

# Improving Fairness for People

## From Minority Backgrounds and Faiths

In collaboration with:



LEONMANN



# Foreword



**Lee Barron MP,**  
Corby and East  
Northamptonshire

## **Labour is committed to get Britain working and to treating workers fairly.**

This is why the Modernising Employment All Party-Parliamentary Group (APPG) report on Reducing Barriers for People from Minority Faiths and Backgrounds is so important. Shamefully, nearly half (48%) of young people from minority backgrounds have faced prejudice or discrimination when trying to enter the workforce. This isn't acceptable in a modern Britain and now is a time when we must stand up for each other. As the party of working people, it is essential that jobs treat workers fairly, and that getting those jobs is a fair and equal process.

Over a third of Muslims cite experiencing discrimination in the recruitment process. Black, Asian, and ethnic minority people have often felt the worst of the cost-of-living crisis, yet their ability to change this narrative

is unfairly hampered by the prejudice and discrimination they face when trying to get a new job or when in the workplace. As the party of working people, Labour is committed to treating all workers fairly. This is central to our New Deal and our mission for growth. We are also the party of equality, and we are committed to building on the successes of previous Labour Governments so that everyone thrives at work.

Whilst the government is pushing forward with plans for the publication of ethnicity pay gaps, we need employers to take other action too in order that getting work, and being in work, in modern Britain is fair, equal, and positive for all.

I support this work by the Better Hiring Institute and urge employers to get involved and work with us to improve the lives of working people across our great country.

# Introductions



## Keith Rosser

Chair of the Better Hiring Institute  
& Director of Reed Screening

I believe in making UK hiring faster, fairer, and safer, in ensuring the UK achieves the fastest hiring globally, the fairest in the world, and the safest it can be. Never had I thought this mission was so far away as I did when the Modernising Employment All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) met in the House of Commons to discuss this issue.

Hearing the hiring experiences of people from the UK was sobering, people from minority faiths and/or backgrounds routinely experience more unfairness when looking for work or when in work. That we have scenarios today, in the 21st century, where perfectly capable and qualified people who want work face discrimination and inequality that prevents them – and therefore the economy and all of us – from succeeding is mind blowing.

The world of work is more flexible now, which should break down even more barriers and remove obstacles, but only if we steer the future of hiring in that direction.

In the business I run, Reed Screening, the predominant religion is not Christianity, the workforce is pleasingly diverse, and we are a better business for it. That's because this agenda is good for business, not business doing good. I believe that key to making UK hiring the fairest in the world is addressing the shameful reality experienced by so many of our citizens. Everyone deserves a fair chance, all hiring must be conducted on the basis of the right person for the right role, no matter the background. Just maybe, those with the right mentality and motivation should be given a helping hand no matter the educational or social background.

The Better Hiring Institute is based on – and committed to – the idea that hiring must be fairer, that the UK has all the ingredients and potential to have the fairest hiring ecosystem in the world which will unlock huge social, productivity and economic benefits.

I hope our excellent partners across industry in hiring, talent acquisition, and HR continue to take the necessary steps to achieve this aim.

# Introductions



**Tolu Afelumo**  
Founder & Director,  
Tolu Wellspring

I am grateful to introduce this vital guidance on how employers can make hiring faster, fairer, and safer for individuals from minority faiths and backgrounds. This guide is a direct outcome of the insightful parliamentary discussion and research on this crucial topic, and sincere gratitude is extended to all who contributed to the collective effort. I am excited to be a part of the significant work spearheaded by Reed Screening, the Better Hiring Institute, and the Modernising Employment All-Party Parliamentary Group.

The Better Hiring Institute aims to make UK hiring the fairest globally. Thanks to their hard work, we are

moving in the right direction; however, consistent evidence highlights the deep-rooted disadvantages faced by people from minority faiths and backgrounds throughout the hiring process. For instance, a King's College London study found that English names received just under 25% more positive responses for leadership and non-leadership roles than non-English names. This stark reality underscores that a considerable journey remains before true fairness in UK hiring is achieved.

