



# Getting in and getting on

Unlocking the potential of young Black people in the workplace



**EY**

Building a better  
working world



**EY Foundation**

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# Foreword



**Maryanne Matthews**  
Chief Executive,  
EY Foundation

## Taking action together

Our independent survey of over 1,000 young Black people from across the UK reveals an unacceptable yet sadly familiar picture – despite a strong desire to succeed, young Black people continue to be denied the opportunities open to others. Not only in terms of accessing jobs, but beforehand at school and again when they enter the workplace, where many young Black people feel that the way promotions are awarded, and how work is allocated can limit their progression.



**Hywel Ball**  
EY UK Chair

## Time for a step change

Our findings suggest that incremental change is not going to be enough: a step change in action is needed and it must be driven by employers.

As a major UK employer, EY and the EY Foundation (an independent charity launched by EY in 2014 to help young people from low-income backgrounds into work), have publicly made a series of commitments to anti-racism backed by clear targets. However, we are aware that our organisations are just a small part of the picture, so we continue to engage with other employers and institutions, such as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), with the aim of tackling this injustice together. We hope that our recommendations at the end of this report can help all employers to deliver a better future for young Black people.

## Our vision for a fairer future

At EY Foundation, our mission is to reduce the barriers to work that many young people face, supporting them to successfully transition into higher education, employment or self-employment. Although we do not place an explicit focus on ethnicity, 83% of the young people we supported in our last reporting year came from a non-white background and 31% were from a Black background.

Across EY, our purpose is *Building a better working world* – and it's abundantly clear that we are not going to be able to do that without addressing racial inequality. In fact, the business case and moral imperative are aligned. It is the right thing to do in terms of addressing inequality, and because a diverse business, which has an inclusive culture, also drives better decision making, stimulates innovation, increases organisational agility and strengthens resilience to disruption.

## Making a difference

We do not underestimate the challenge that lies ahead, nor do we believe that, even with the policies and procedures that we recommend in this report, the job will be done. It will take concerted individual, corporate and collaborative action, but perhaps most of all, it will require listening – to the voices you will hear in this report and in your own workplace. They are telling us that not being racist is not enough – we must be actively anti-racist in order to make a difference.



**Ryan Makuku**  
EY Foundation Youth  
Advisory Board member

## Employers must do better

I took part in the EY Foundation's Smart Futures programme in 2014 and that one experience changed my life. Now as a member of the Foundation's Youth Advisory Board, I support the charity's work to help ensure young Black people can also access the opportunities I've been afforded.

My view is that this report's findings are far from surprising as, unfortunately, they tell the real story and thoughts of many young Black people in the UK. This should send a simple message to employers – do better. Do better to impact the communities you operate in. Do better in enabling social mobility. Do better in changing lives.

I encourage all employers to take a stance in supporting the Black community, in the hope that such findings in years and generations to come become few and far between.

## About this report

This research was jointly commissioned by EY and EY Foundation as part of their anti-racism commitments\* to better understand the employment barriers facing young Black people. It is based on an independent, third-party survey by research agency Savanta ComRes of 1,074 young Black people, aged 16-30, working in organisations across the UK or currently in education, which was carried out between November and December 2020. The data was weighted by gender, age and UK country to be representative of young Black people in the UK. The insight gained from the research will help to direct and support the work at EY and EY Foundation, in addition to providing important insight for employers more broadly.

\*To find out more about our anti-racism race commitments, please visit the dedicated [EY](#) and [EY Foundation](#) web pages.

# Our findings

From getting into the workplace to getting on within it, young Black people face barriers to success.

## Starting with high aspirations

**92%** of young Black people have firm career goals and believe that they will achieve them.

Our survey shows that young Black people are ambitious and confident. Young Black women are more interested in following a particular profession (30% of women compared to 15% men) whilst young Black men are driven more by seniority, success and reaching the top of their chosen career (23% of men compared to 16% of women).

Those from a low-income background are less likely to expect to achieve the qualifications they need to pursue their career goals, with only 63% of young Black people in low-income groups saying that they left school with the qualifications they needed.

## Barriers to progression at school

**37%** of young Black people in a job say that their ethnicity hindered their ability to progress at school.

Poor careers advice (24%), a lack of role models (25%) and a lack of connections to colleges or universities (16%) were identified as being the key barriers to success at school. Over a quarter (27%) of respondents believed that racial discrimination affected their ability to progress at school, rising to 30% for those in a job.

