



**HAVING THE
UNCOMFORTABLE
CONVERSATION
ABOUT RACISM IN
THE WORKPLACE**

**A UNISON East Midlands Strategy
to build Anti-Racist Workplaces**

UNISON
East Midlands

Contents

Contents	1
Foreword.....	2
Defining Black	3
Introducing the Charter.....	4
The Importance of Data Collection and Monitoring.....	5
The role of the Anti-Racism Champions	5
Joint Anti-Racism Charter	6
Anti-Racism Training.....	7

Foreword

In June 2020, fellow Black Members in one of our large employers reported that they were all called the 'n-word' by White service users and they were also threatened. Their White colleagues laughed at them and colluded with the racist and threatening behaviour.

After being told about this shocking incident by one of the Regional Organisers, I decided to draft a survey called 'Having The Uncomfortable Conversation About Racism In The Workplace'. The survey was sent out by the Region to all 54 Branches, the key analysis was the following:

29% of all respondents had witnessed Black colleagues experience Racism in the workplace

54% felt unable to challenge the discrimination they saw

64% of Black members who responded had experienced Racism directed towards them in the workplace

70% of Black members who have experienced Racism in the workplace have not raised the issue with their Branch

The respondents also said that they wanted Branches to do more to:

- Make them feel supported, not isolated
- Listen to the member
- Tackle internal culture
- Review at monthly or quarterly Branch Committee meetings all race discrimination case numbers and how effectively the Race Discrimination Protocol is being used
- Review and Enforce the employers' policies and procedures with employer HR teams
- Improve case handling

In April 2021, our General Secretary Christina McAnea attended our virtual Regional Black Members Network Meeting (RBMN) to hear about our survey and offered her support in implementing the campaign project in our region and across the whole union.

With Christina's support, and in collaboration with Regional colleagues, Louisa Wass Griffiths, our Regional Equality Manager, and I began to plan

a campaign to work with local employers to build proactive, anti-racist workplaces and encourage all workers to have the uncomfortable conversation about Racism in their workplace.

We then set up our project implementation team, which would enable the RBMN to lead the campaign with regional staff, I was joined by my two Co-Vice Chairs, the Deputy Regional Convenor and the Chair of the Regional Local Government Committee plus the Secretary to the RBMN and Louisa.

In March and June 2023, Louisa and I were able to provide two training events with Branch and Employer representatives, the event in June was when we discussed the role of the workplace champions that would be selected from the Branch and the Employer side and how they would work in partnership to create and monitor how their workplaces become anti-racist.

In October 2023, at our combined Black History Month and Year Of The Black Worker event, we formally launched the Employer Charter for the 20 Pilot Branches and began the rollout of this initiative to all branches in the region.

This campaign project has been an excellent example of how the RBMN, the Regional Team, and participating Branches and employers can come together to implement organisational changes in workplaces.

Many thanks to all involved.

Kind regards

Gilly Anglin-Jarrett
Chair East Midland RBMN

Defining Black

In UNISON, Black is used to indicate people with a shared history. Black with a capital 'B' is used in its broad political and inclusive sense to describe

people in Britain that have suffered colonialism and enslavement in the past and continue to experience Racism and diminished opportunities in today's society.

The terms 'minority ethnic' and 'ethnic minority' are in widespread official use. But these terms have negative connotations of being marginal or less important. In many neighbourhoods, towns, and cities in the UK it is statistically inaccurate or misleading to describe Black groups as a minority.

Since the '70s the term 'Black' has been used in antiracist campaigning in recognition of the common struggle against Racism and under-representation. Language changes and evolves but terminology is always important in terms of intention and direction. Using 'Black' is about creating unity in the fight against deep-rooted Racism that sees Black people disadvantaged in housing, education, employment and the criminal justice and health systems.

Introducing the Charter

The Charter represents a joint commitment from UNISON and the Employer to Black workers in your workplace. It is the product of joint working between UNISON staff, activists and employers from across the East Midlands.

It is the first step of the road towards truly anti-racist workplaces, where Black workers are as safe, valued and respected as their white colleagues.