Yet, I believe this goal is certainly attainable. It demands a fresh, realistic approach, particularly in addressing bias within the hiring lifecycle. Tolu Wellspring's framework outlines the hiring lifecycle as: Need, Advertisement, Application, Assessment, Interview, Onboarding, Integration, and Growth. At every stage, a conscious awareness of bias is paramount. As highlighted in the parliamentary discussion, our "schemas", the mental frameworks shaped by our experiences, can lead to pavlovian associations.

For example, considering what comes to mind with a name like "Maria" illustrates how ingrained data might automatically link it to a singular race, even though it could be a person of any background. This demonstrates the pervasive nature of bias.

It is crucial to understand that having biases does not inherently make someone a bad person. It is dismissing biases as unconscious and thus neglecting their conscious impact, that allows discrimination to occur "unknowingly." Statistics reinforce this: CIPHR reported that 48% of hiring managers admitted bias influenced their hiring decisions. This pervasive issue affects all minority groups, faiths, and other protected characteristics, including gender and neurodiversity.

Tolu Wellspring supports the notion of moving beyond "unconscious bias" to foster "conscious inclusion", a recommendation strongly advocated for during the discussion and championed by attendees, including representatives from Reed Screening.

We also emphasise the importance of long-term strategies to diversify the hiring pool, such as targeted outreach to students in disadvantaged areas. The Bridge Group Report, for example, demonstrated that outreach programmes significantly improve graduate employment outcomes for institutionally disadvantaged students.

The British Hiring Institute presents a wealth of guidance, drawn from both their research and that of the esteemed speakers at the parliamentary discussion. The data presented informs the actionable recommendations offered to businesses in our collective pursuit of fairer hiring and inclusion. The guidance outlines three key recommendations including those from me that, whilst bold, are practical, measurable, and designed to yield positive results for companies, their employees, and society as a whole.

When individuals thrive, businesses thrive, and when businesses thrive, our country thrives.

# The Modernising Employment All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)

The Modernising Employment All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) met to discuss the specific challenges those of minority faiths and backgrounds often face in the recruitment process and throughout their working life.

It's widely acknowledged that individuals from minority backgrounds and faiths may encounter discrimination, however, what may be surprising is just how prevalent this remains today.

Recent findings reveal that nearly half (48%) of young people from ethnic minority backgrounds have faced prejudice or discrimination when trying to enter the workforce.

This paper highlights such challenges and barriers minorities face in the workplace, summarises key themes in discussions that took place at the APPG, and provides recommendations to industry and parliament to improve fairness in the world of work for minorities.

It's widely acknowledged that individuals from minority backgrounds and faiths may encounter discrimination.



The meeting was chaired by **Lee Barron MP** and joined by the following speakers:

**Keith Rosser**

Chair of the Better Hiring Institute & Director of Reed Screening

**Dr Marina Hasan**

Leeds Trinity University

**Mustafa Faruqi**

Muslim Aid and BT Group

**Leon Mann MBE**

Football Blacklist

**Tolu Afelumo**

Tolu Wellspring

# Why is fairness in the workplace so important?

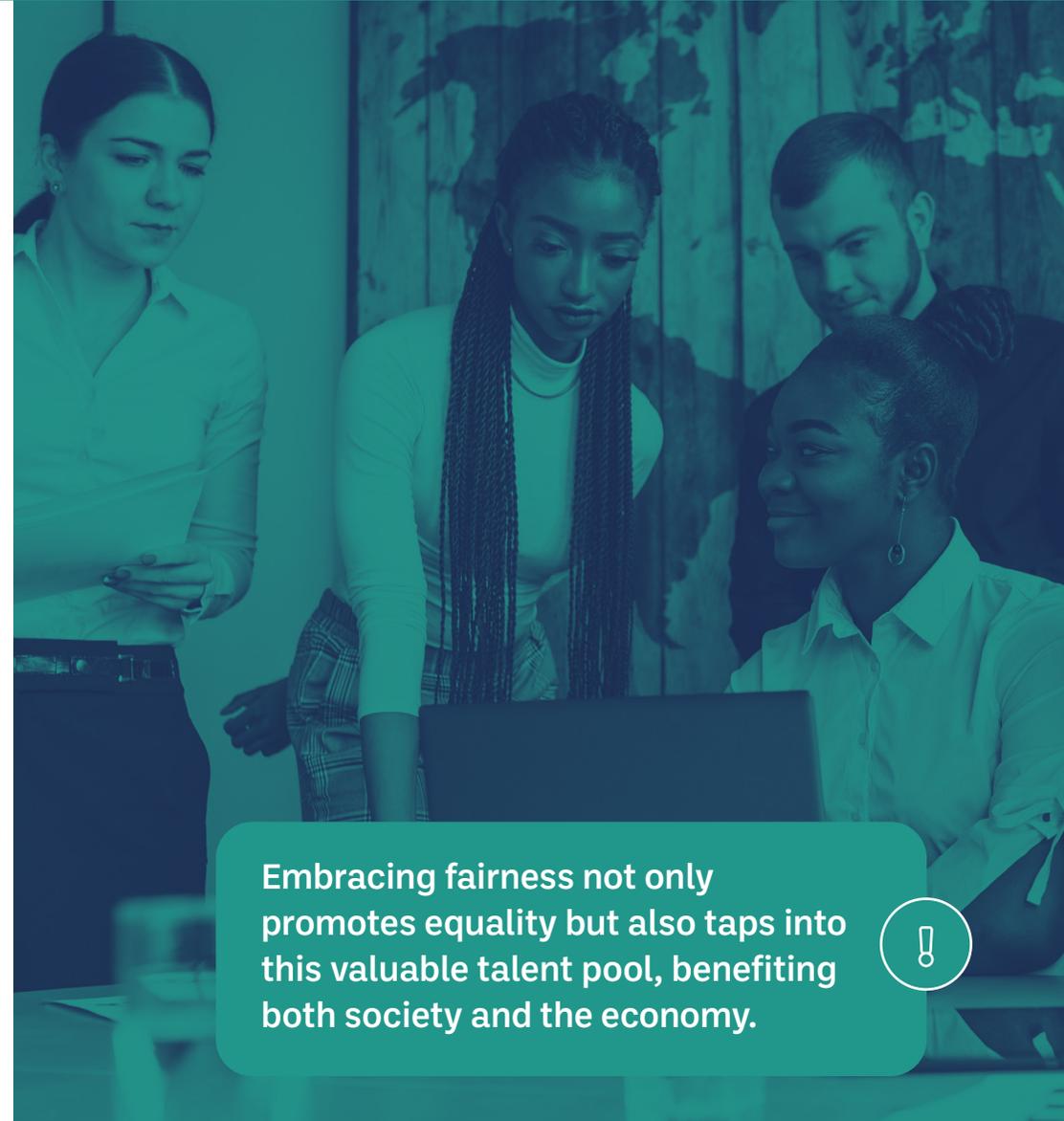
## Societal Context – Why is fairness in the workplace so important?

**Fairness in the workplace is not just a moral imperative, it is a cornerstone of successful, inclusive businesses – a truth recognised since the 1960s.**

Yet today, we are witnessing a troubling rise in discrimination and hate crimes across the UK. Alarming, the inclusion narrative is being increasingly stolen to sow division rather than unity. It is vital that we resist this and focus on our commitment to building a truly equitable society.

As Lee Barron MP, MP for Corby and East Northamptonshire, states, we must use this uncertain time as an opportunity to ‘speak up for each other’.

Embracing fairness not only promotes equality but also taps into this valuable talent pool, benefiting both society and the economy. For example, with 61% of the Muslim population being city based and holding a median age of 29 years, there is a significant workforce that is young, skilled, and conveniently located.