The impact of the pandemic is also concerning, with 50% of those in education believing that COVID-19 and remote learning has impacted their ability to progress at school. Nearly 3 in 10 (29%) of those at school believe that the pandemic has created mental or physical health difficulties, presenting an additional barrier for pupils.

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When we aspire for more, we're often discouraged and made to feel as if we're not good enough compared to white counterparts.

Survey respondent verbatim comment

“

People either expect less of you or you have to be perfect to be seen to be as good as everyone else.

Survey respondent verbatim comment



“

There's unconscious bias in the recruitment process and (there aren't) sufficient role models to aspire to.

Survey respondent  
verbatim comment

“

Usually I am profiled on my looks because I am not the typical sort of person that would be found in the Consulting industry.

Survey respondent  
verbatim comment

## Getting in – the sector story

Only **13%** of young Black people believe that their ethnicity does not present any barrier to entry.

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A large majority of young Black people perceive that there are barriers to entry in employment sectors due to their ethnicity. However, some sectors are seen to be more difficult to enter than others. Law (28% of respondents) and Accounting, Banking and Finance (27%), Business Consulting and Law Enforcement (17%) will need to work harder to attract young Black people into careers. In addition, female respondents were more likely to see barriers in pursuing careers in these sectors than their male counterparts.

## Racism in the workplace

**24%** of young Black people say that they have experienced racism at work.

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That headline figure of 24% rises to 55% when young Black people are engaging with customers, clients and others external to the company. This is doubly problematic because external relationships are the most challenging to address through internal policies and practices.

Racism is experienced through a range of situations at work. Some report not being taken seriously (30%), with limited opportunities offered to progress (29%), being treated differently and having to work harder than their white colleagues (with 26% of young Black people saying that they feel they are perceived as not coming from the right background).

“

There aren't enough resources to encourage us that we achieve more, nor is there enough representation to show us that we'd be accepted and made comfortable.

Survey respondent  
verbatim comment

“

Individuals who tend to be well connected within the company are promoted.

Survey respondent  
verbatim comment

## Addressing the challenges – employer policies and practices

**17%** say their employer has no policies in place to support Black employees.

Those in a job state that their employers do have some policies and practices in place to support Black employees, with anti-discrimination training (28%) and diversity and inclusion committees or champions (27%) heading the list. Yet 17% of respondents say that none of the policies or practices options mentioned in the survey are available in their workplace and 15% don't know if their company has any policies that support Black people.

These figures disguise a big gender divide, with 25% of women saying there are no such policies in their workplace, compared to just 9% of men. Women are also more confident about suggesting policy changes in the workplace.

## Getting on – promotion and progression at work

**26%** believe their ethnicity was the main barrier to promotion.

According to young Black people in a job, their ethnicity (26%) has had the greatest negative impact on their ability to gain promotion and progress their career. Many young Black people who apply for a promotion do not receive feedback or are not interviewed by an ethnically diverse panel, with women the least likely to receive either. Of those that were promoted, 72% of men received feedback compared to 49% of women. Young Black men are more likely to call out tough competition as being a barrier, whilst women are less likely to be focused on reaching the top of their respective professions.

## Our findings



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Sometimes interviews create a pressure to fit the mould of a correct candidate — a specific way of dressing and a specific way to carry yourself that doesn't allow you to be you.

Survey respondent  
verbatim comment

## Bringing down the barriers – preferred strategies

Only **36%** think that targets for Black representation should be put in place for businesses.

Nearly half (46%) of young Black people think that the promotion of Black employees to senior roles should be encouraged to support recruitment and progression in the workplace. However, fewer (36%) think that there should be targets put in place for Black representation. Reaching out to schools and universities to encourage Black students to apply attracted the support of 43% of respondents. Of those businesses that our respondents say do have measures in place to support the recruitment and progression of Black employees, 50% have policies to reduce racism and 46% to provide equal access to higher roles.



# Summary

We have distilled our independent survey results into six key conclusions.

1

**Young Black people are ambitious**, with many having clear career goals and expressing confidence in achieving them. However, recent school leavers say they lacked connection with universities and were given poor careers advice.

2

**Social background is an additional barrier**, with our research suggesting that those in education from a low-income background are less confident that they are on track to achieve qualifications.

3

**Some sectors are harder to enter**. Law and Accounting, Banking and Finance and Business Consulting are the sectors in which young Black people believe that they are most likely to face barriers to entry due to their ethnicity.

