



The Prince's  
Responsible  
Business Network



# LET'S TALK ABOUT RACE

A pocket guide to getting conversations started



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# FOREWORD:

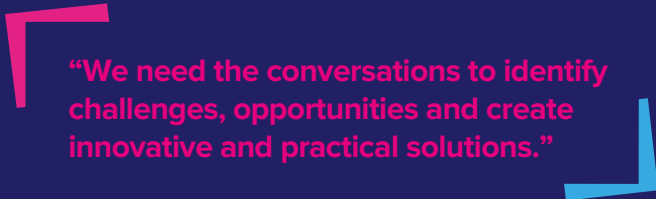
## Sandra Kerr CBE



I am delighted to be updating this guide because of the rapidly changing pace of language around race inclusion in the UK. This guide was based on evidence from our Race at Work survey in 2015 and at that time the evidence was clear that BAME was an acceptable terminology for talking about race, but more importantly, 30% of people said they really didn't mind what terminology was used.

We have run the Race at Work survey again in 2018, and in 2021 we established and expanded the Race at Work Charter, and the evidence around preferred terminology is clear after 9,121 respondents shared their views with us. 70% of people in the UK from a Black background prefer to be called Black. 64% of Asian people in the UK prefer to be called Asian and 49% of Mixed Race people in the UK prefer to be called Mixed Race and 29% prefer Mixed Heritage. People from other diverse ethnic backgrounds are more likely to opt for descriptions like Other ethnic groups, ethnically diverse, ethnic minority or not mind. Only 6% of all respondents said people of colour was their preference.

I have updated this guide to reflect the change in terminology preferences, as I don't want that to get in the way of having an interesting dialogue with people about ethnicity and cultural heritage. In our Race at Work 2021 survey, only 41% of employees said that their employers were comfortable talking about race. I want to continue to support employers to sign the Race at Work Charter, and I want workplaces to be able to have conversations about race and ensure they are addressing disparities as they come to light and are transparent about the actions that they are taking. And if employers need to accelerate action differently for ethnic groups, they have the evidence to demonstrate why this is the case and can comfortably talk about it.



**“We need the conversations to identify challenges, opportunities and create innovative and practical solutions.”**

One of the key findings from Business in the Community’s Race at Work 2015 survey of 24,457 people, the survey in 2018 of 24,310 people and the 2021 survey of 24,630 people was that employees from all ethnicities in the workplace said that their employers were not comfortable talking about race. Each survey found that conversations around age, gender and sexuality are much easier to have than conversations about race. I then began conversations with people from many different racial backgrounds about their experiences of talking about race. I also asked them to share what they think some of the barriers are and what some of the solutions might be.

This pocket guide is a result of some of those conversations as well as my personal views on this subject. Recommendations from the government sponsored [McGregor-Smith Review: Race in the workplace \(2017\)](#)<sup>1</sup> said that a guide should be produced for talking about race. My hope is that this guide will help to

get Britain talking about race and ethnicity, discrimination, diversity and inclusion in an environment of ‘uncomfortable confidence and respect’ and spark many new conversations which would not have happened otherwise.

They say that courage is feeling the fear and doing it anyway. I want this booklet to help people to feel the discomfort and start the conversations anyway. It is pocket-sized because it’s not designed to cover every possible scenario that you may encounter or want to discuss. My best hope is that it’s an effective icebreaker and conversation starter which will enable leaders, employers and policy makers to openly discuss issues of race within their organisations.

Thank you to all the contributors who helped me to create this guide by sharing your stories with me.

# INTRODUCTION:

Let's talk about race

**Why  
does  
talking  
about  
race in  
the UK  
matter?**

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**£24 BILLION  
PER YEAR**

This will be the benefit and impact on the economy if we tackle all the racial disparities in the UK

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**Getting race equality right in the UK is worth £24bn per year to the UK economy<sup>2</sup> – 1.3% of GDP.**

Employers with more diverse teams also have 36% better financial results<sup>3</sup>. Group-think policy ideas are ineffective and very costly to review and put right. One in four children in primary and secondary education in the UK are from a Black, Asian, Mixed Race and other ethnically diverse background; that is the future talent pipeline for the UK. One in eight in the working age population are from a Black, Asian, Mixed Race and other ethnically diverse background, yet only one in 10 are in the workplace.

When we look at senior levels in the private and public sector, Black, Asian, Mixed Race and other ethnically diverse representation is one in 16. This pyramid needs to be squared so that there are role models across all industries and sectors to inspire the next generation of talent.