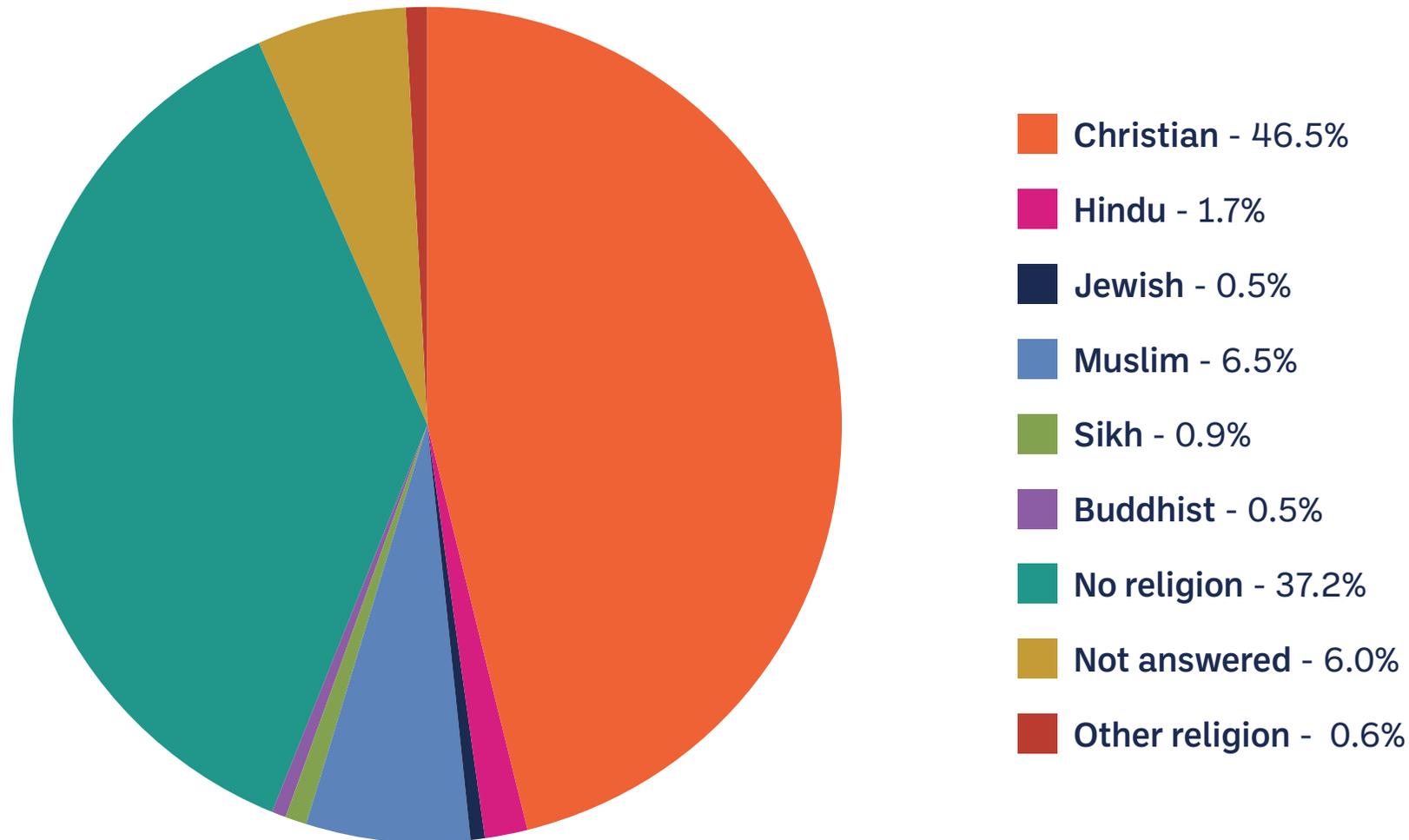


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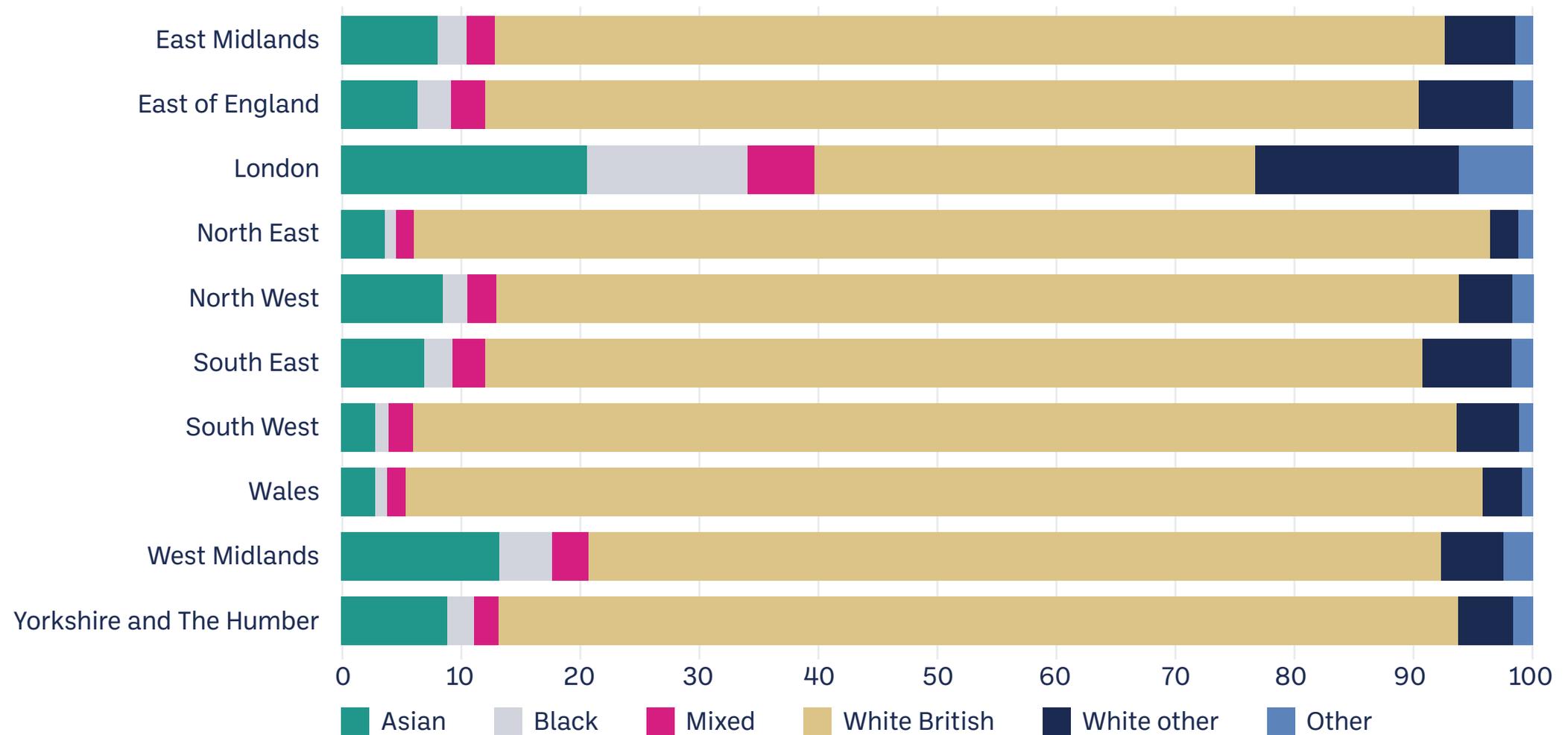
# Why is fairness in the workplace so important?

Areas of England and Wales by ethnicity & religious composition (2021 census):



# Why is fairness in the workplace so important?

## Areas of England and Wales by ethnicity & religious composition (2021 census):



# Why is fairness in the workplace so important?

## Understanding the role of culture, ethnicity and religion.

### Culture

Culture includes the beliefs, behaviours, values, and traditions of a group, passed down through generations.

It shapes how people see and interact with the world.

Religion often shapes cultural practices, including holidays and dietary restrictions, making them integral parts of the culture, such as Jewish identity, where cultural and religious aspects are deeply interwoven.

### Ethnicity

Ethnicity refers to shared characteristics like ancestry, history, language, and sometimes physical traits.

It creates a sense of common identity among a group.

In turn ethnicity often includes religious elements meaning that for many individuals, cultural, ethnic, and religious identities are so interconnected they form a unified whole, making them hard to separate.

### Religion

Religion is a system of beliefs and practices related to the sacred or divine, often influencing moral codes and worldviews.

In essence, while culture, ethnicity, and religion are distinct, they regularly overlap and influence each other, creating a complex identity.

