sector to be extended to the private sector. The government should recognise the importance of using the Equality Bill as an opportunity to extend to the private sector the requirement to promote equality and prevent discrimination. We have a great deal of experience promoting equality in the private sector with employers of a range of sizes, including eg British Airways, Ford Motor Company, J Sainsbury, BAA, London Buses, English Church Housing Group, Ineos, TNT, Happy Computers, Associated British Ports, Cadbury, Stagecoach. Our experience is that a clear commitment to promoting equality and to establishing procedures for implementing this commitment is beneficial to all aspects of the workplace. Examples??? Additionally, the financial cost of discrimination to individual employers and to the whole economy, as well as the savings from promoting equality have been calculated in a range of areas eg Women & Work Commission, Boots plc.

Additionally, our experience of representing members who are employed through private sector agencies leads us to make a very strong case for them to be specifically included in the Equality Bill. This is particularly important as a potential source of discrimination faced by black, Asian and ethnic minority workers. Examples???

Lack of progression, especially for black women is due to race discrimination and stereotyping of black, Asian and ethnic minority (BAEM) women. Also lack of training although when many BAEM women are over qualified and fully trained and still are not promoted it is further evidence of discrimination.

The “ethnic penalty” is recognised by the government which shows that race discrimination must be a priority and be recognised as a disadvantage. There is also an added disadvantage for BAEM women, disabled, young and older workers.

5) We are concerned that community cohesion has become synonymous with race and is replacing the promotion of race equality. We believe it is the discrimination that is a barrier to cohesion and therefore elimination of racial discrimination is key to a fair society and a cohesive community. Government and communities have to take responsibility and action on race equality. The priority areas for Government are to not only put the onus on Black people to ‘fit in’, but to put in place resources and other support to recognise that due to discrimination, many BAEM people do not feel part of their community and to make that the starting point.

Everyone in the community has a responsibility have a say and this needs to be made easier. Also, more work is needed on opportunities to bring communities together, i.e. resources for ‘Get to know your Neighbours Day’.

6) The government has a vital role to play in tackling race discrimination and promoting race equality. In order to achieve race equality we must ensure that employers monitor and take action to increase opportunities for BAEM workers and for stronger enforcement of legislation.

7) We have organised many migrant workers into our union and have been negotiating workplace agreements ensuring equal rights for migrant workers. We believe that regularisation of undocumented workers is vital to provide opportunities. The current Agency Workers Directive affects many of our members who work for agencies. We believe that providing equal treatment to all agency workers will address discrimination faced by migrant workers, many of whom are our members.

Adequate funding for education initiatives such free access to English language courses (ESoL) designed to integrate migrant workers and their families into our society while respecting and valuing their own cultural identity, and support for the campaign against the proposed withdrawal of free ESoL for migrants.