

# PERSONNEL TODAY

## Boris Johnson promises commission on race inequality

By Adam McCulloch on 15 Jun 2020 in Unconscious bias, Ethnicity, Equality & diversity, Latest News, Race discrimination



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**Prime minister Boris Johnson has responded to two weeks of anti-racism protests by promising a commission to address inequality in the UK. But the plan has faced criticism from those who say action, not a further review, is needed.**

Writing in the Telegraph, Johnson said the “substance was much more important than the symbols”. He criticised those who would “edit or Photoshop the entire cultural landscape” and wrote it would be more cheerful to erect new statues, including more of people of colour and from ethnic minorities.

Johnson wrote that “no one who cares about this country” could ignore the anti-racist protests sparked by the killing of George Floyd and acknowledged the growing success of BAME people in the workplace and academically.

According to the BBC the new commission would be run out of the Cabinet Office and report to the Prime Minister, and it would be asked to finish its work by Christmas.

A chair has not yet been identified but the commission will be overseen by equalities minister Kemi Badenoch, with independent members also on the panel.

Discrimination

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The announcement of a commission came under fire from Labour, who wanted swifter action. Shadow secretary of state for justice and shadow lord chancellor David Lammy told BBC Radio 4 this morning that the article appeared to have been written on the “back of a fag packet yesterday to assuage the Black Lives Matter protest”.

He said had there had already been plenty of reviews and a backlog of measures that needed to be implemented.

Lammy told the BBC: “In the [David Cameron-commissioned] Lammy review I made 35 recommendations – implement them. There are 110 recommendations in Elish Angiolini’s review of deaths in police custody – implement them. There are 30 recommendations in the Home Office [Lessons Learned] Wendy Williams review into the Windrush scandal – implement them. Twenty-six recommendations were made in the [Baroness McGregor report on workplace discrimination](#) – implement them.”

“It feels like we’re going around in circles,” Lammy said, adding that he was encouraged by the growing academic and professional success of the BAME community. But, “Yet again we seem to want figures and data but not action. The Prime Minister has buried his article behind the paywall in the Telegraph amid loads more stuff about Churchill. You’re the Prime Minister, do something!”

Frances O’Grady, TUC general secretary, voiced similar sentiments. She told The Independent: “The evidence has been out there for years. Isn’t it time that the government took some action to ensure that black and ethnic minority workers got a fair chance in life, and fair treatment at work? There’s plenty that they could do. I’m not sure how many more reports they need.”

Johnson’s article referred to “a sense of discrimination and victimisation” among the BAME community. This, said Marsha de Cordova, the shadow women and equalities secretary, was condescending.

Lord Woolley, the founder of Operation Black Vote and chair of the government’s Race Disparity Unit, said he was “pleased that our PM has clearly acknowledged the deep-seated and persistent racial inequality in education, health and the criminal justice system”.


But he added: “The use of the word victimisation is an unnecessary distraction and to some will be seen as unhelpful.

Conservative Party candidate for the 2021 London mayoral election Shaun Bailey told the BBC that changing the law wouldn’t change how people interacted in the workplace. He said, defending the delay involved in forming a commission: “Lots of these things take time to change. We really need to change systems.”


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"We know the scale of the problems we face to tackle the entrenched racial inequality in our country. It is not new. Now is the time for urgent action." [@EHRCCChair](#) on the announcement of The Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities.

[orlo.uk/q4Mmw](https://orlo.uk/q4Mmw)

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Referring to the plan for a commission Equality and Human Rights Commission's chair David Isaac told this morning's Westminster Employment Forum policy conference, BAME equality in the workplace: "We are very supportive of the need for a joined up strategy in relation to dealing with entrenched issues for BAME individuals in this country and addressing issues in the workplace is one of the key areas where we think a huge amount of work has been done, but where we need particular action."

Meanwhile a new Ipsos Mori poll has revealed growing optimism about the erosion of racism in the UK. Eighty-four per cent strongly disagreed with the statement "you have to be white to be truly British", up from 55% a decade ago. And when asked if they were optimistic the UK would be more tolerant and diverse in 10 years' time, two thirds said they were, up from half in 2009.

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