# Why is fairness in the workplace so important?

## Why is this important to recognise in a place of work?

**Recognising this complexity helps employers create inclusive environments that respect and accommodate diverse backgrounds.**

When employers appreciate all dimensions of their employees, they can better address potential biases and barriers. This leads to fairer hiring practices and workplace policies, encouraging a sense of belonging and engagement. Embracing diversity not only enhances employee satisfaction and retention but it has been shown to drive innovation and productivity by bringing different viewpoints and talents to the table.

Ultimately, acknowledging and valuing these is essential for building a fair and inclusive workplace where all employees can thrive.

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**Overlapping layers of prejudice comes from faith, backgrounds and race. Without intersectionality we miss the full picture.**

Dr Marina Hasan

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# Understanding intersectionality and its impact at work

## What is intersectionality?

Intersectionality examines how various aspects of a person's identity (such as race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, and more) interact to create unique experiences of discrimination or privilege.

It highlights the importance of looking at the 'whole person' and acknowledges that individuals don't experience bias in isolated categories, but through overlapping systems of oppression.

37% of Muslims have cited discrimination at the recruitment stage – a figure which rises to 58% for black Muslim workers.



## Why is this important when considering diversity in the workplace and hiring process?

It helps employers recognise that a “**one-size-fits-all**” approach to diversity and inclusion can overlook the distinct challenges faced by individuals with multiple marginalised identities. **For example, a black woman may face both racism and sexism in ways that differ from those faced by black men or white women.**

Applying intersectionality leads to fairer hiring practices by addressing compound biases and encouraging a more inclusive environment that values the complexity of employees' identities. It promotes fairer policies and better decision-making by highlighting hidden disparities and preventing well-meaning efforts from reinforcing inequality.

# Unconscious bias vs active anti-bias

**Unconscious bias refers to the automatic, mental shortcuts people use to make decisions quickly.**

These biases are shaped by social stereotypes, past experiences, and cultural norms, and they occur without conscious awareness or intentional control. **For example, making assumptions about someone's ability based on race, gender, age, or other characteristics.**

Active anti-bias, on the other hand, is a deliberate and conscious approach to recognising, challenging, and changing biased attitudes and behaviours. It involves ongoing proactive efforts to change perceived 'unconscious' biases. Anti-bias work requires individuals and organisations to interrupt bias when it appears and to create environments that encourage diversity and fairness.



## Unconscious bias

- Involuntary and unintentional
- Often goes unnoticed
- Maintains status quo
- Focuses on individual thinking patterns

## Active anti-bias

- Intentional and deliberate
- Requires self-awareness and action
- Seeks systemic and behavioural change
- Extends to institutional practices and culture

# Unconscious bias vs active anti-bias

Anti-bias work requires individuals and organisations to interrupt bias when it appears and to create environments that encourage diversity and fairness.



**In recent years, employee training has largely focused on identifying unconscious bias and offering strategies to address this in the workplace.**

However, this approach can unintentionally reduce individual accountability. When bias is labelled as unconscious, it may create the impression that little can be done to change it.

A shift in perspective, and in training, is needed. Individuals should be empowered to take responsibility for their thoughts and actions. Bias is not inherently negative, it is a natural cognitive process through which the brain interprets the world. Framing it as entirely unconscious risks undermining the action required to confront and overcome it.

# Challenges & Barriers

This section provides some examples of potential challenges and barriers minority employees face in the workplace.

- 01.** Many discrimination victims feel that **reporting it will make no difference** and fear of retaliation or further discrimination can deter individuals from speaking up.
- 02.** Many have experienced **mockery, exclusion, stereotyping, and discrimination** when revealing their religious identity at work. Creating a hostile work environment where individuals feel marginalised and undervalued.
- 03.** Workplace **discrimination disproportionately affects employees from ethnic minority backgrounds** perpetuating a cycle of inequality and limiting the representation of diverse voices in leadership positions.
- 04.** **Annual leave rejected** when taking time off for religious festivals. This can be due to a lack of understanding or appreciation for the significance of these festivals and rejections can prevent individuals from practicing their faith fully and contribute to feelings of exclusion and disrespect.
- 05.** Due to fear of judgment and discrimination, many individuals **do not feel comfortable wearing religious dress or symbols** in the workplace, resulting in a loss of personal identity and a sense of disconnection from one's faith.
- 06.** Underrepresented groups are being recruited for **entry-level roles at a much lower rate than white applicants**. This disparity can be attributed to bias, lack of outreach to diverse communities, and insufficient support for minority candidates.