The project group acknowledged that it takes organisational courage to tackle Racism proactively. In order to tackle Racism in our workplaces, we have to acknowledge that it is an everyday experience for Black workers across the region and that your organisation is not an exception.

Racism hurts people every day. it is essential that we respond well to individual complaints, but it is also important that we make a conscious and concerted effort to prevent Racism from occurring in our workplaces at all.

The Charter is intended to hold all parties accountable to a meaningful commitment to tackle workplace Racism in all the forms it takes in our workplaces and the working lives of Black workers.

The Charter underpins the role of Anti-Racism Champions, who will work alongside organisational leaders to challenge Racism internally and externally wherever it arises in relation to the organisation.

The Importance of Data Collection and Monitoring

Racism isn't just an interpersonal issue. Racism is a framework that places, often invisible, barriers before Black people. Black workers in public-facing roles may be more likely to receive trivial or vexatious complaints against them, they may be less likely to secure a job in certain sections of your workforce, and less likely to receive promotions.

You will not know which barriers Black workers in your workforce face if you are not collecting demographic data. One Black worker being performance managed may be innocuous, but data analysis across your organisation might indicate that Black workers are significantly more likely to be performance managed or receive harsh outcomes on average.

We therefore encourage employers to build ethnicity monitoring into their Recruitment, Employee Relations, and Complaints procedures.

Where employers are obligated to publish Gender Pay Gap reports, we encourage them to undertake Ethnicity Pay Gap reporting in the same cycle.

The role of the Anti-Racism Champions

1. UNISON will put forward an Anti-Racism Champion from the Branch. The Employer will put forward an Anti-Racism Champion.
2. Each pair of Champions will undergo training and have support from the Regional Group made up from other Anti-Racism Champions across the Region.
3. Each pair of Champions will oversee the introduction of effective ways of working to make sure concerns about Racism are dealt with

appropriately, and will monitor concerns about Racism and action taken, providing reports to the joint negotiating body of the Employer.

4. Each pair of Champions will work collaboratively and proactively to suggest changes to practice, introduced through joint negotiating body of the employer, that will improve lives for Black workers. This may include but is not limited to reviews of recruitment, disciplinary, grievance, sickness and training policies and ways of working.
5. Each pair of Champions will be visible advocates for Anti-Racism in that Employer.

Joint Anti-Racism Charter

1. We acknowledge that Racism harms people in our workplaces and we are committed to proactively supporting those affected so they feel heard and valued.
2. We are committed to identifying, resourcing, supporting, and promoting our champions.
3. And welcome their commitment to promote, monitor and scrutinise anti-Racism efforts in our workplaces.
4. We are committed to working collaboratively with each other. To ensure that effective training and support is provided for all our workforce around equality, discrimination, and inclusion.
5. We are committed to reviewing our recruitment processes to determine and counteract the impact of bias.
6. We are committed to gathering and maintaining data from our employees on their ethnicity and race, to help us with recording and monitoring Racism by implementing impact assessments in all our processes, including but not limited to:
 - a. Recruitment, retention and career progression

- b. Disciplinary, Grievance, Capability and other ER processes
- 7. We are committed to recording concerns of Racism and actions taken in response and reviewing how they are dealt with.
- 8. We are committed to dealing with concerns of Racism promptly and appropriately, however they come to our attention and will provide support to those who report or experience Racism.
- 9. We are committed to the implementation of an anti-Racism policy.
- 10. We are committed to reviewing our other policies and ways of working to reduce the harms of Racism.

Anti-Racism Training

Training will be sourced by UNISON to provide education to all Anti-Racism Champions in their role. This will include:

1. What is Racism and how are its effects felt in our Employers
2. Barriers to Change and how to Overcome them
3. Working together to inspire and activate our union or management colleagues around Racism; and generate confidence in workers to challenge Racism.

Once this is embedded, we will move to developing the second stage of our training for our whole workforce in that employer. This will include:

1. There is nobody racist here, or is there? Introduction to Racism and how to notice and make a difference.
2. What to do if you are experiencing or witnessing Racism?
3. Diving Deeper in Racism – unconscious bias, micro-aggressions, code swapping and privilege.