4

**Many young Black people experience workplace racism**, from recruitment to promotion and the way work is allocated. Racism from clients, customers and suppliers was the highest reported workplace situation, which is more challenging to address as the perpetrator is not part of the business or organisation.

5

**Young Black women are more likely to experience workplace and sector barriers**, but less likely to receive feedback when applying for promotion or benefit from supportive policies in the workplace.

6

**More progress is needed**, even though most workplaces are reported to have at least some diversity and inclusion practices or measures in place.



# Taking action

Our survey findings make it clear that concerted action is required by employers across all industries. Here we outline some of the ways to achieve that.



## Improve access

Employers must work together to enable Black young people to understand the career opportunities open to them by the end of year 7 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and the end of year S1 in Scotland.

### Actions for employers

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- ▶ Develop a career discovery programme to help young people identify their strengths, discover their passions, set a career path, and find their purpose. This can be done through events, education offerings, and digital and social engagement.
- ▶ Use technology to engage with the target audience – gamification of different roles so that young people can role play and understand the main functions of a job, also day/week in the life in a job.
- ▶ School visits, website accessibility, relevant messages and messengers, creatively tailored to age group preferences (e.g., share stories of the journey young people have taken from different backgrounds).

## What we're doing at EY and EY Foundation

In collaboration with EY and a range of other organisations, the EY Foundation is piloting a new Professional Services Smart Futures Programme. It is designed to help young people living in poverty across the UK access careers in professional services and will specifically encourage Black young people to apply. Participants will gain a broader understanding of what is expected as part of the recruitment process for professional services firms. This includes a Maths Mindset coaching module which helps prepare young people to take (and pass) numerical reasoning tests. EY and EY Foundation also work together to deliver employability workshops in schools, giving young people access to diverse role models and guidance about different career pathways.

## EY Futures

EY has committed to offering at least 30% of its work experience places to young Black people on the EY Foundation Smart Futures/Our Future programmes for the next five years, starting in 2021. We will set ourselves a target to offer entry into EY school leaver pathways to at least 30% of Black young alumni of the [EY Foundation] Smart Futures/Our Future programmes for the next five years.

## Increase inclusion

Employers must take action and measure outcomes to make sure that they are fully inclusive of young Black people.

### Actions for employers

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- ▶ Use data from across the employee lifecycle to compare the outcomes of Black employees to other groups, with Black and ethnicity pay gaps publicly reported.
- ▶ A much greater focus should be placed on building an inclusive culture that is conducive to retaining talent. Explain the actions in place to identify, understand and then remove barriers for Black candidates and employees.
- ▶ Induction for all employees to include making a commitment to equality and anti-racism, including examples of what that looks like in practice and the consequences of racism.
- ▶ Implement blind recruitment where appropriate. Start by deciding the personally identifiable information you want to omit, implement a system to remove the identifiable information, and educate interviewers and hiring managers on understanding and mitigating unconscious bias in the interview process.
- ▶ Work with Black employees or networks to establish sponsorship, mentoring and coaching initiatives that supplement mainstream talent development activity.
- ▶ Responsibility and accountability should remain with the business leadership and be embedded in core business reporting.

## What we're doing at EY and EY Foundation

In 2020, EY and EY Foundation expanded our analysis of ethnic minority as a single group to the outcomes by Black, Asian, Chinese, Mixed, White, Other (our data classification sets). This enables us to take focused and meaningful actions to improve outcomes. For example, a concerted campaign in EY ensured there was a proportional distribution of promotions and performance awards by ethnicity at a UK level. We are also seeing progress in terms of the allocation of work and job satisfaction scores. The EY Foundation recruitment process uses CVs that exclude reference to name and gender, and candidates are selected through diverse interview panels.



## Zero tolerance for racism

Employers must adopt a zero-tolerance policy for both overt racism and repeated acts of covert racism. This should apply whether racism is experienced internally or from external parties such as customers and suppliers.

### Actions for employers

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- ▶ Develop an understanding of the damaging effects of overt racism, as well as covert racism (in the form of repeated microaggressions) through organisation-wide training.
- ▶ Create a culture where people feel safe to report inappropriate behaviour, particularly racism, internally and externally.
- ▶ Ensure that processes for reporting inappropriate behaviour are well established, understood, and communicated. The reporting process should not be a barrier to, or unduly burden, those reporting grievances.
- ▶ Carefully select and properly train those involved in hearing complaints.
- ▶ Explicitly use the term 'zero tolerance' in discrimination policies.
- ▶ Make zero tolerance meaningful, for example, include a commitment to walk away from external parties as a result of racist incidents.
- ▶ Consult with Black employees to understand how to strengthen informal complaint processes, escalation routes and establish a learning culture.