A 2023 report found that 38% of UK-based Hindu employees have had an annual leave request to celebrate a religious holiday or festival rejected without good reason.



# Challenges & Barriers

## Industry Spotlight – Did you know?



That despite making up 43% of Premier League players and contributing significantly to football's financial success, the black community remains severely underrepresented in leadership and media roles.

With only two black board members, one Premier League manager, and no live black presenters on Sky Sports, the message is clear: visibility on the pitch does not translate to influence off it.

The solution lies in intentional action like collaborating with credible voices, investing in resources, and committing to inclusive hiring and workplace cultures. Initiatives like the [Football Blacklist](#) and behind-the-scenes media masterclasses show it can be done, but systemic change is needed to accelerate progress and prevent the continued loss of talent.



# Industry recommendations



## Employment stage

### Job Advertisement and application process

Recommendation	Details
Remove ambiguous language and requirements from the application process.	By removing ambiguous questions and requirements, such as an 'optional' cover letter, you even the playing field for candidates that may not be aware of these expectations.
Be upfront about company diversity policies.	If you have policies around flexible holidays or pension options, then be upfront in the job description to encourage diverse applications.
Visually reflect the diverse culture you want in your company.	Inclusive visuals signal that people from all backgrounds are welcome.
Include salary in the job description.	This helps to increase pay transparency, increasing equality regardless of gender, ethnicity or ability.
Do not include a request for DEI data upfront.	If it is still felt necessary to collect the data at this stage, it should be anonymised and kept separate to the rest of the application data.



## Employment stage

### Selection process and job offer.

Recommendation	Details
Start practising blind recruitment, not just name blind recruitment.	By removing all leading information and focusing on what matters to the role, blind recruitment has been shown to increase diversity.
Have an interview panel that reflects the diversity you wish to see in your company.	Having an interview panel that reflects the diversity you wish to see in your company sends a clear message about your values and commitment to inclusion.
Ensure AI is trained to remove human bias – not replicate or increase it.	Find more guidance on using AI in hiring <a href="#">here</a> .



# Industry recommendations



Employment stage

Work

Recommendation	Details
Train employees on practising active anti-bias.	Move to active anti-bias training to increase accountability in your staff and foster a more inclusive, self-aware culture where individuals are empowered to recognise, challenge, and mitigate their own biases in real time.
Flexible bank holidays.	Having a policy that recognises not all employees will celebrate the same holidays will help allow everyone to feel they have a right to celebrate the ones that mean the most to them without backlash.
Track diversity data and review regularly for trends.	By actively tracking diversity data and reviewing this, you can identify gaps and tailor initiatives to address specific issues.
Start educational outreach earlier and diversify the targeted area.	Employers should aim to engage with students before they have had to make a decision on their direction of study. Targeting students at a later stage and in few privileged areas means that the engagement activity is not only less effective but limits the potential future candidates.
Make physical room for diversity at the workplace.	Creating safe spaces for prayer and meditation at work (with washing facilities) allows for inclusion and enhances employee wellbeing. By creating a physical dedicated space for religion, you cement the idea of valuing and championing diversity throughout all employees.
Invest in specific diversity focused leadership initiatives.	Be pro-active in leadership initiatives that recognise the barriers minorities can face in the workplace.
Consider company events and casual work culture.	When planning work events consider how to ensure they are not unintentionally discouraging those of minority faiths. For example, a neutral venue that does not focus on alcohol and/or includes religion friendly dietary options.
Review your company benefits package including pensions.	There may be cases, including pensions, where religion and culture may impact the suitability of an employees benefit package. Why not complete a full review with diversity requirements in mind or ask current employees what they need?
Employ and promote flexible work policies.	Clearly state in company policies that taking time off for prayer is always supported and offer flexible work-from-home options during significant periods of religious observance whenever feasible.
Take time to educate, integrate and celebrate both minority faiths and ethnicities.	This can be achieved through training, employee groups, and celebrating key holidays helping foster a respectful culture that boosts engagement, sparks innovation, strengthens teamwork, and enhances the company's inclusive reputation.