There are persistent unemployment rate gaps, with some ethnic minority groups experiencing unemployment rates which are twice as high as their White counterparts. We know that disparities in pay, progression and

access to senior roles and executive and board level opportunities persist.

**We need to identify where action is needed without avoiding the ‘elephant in the room’**, which is often, ‘How come there are no Black people in this senior team or the team just below it?’ Or ‘Why are all the people shortlisted for this senior promotion opportunity White?’



# ACTION

## for Employers

### CREATE A STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN FOR YOUR ORGANISATION

#### **Encourage the promotion of dialogues and conversation about the nine protected characteristics**

in the equality legislation. This will signal to the organisation that conversations about race are important and encouraged. Questions for debate might include: 'How do you transform talk into action?'; 'How can the actions that are agreed be owned by leaders and individuals across the organisation?'; 'What exactly is unconscious bias?'; or 'Are there areas of the business where we

should set targets?' Encourage everyone to share a bit about their family background at roundtables, so that everyone who comes to the table comes ready to share. This is a great opportunity to find common experiences as well as gain insight and appreciate difference.

**Demonstrate your organisation's commitment to an inclusive workplace**

where employees can progress and use their experiences and talents regardless of their ethnicity. Share the data that you have if there is any. If not, review the UK demographic data and set some aspirational goals to focus on what your workforce should look like to ensure you have access to the widest pool of talent available. (There is great demographic data available on the Government's Ethnicity Facts and Figures website). Maximise the opportunity to reflect and connect to your customers, clients, communities, suppliers and contractors. Embark together as an organisation on a campaign to collect better data – you may as well collect data on all the other protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010 whilst you are doing this and get all your employee data up to date.

## **INCLUDE HAVING CONVERSATIONS AND DIALOGUE WITHIN THE ACTION PLAN**



## **TWO-WAY MENTORING MODELS (SUCH AS REVERSE MENTORING, RECIPROCAL MENTORING AND MUTUAL MENTORING)...**

**...provide a perfect opportunity  
to build relationships and rapport**

and learn more about someone with a different cultural heritage or background at the same time. Leaders can also gain some valuable insight from someone from a Black, Asian, Mixed Race and other ethnically diverse background's experience, including different perspectives on the organisation that they, as senior leaders, have already successfully navigated. Both parties can benefit from a reciprocal mentoring relationship. The leader gains useful insight into the perspective and experiences of Black, Asian, Mixed Race and other ethnically diverse people in the workplace and the Black, Asian, Mixed Race and other ethnically diverse person can draw on the experience of a senior leader who has already navigated a successful career.

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**LEARN MORE  
ABOUT SOMEONE  
WITH DIFFERENT  
CULTURAL  
HERITAGE OR  
BACKGROUND**

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## USE RESEARCH REPORTS AND EMPLOYEE DATA

**Employers need to use evidence from research findings**, their own employee data and employee survey findings to create a context for conversations. As you talk, you can identify where there are disparities, agree action to facilitate improvements and close any performance gaps. Making data collection routine can also help to address the stigma and fear of self-reporting.

## FOR EMPLOYERS WHO LEAD SERVICE INDUSTRY ORGANISATIONS (WITH CLIENT FACING ASPECTS OF THEIR BUSINESS)

**Employees may need different types of support around talking about race.** They may work with clients or customers who express racist views about whom they want to serve them or care for them. We strengthened the Race at Work Charter commitment three – zero tolerance on bullying and harassment - to include customers and clients. In the Race at Work 2021

survey, we found evidence that there was an increase in employees saying that they had experienced bullying and harassment from customers, contractors and service users. Having a clear policy and dialogues to discuss appropriate responses to such behaviour can ensure that employees feel supported by the organisation, whilst at the same time deliver great customer service. There are also teachers working with student groups who may need guidance about speaking with Black, Asian, Mixed Race and other ethnically diverse students or parents. These employers should embed a commitment to create discussion groups and forums to develop good practice and share examples of what works well.

# SO LET'S GET TALKING

## Contextualise the conversation

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### COME TO THE CONVERSATION WITH CURIOSITY

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### ESTABLISH THE IMPORTANCE OF RESPECT FROM ALL PARTIES

**No-one knows everything there is to know about race and ethnicity**, and asking questions is how we all learn more. Before you ask, consider if your question has relevance. What is the context in which you are asking the question? What do you really want to know? Why do you want to know? How will the information help? Share the answer to these questions when you are framing questions. Transparency, openness and respect builds trust and rapport.

**Seek to build rapport and use common courtesy.** Our Race to Progress survey (2011) highlighted that all employees wanted respect, regardless of their ethnicity. All parties should approach the conversation respectfully with genuine curiosity.