## What we're doing at EY and EY Foundation

EY's Global Code of Conduct sets out the guiding principles and standards that all people are expected to follow. This includes being accountable for decisions, but also a commitment to respond in a manner consistent with EY's values whenever an ethical issue is encountered. People are encouraged to speak up whenever they see behaviour that compromises the principles of the Code, either by colleagues, clients or suppliers. They can raise their concerns to a line manager, Talent or Risk team or by calling an ethics hotline. To implement new initiatives that support Black people in the team, EY Foundation uses exit interview data, insights from employee surveys and has formed a Race Forward 21 staff group.

All EY and EY Foundation people are required to complete inclusive leadership and race learning as part of the firm's commitment to creating a culture of equality. These learning programmes ensure all people develop their skills in recognising, valuing and working with a wide range of differences.

## Taking action

# Tackle barriers to entry

Employers must take joint action to address the barriers to entry. This should be led at CEO level and be a priority for the Law and Accounting, Banking and Finance sectors.

## Actions for employers

- ▶ CEOs should take visible leadership and be a strong voice for change both internally and externally. For example, by having a reverse mentor from the Black community, establishing C-suite sponsors, hosting learning sessions for the C-suite, and ensuring race equality features on all their internal communications and employee engagement messaging.
- ▶ CEOs should collaborate in their sector to establish a Race Leadership Forum, where appropriate by leveraging existing forums, such as the Professional Services Group, CBI's Change the Race Ratio and the Black British Network.

EY and EY Foundation recognise that more action is needed and commit to taking additional steps to support the implementation of all these recommendations and will report progress on our websites annually. We also commit to follow up research annually to report on the impact of this report, its recommendations, employer actions and the impact on young Black people.

To find out more about what we're doing and to discuss our recommended actions in more detail, please contact us by emailing [diversityandinclusion@eyfoundation.ey.com](mailto:diversityandinclusion@eyfoundation.ey.com)

# What we're doing at EY and EY Foundation

In 2020, EY publicly made a series of anti-racism commitments.

EY is principal sponsor of the Parker Review since its inception in 2017 and it provides annual reporting and insights to UK business on ethnic minority representation on FTSE boards.

EY is a founding member of several new forums and campaigns, including the CBI's Change the Race Ratio, and more recently, the Black British Network, founded by Black rights campaigner Cephias Williams. EY is also collaborating with members of the Big Six firms on improving Black representation and is involved in establishing the Black Professional Services Collective. EY has worked with a number of clients in helping them talk about diversity and inclusion within their own firms.

EY Foundation works in partnership with a range of employers to support organisations to better attract and retain more diverse young talent through its Smart Futures and Our Future employability programmes.

# The last word

It's clear from our survey that many young Black people feel that they are not heard so, at least on this occasion, we wanted to make sure they had the last word.

These are all verbatim comments from our independent and anonymous survey of over 1,000 young Black people, either working in organisations across the UK or currently in education.

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I felt as though I wasn't accepted due to my skin colour, which has impacted my self-esteem.

“

Being Black in this world kind of ensures a lifetime worth of struggle.

“

I know that I am going to have to work twice as hard to get into the room as anyone else, even with better qualifications.

“

If there was more racial equality in the UK, it wouldn't be as hard for people of different races to progress in their jobs and careers.

“

Everything we do is 'unprofessional' from our hair to behaviour. We have to do so much more than the average person to please people.

“

We have to deal with microaggressions in the workplace and those conversations are hard to bring up.

“

I find that people tend to stereotype me and due to the fact that Black people tend to have quite negative stereotypes it hinders my ability to find a job.

“

I have applied for jobs with friends who have the same work experience and qualifications as me and they have been interviewed and I have not. The only difference has been our race.

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#### **About EY Foundation**

The EY Foundation is a UK registered charity that works directly with young people, employers and social entrepreneurs to create or support pathways to education, employment or enterprise. EY Foundation operates and is incorporated independently of EY and is governed by a separate trustee board.

The EY Foundation is a charitable company registered in England and Wales and Scotland with registered charity number 1157154 and SC045076. It is also a member firm of Ernst & Young Global Limited.

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