# Industry recommendations

## Policy recommendations:

- 1** Whilst waiting for the introduction of mandatory ethnicity and disability pay reporting for large employers. Government should provide guidance on voluntary reporting and action plan generation.
- 2** Support and encourage early outreach programmes by employers. Highlighting areas that would benefit from the 'playing field' becoming more equal by guidance from industries.

# Further resources

[The Better Hiring Institute](#)

[Muslim Friendly Employers – resources](#)

[M-IFS | Muslim-Inclusive Framework Standard | Workplace Accreditation](#)

[Home – UK’s leading Muslim Employment Charter](#)

[The Employer’s Guide To Judaism](#)

[Change the Race Ratio | Championing racial and ethnic minority participation in business leadership. | Change the Race Ratio Logo](#)

[Religion at Work: Experiences of Hindu Employees](#)

# About Us



[The Better Hiring Institute \(BHI\)](#) mission is to make UK hiring faster, fairer, and safer. The BHI is a not-for-profit social enterprise driving the development of a modern, agile UK labour market, accelerating economic recovery.

Working closely with all the major UK industries, The BHI is driving standardisation, best practice, and digital innovation to reduce hiring times, enable portability, and improve safeguarding. Cross industry themes include digital standardised referencing, open banking, digital right to work checks, education credentialing, and digital identity.

The BHI is already working with many of the UK's largest, household names making UK hiring the fastest globally.

## Reed Screening

[Reed Screening](#) are the leading specialists in pre-employment vetting and are at the forefront of influencing regulation and industry change.

Reed Screening are the only UK, onshore screening company who are open 24/7, they are family owned and give 20% to charity. Their business never sleeps so if you ever need them, they're available.

Their vision is to 'pioneer the future of hiring' by collaborating with government bodies and industry leaders to bring about change.



Tolu Wellspring is a consultancy dedicated to fostering genuinely inclusive and thriving workplaces, empowering every individual. They partner with diverse organisations, from large to small businesses across various sectors, to create true inclusion.

For Tolu Wellspring, inclusion is a strategic imperative, driving innovation and organisational success. Led by Director Tolu Afelumo, a recognised Global Well-being & Inclusion Consultant, Tolu Wellspring specialises in bespoke strategies. Her notable public work includes Parliament recommendations on hiring and Gen Z advice for HR Directors.

She also convenes "The Inclusion Effect" Spotify Podcast. Tolu Wellspring's unique Simplified Wellspring Inclusion Model (SWIM) is an evidence-based assessment framework, providing tailored, actionable recommendations for sustainable, measurable change.

# About Us

## LEONMANN

[Leon](#) is an entrepreneur, activist, broadcaster and filmmaker, who has devoted his career to bringing life to incredible stories throughout the world of sport.

At the heart of his passion for the industry, his filming and campaigns present inspiring athletes, coaches, and sports executives with a platform to tell their piece. In doing so, he saw an opportunity to launch his own consultancy and production agency, and is now collaborating with some of the world's top sporting talents.

Leon is also working to enable inclusivity across the sport and media landscape, wholesale, by supporting content creators and advocating greater diversity within sport's media and governance.



[Leeds Trinity University](#) is a higher education institution known for its student-centered approach and commitment to social justice.

It emphasizes a transformative educational experience, fostering both personal and professional growth for its students.

With a history dating back to 1966, Leeds Trinity has a strong focus on employability, integrating professional work placements into its undergraduate degrees.



[Muslim Aid](#) is a faith-based UK charity founded in 1985 by Yusuf Islam, the artist formerly known as Cat Stevens.

Our charitable objects are to alleviate poverty and human suffering in support of people globally in accordance with the teachings of the Quran and the traditions of the prophet Muhammad.

Our vision is a world that is just and harmonious, as ordained by God, where everyone can achieve their potential with dignity. In 2024, we delivered 135 aid and development projects spanning 20 countries, reaching over 3.2 million people under our themes of emergency relief, healthcare, housing, education and livelihoods.