When we surveyed the Black, Asian, Mixed Race and other ethnically diverse employees as part of the Race at Work 2021 survey, there were more than 9,000 responses. We asked them what terminology on race was preferred. It is very important to note that more than one in ten people said they don't mind what terminology you use.

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## JUST PICK A 'TERMINOLOGY' AND START



Here are the results when we asked about terminology. 'In life which of the following, if any, best describe how you would like to be referred to?'

## “IS IT OK TO SAY BLACK?”

Our survey returned the following results:

So, using any of these terminologies are going to be OK with one in three people. This also opens up the opportunity to survey your organisation and find out which terminology everyone prefers. If you think about it, you only really need a terminology for public speaking or written narrative. You don't even have to pick one of these; you can use them both interchangeably as I often do, in presentations and conversations.

**In the Race at Work 2021 survey, 9121 people answered the question:**

- **70%** of people in the UK from a Black background prefer to be called Black.
- **64%** of Asian people in the UK prefer to be called Asian.
- **49%** of Mixed Race people in the UK prefer to be called Mixed Race and **29%** prefer Mixed Heritage.
- People from other diverse ethnic backgrounds are more likely to opt for descriptions like Other ethnic group, ethnically diverse, ethnic minority or not mind.
- Only **6%** of all respondents said people of colour was their preference.



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## **“THERE IS ONLY ONE RACE, THE HUMAN RACE”**

### **What is the true definition of race?**

Is it more about colour, people and what people look like? What is multiculturalism? What about Asian people; is there a preference there for terminology? Mixed Race or Mixed Heritage? You can use the findings from our Race at Work survey, or you could survey your own employees to find out what their ‘preferred’ words are and, based on the evidence, use those for your employer narrative and presentations. Remember, everyone has an ethnicity, including White people. In England and Wales, people from the White ethnic group are the majority of the population (81.7%) as opposed to everyone else who are therefore in the minority and thus make up the ethnic minority population which is 18.3% in England and Wales from the 2021 census<sup>4</sup>.

**Conducting your own employee survey with your employee network group gives everyone permission to use agreed terminology** based on evidence and everyone is aware that ‘this is

the language our business uses’. You can also search on the internet, look in the dictionary and add this insight to discussions around what you find out during your conversations.

**Is this really the right time or place to start a conversation about race with an individual?** Is there a chance that you will become distracted or not be able to actively listen to the answers or seek clarity with some follow up questions? If the answer is yes, wait for another time.

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## **“CHOOSE YOUR MOMENT. A BIG PUBLIC MEETING PROBABLY ISN’T IT”**

# EVERYONE CAN SHARE

## information on ancestry and heritage

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**“NOBODY LIKES TO BE PUT ON THE SPOT”**

**Unless you are a gameshow contestant, most of us don't like being put on the spot.** And this is even more likely to be the case when it comes to talking about race. If there is a room full of people or some large meeting, don't ask a question about race loudly so that others overhear unless you have asked the person if it's OK to do so before the meeting.

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**“A GLOBAL EXPERT ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES? UMM, I DON'T THINK SO”**

**Don't expect people to be an expert on world events just because they reveal that their cultural heritage is linked in some way.** Only expect them to be as up to date as you are, if at all. Why not ask them if they have ever visited their family's country of origin and ask if they still have family living abroad? This could also spin off into conversations about second languages and all sorts of things that people from all backgrounds talk about, be it from family heritage or studying at school or university. Remember, many people whose

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## **“I DO NOT SPEAK FOR EVERY BLACK, ASIAN, MIXED RACE AND OTHER ETHNICALLY DIVERSE PERSON. I CAN ONLY SPEAK FOR MYSELF”**

parents, grandparents or great-grandparents migrated here from outside of the UK may have never visited the country of some of their ancestors.

**This is something I say continually. Individuals can only speak from their own experience.** It's important to not think they are speaking for everyone from a similar ethnic origin in the UK. And as to what is happening with similar ethnic groups abroad? See the global expert paragraph above. We are all individuals and can only speak for ourselves, not an entire ethnicity, gender or age group.



# RESPECT THE LIVED EXPERIENCE



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## LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND

**Don't dismiss or even attempt to explain away someone's lived experience.** Check for clarity of what you have heard or play it back to confirm understanding. This isn't a competition regarding who has had the most pain or discrimination. Appreciate and acknowledge what you hear, even if you don't relate to the experience that has been shared or don't feel that you really 'get it'. It's the individual's experience - they have lived it, so accept what you hear on that basis.

