All-Party Parliamentary Group
for Responsible Business

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Responsible Business Minutes for Roundtable on Eliminating Workplace Discrimination

Tuesday 11 November 2025, 3:30pm-4:45pm

Location: Jubilee Room, Houses of Parliament

Present:

APPG Officers: Dame Harriett Baldwin MP (Chair)

Business in the Community (Secretariat): Kieran Harding (Acting CEO), Gail Greengross (Creative and External Affairs Director), Polly Dacam (Press Officer), Hannah Tankard (Content, Research, and Engagement Senior Lead), Antoinette Blake (Race Campaign Manager)

Speakers: Richard Iferenta (Partner and Vice Chair, KPMG UK), Leigh Lafever-Ayer (HR Director UK & Ireland, Enterprise Mobility), Nishi Mayor (Director of Employer Engagement & Partnerships, Youth Futures Foundation), Sandra Kerr CBE (Race Equality Director, Business in the Community)

Attendees: Approximately 40 additional Parliamentarians, senior business leaders, and representatives from industry.

1. Welcome from Dame Harriett Baldwin MP, Chair of the APPG for Responsible Business

- Dame Harriett Baldwin MP welcomed attendees and introduced the topic of the meeting, reinforcing the point that all organisations should be looking to eliminate discrimination, and asking the question: *What role do Parliamentarians and government play in eliminating discrimination at work?*

2. Sandra Kerr CBE, Race Equality Director, Business in the Community

- Highlighted the importance of intersectionality in terms of gender, age, disability, and ethnicity, and how these need to be looked at holistically.
- Outlined the main focus areas of the Race at Work Charter, based on 10 years of evidence and YouGov data:

- **Leadership:** 61% of large employers in the UK now have a senior lead for fairness and equality.
- **Data and evidence:** employers need to explain what they are doing in terms of promoting fairness and equality at work. Data must be broken down by demographics, location, and age. Any disparities must be flagged.
- **Bullying/harassment:** this is a persistent issue and must be tackled to support recruitment and progression.
- **Manager engagement:** emphasised that people do not leave organisations, they leave managers.
- **Progression:** there is a strong appetite for progression from employees from low socioeconomic or ethnically diverse backgrounds, but structures must support their advancement.
- **Allyship to solidarity:** 52% of the workforce want to stand in solidarity with ethnically diverse colleagues.
- **Supply chains/fair access to enterprise:** it is essential to create opportunities for young people, particularly those who are not in education, employment, or training, and ethnically diverse groups.

- Urged employers to act by place and location – all places are different; there is no one-size-fits-all approach.

3. Richard Iferenta, Partner and Vice Chair, KPMG UK

- Expressed concern about artificial intelligence's (AI) impact on recruitment and whether it will exacerbate discrimination; raised the question: *Are we paying enough attending to AI bias and its effects on protected characteristics?*
- Highlighted BITC research which found that addressing racial disparities in the workplace and levelling the playing field for ethnically diverse employees could lead to a £37 billion economic gain to the UK economy each year.
- Outlined three 'lenses' for action:
  - **Recruitment:** 5% of people in the UK are unemployed; there is a risk that initiatives to promote fairness in recruitment for ethnically diverse candidates could slow down during downturns.
  - **Upskilling/reskilling:** it is important to plan ahead and ensure fairness in access to opportunity, rather than tokenism. Employers need to invest in those losing their jobs to AI.

    - **Leadership:** leaders must ensure that people are not left behind and forgotten, create access to opportunity, and promote opportunities intentionally.
- Called for government incentives to support business investment in upskilling.
- Emphasised the importance that everyone should be able to thrive at work, not just enter into the workplace.