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**WE ARE ALL  
INDIVIDUALS  
AND CAN ONLY  
SPEAK FOR  
OURSELVES**



I know courtesy shouldn't have to be mentioned here but it's important that those sharing and those listening are polite – 'thanks for sharing' and 'thank you for asking' are just two suggestions.

## GO TO CULTURAL AWARENESS DAYS WHEN YOU CAN

These events provide a great opportunity to learn about diverse communities and individuals. As the purpose of these events tends to be to educate and inform, it has to be one of the best places to go to ask questions - so go along and ask away.



# LET'S REDUCE THE CHANCES OF CAUSING OFFENCE

Some things best avoided...

## PLEASE DON'T ASK WOMEN WHAT THEY ARE WEARING UNDER THEIR RELIGIOUS DRESS

From multiple conversations in research for this handbook this seems to be a question sometimes asked of women who wear

**religious dress.** In fact, don't ask anyone – man or woman! And if you missed the opportunity in primary school to touch a black girl's hair, it's a bit late to do it now. There are of course exceptions to the above for hairdressers, or asking a friend for permission to do so (with the understanding that 'no' is an acceptable response).



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## **PLEASE AVOID THE 'WHERE DO YOU COME FROM? NO, WHERE ARE YOU REALLY FROM?' QUESTIONS**

**Why not offer up some insight on your own cultural heritage first?** Or you could simply ask 'What country does your family originate from?' and follow this up with where your own family originate from. This sets a pattern for the depth of response you're looking for, rather than the awkward situation of hearing about where someone lives right now..... when you are really interested in their diverse racial background.

I appreciate that no offence is meant by this question. However, asking individuals who were born here 'Where do you really come from?' and whose parents and grandparents were born here where they really come from, implies they don't come from here and are not British if they are not White. To find out more about this, look up micro-aggressions which I am not covering here as this is only a pocket guide.

# HAVE FUN:

## A message from the Author

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### “I DON’T SEE COLOUR”

**‘I don’t see colour, I just see character, skills, talent....’** I have heard people from all backgrounds say this at different times. If you can see that the grass is green and the sky is blue, you can see colour. So, don’t bother to say that – it’s not true and adds nothing to a conversation about race.



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### “THIS WHOLE AGENDA JUST NEEDS TO BE COLOUR BLIND”

**‘The whole agenda just needs to be colour blind’.** Why, when we won’t even wear clothing in colours that we don’t like? See the paragraph above. Colour makes life interesting. Let’s acknowledge it, embrace it and enjoy it but do not diminish it or pretend it doesn’t exist when we all know that it does.



Have fun. It doesn't have to be an uncomfortable, stilted conversation and will be a richer and much more interesting one if everyone in the conversation is sharing information about themselves during the discussion. I have smiled to myself as I have written some of this pocket guide, and I am not saying 'don't try this at home.' Laughing together about things is OK too.



# FINAL TIPS

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**WHY NOT USE THIS  
GUIDE TO START A  
CONVERSATION?**

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**SHARE WHAT YOU  
HAVE LEARNED  
FROM PREVIOUS  
CONVERSATIONS  
TO SPARK A NEW  
CONVERSATION**



**Other resources that can help  
you to start a conversation  
include:**

[\*Race at Work 2021\*](#)

[\*Race at Work Charter\*](#)

[\*https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.  
service.gov.uk\*](https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk)

**Why not use this guide to start a conversation?** Even if it is to say that it is too simplistic or doesn't go far enough. If it starts a new conversation it is fulfilling its purpose. Please go online for more complexity - this is just an ice breaker guide. You can use this pocket guide as the basis for your own guide tailored to your own organisation.

**Share what you have learned from previous conversations to spark a new conversation.** It's a great opportunity to then ask, 'Is this something that you have experienced?' And offer up any experiences that you may have had. Why not use this small pocket guide as a conversation topic? Ask, "Have you seen that new updated booklet on Let's talk about Race? What do you think? No, you haven't seen it? Let me show you my copy. I'd love to have a coffee and discuss it with you."

**SO WHAT ARE YOU  
WAITING FOR?  
LET'S GET TALKING.**





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## Endnotes

- 1 Race In The Workplace, McGregor-Smith Review, 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/race-in-the-workplace-the-mcgregor-smith-review>
- 2 Race In The Workplace, McGregor-Smith Review, 2017
- 3 Diversity Wins, McKinsey, 2020, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters>
- 4 Census briefing, 2022, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/bulletins/ethnicgroupenglandandwales/census2021>

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Please give us your [feedback](#)

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**Chairman:** Gavin Patterson

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