4. Nishi Mayor, Director of Employer Engagement & Partnerships, Youth Futures Foundation

- Outlined Youth Futures Foundation's role as the national What Works Centre for Youth Employment, as well of key insights found in Youth Futures Foundation's research:
    - Black, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi young people are most at risk.
    - A survey of 3,000 young people, conducted by Youth Futures Foundation, found that:
        - Almost 50% experienced prejudice in hiring.
        - 71% of those in work faced discrimination and sought to leave.
        - Ethnically diverse young people are twice as likely as their White peers to be on zero-hour contracts.
- Emphasised the effectiveness of apprenticeships when they are high-quality and targeted; only one in 10 young people get a job through apprenticeships if they are not targeted, and ethnically diverse young people are half as likely to start or complete an apprenticeship.
- Addressed barriers to getting young people into work:
    - **Cultural barriers:** some communities do not view vocational routes as viable.
    - **Financial barriers**
- Highlighted the new Commitment 1 of Business in the Community's Race at Work Charter: supporting young people's pathways into good work and enterprise. Emphasised how this is aligned with Business in the Community and Youth Futures Foundation's *Talent Unlocked* partnership and the importance of structured work experience and quality apprenticeships to tackle entry barriers.

5. Leigh Lafever-Ayer, HR Director, Enterprise Mobility UK & Ireland

- Stressed the importance of fairness being embedded at the start of every employee journey, and how this is core to company values at Enterprise.

- Highlighted Enterprise as one of the UK's largest graduate recruiters, recruiting from 120 universities and schools, with 250 apprenticeships, 350 internships and 1,000 management trainees annually.
- Emphasised that employers need to focus on:
    - **Community outreach and social mobility** to build local talent pipelines.
    - **Competency-based hiring** to ensure no degree grade barriers.
    - **Inclusive managers** to ensure a strong link between inclusion, engagement, and performance, including regular 30-minute meaningful conversations between managers and their direct reports to maintain engagement.
    - **Intersectionality and the shift from allyship to solidarity** so employees can understand each other's journeys and truly support inclusion.
- Spoke about preparing for a digital future (such as auto mechanics becoming coders) and the importance of targeting and reaching communities that are unfamiliar with such job role shifts.

6. Dame Harriett Baldwin MP

- Framed two focal issues for discussion:
    - **AI and recruitment bias:** shared an example from an AI professor – if AI is trained on historic hiring for roles, it will likely reproduce those profiles, leading to bias in shortlisting. Posed a question to the room: *How can we recognise and counter AI-driven barriers in hiring?*
    - **Employment Rights Bill:** raised concern that some employers might take fewer chances on candidates who need more support if certain rights are immediate. Invited reflections of how to mitigate unintended consequences while upholding good work standards.

7. Questions from stakeholders

Professor Nelarine Cornelius – Queen Mary's University of London

Stressed the importance of data and prioritisation: evidence must inform which actions have the greatest impact. Emphasised that the £37 billion boost to the UK economy (mentioned by Richard Iferenta) is not just economic, but also about productivity: if employers do not become more inclusive, this will result in a productivity gap caused by under-utilising talent.

Posed the question: *How can we ensure that the new Employment Rights Bill gains traction and that employers take their responsibilities seriously, beyond legal compliance?*

- **Richard Iferenta:** Emphasised that large corporations already have infrastructure in place and are preparing in advance: they will not want the reputational risk of falling foul of legislation.
- **Nishi Mayor:** Stressed the need to support employers to take a chance in young people; the youth guarantee will help with this. Emphasised the need to provide vocational training.
- **Leigh Lafever-Ayer:** Agreed with Richard that large firms already invest from day one, but pointed out that smaller businesses may struggle with this. Shared an example of Enterprise inviting parents to understand careers for first generation graduates.
- **Sandra Kerr CBE:** Urged government to ensure clarity and outreach so that candidates understand opportunities and training. Highlighted that AI is already creeping into recruitment and that there is a need to look positively at the use of AI to provide feedback to unsuccessful candidates.

Veronica Heaven – The Heaven Company

Posed a question about the implementation and the role of the new Social Value Model. Expressed concern about the loss of entry-level jobs due to AI and the barriers for young people entering work.

- **Leigh Lafever-Ayer:** Outlined how Enterprise measures volunteering hours and local giving through its 'Fill Your Tank' and literacy projects. Stressed that social value is the product of time and community benefit, not just money. Advocated for creative, meaningful work experience, not token tasks.
- **Nishi Mayor:** Emphasised the need to rethink core skills like curiosity, teamwork, and problem-solving: AI changes job types but not core skills. Stressed the need for businesses to forecast jobs of the future and prepare young people. Called for Level Two/Three vocational training and for organisations to offset barriers, such as travel and care leavers.
- **Sandra Kerr CBE:** Called for businesses to examine data at each stage of recruitment to identify blockages and design targeted interventions.
- **Richard Iferenta:** Agreed that AI is transforming the business landscape; businesses and universities must collaborate to reskill. Stressed that social value should include supply chain inclusion, so large firms should ensure they

have diverse suppliers. Highlighted that small changes across many firms drive big systemic changes in wealth and opportunity.

Laura Spence – King's College London Business School

Posed the question: *We already have legislation and evidence. What bold measures will truly accelerate equality?*

- **Richard Iferenta:** Suggested that employers follow the money, linking executive pay and accountability to equality outcomes. Emphasised that leadership must be measured and rewarded for progress.
- **Sandra Kerr CBE:** Talked about using procurement and social value contracts as levers, as well as ensuring due diligence on suppliers' diversity performance.
- **Leigh Lafever-Ayer:** Encouraged dialogue on what social value really means, enabling a shift from box-ticking to genuine community impact.
- **Nishi Mayor:** Mentioned that true progress requires steadfast, prioritised leadership. Emphasised the need to celebrate and reward inclusive leaders.

Ama Ocansey – BNP Paribas

Raised the importance of mentoring, sponsorship, and career pipelines. Posed the question: *What research exists on AI's impact on experienced workers with regard to retention, progression, and upskilling?*

- **Panel:** Acknowledged the need for further research and integration of AI impacts into career development planning.

Chris Worts – Bettys and Taylors Group

Noted that transparency about why data is collected is vital. Stressed the importance of training (such as training on stopping and reporting sexual harassment) to increase confidence in reporting issues; a cultural change must follow this. Posed the question: *How do we achieve psychological safety, so that staff feel comfortable sharing data and raising concerns?*

- **Sandra Kerr CBE:** Stressed that psychological safety depends on leaders explaining why data is used and showing the results, as well as ensuring that complaints are handled safely and anonymously. Emphasised the need to reward leaders who model inclusive behaviour.
- **Leigh Lafever-Ayer:** Highlighted that inclusive leadership must be woven into all training and development, and that employees trust organisations more when they understand the purpose behind data collection.

Steph Wheat – WJ Group

Raised the point that trade unions and employee networks are mechanisms to help tackle workplace discrimination. Suggested that organisations could better leverage these structures to support their staff in speaking up, improving confidence in reporting, and reducing negative workplace behaviours.

Sally Blake – Zurich Insurance

Suggested creating an Ofsted-style body to inspect and hold businesses accountable for workplace equality standards.

Additional points raised

- A representative from an engineering company raised a point about changing the curriculum, including introducing the subject of engineering into the curriculum, and the importance of going into schools to inspire children.

8. Closing remarks from Dame Harriett Baldwin MP and speakers

- **Dame Harriett Baldwin MP:** Outlined the core themes of the meeting: leadership accountability, AI bias, inclusive recruitment, apprenticeships, progression, social value, and psychological safety. Stressed that there are always people who want to change the curriculum to get young people learning the skills they need for work from an early age, but this is not a change that happens very quickly, and the change is not fast enough for businesses.
- **Sandra Kerr CBE:** Agreed with Dame Harriett Baldwin MP that young people should start learning core skills and values from a young age to set them up for the world of work.
- **Richard Iferenta:** Stressed that businesses need to invest in training for both today and tomorrow and how apprenticeships are important for this.
- **Panel consensus:** Agreed that data-driven, intentional leadership and joined-up action between business and government are essential to eliminate workplace discrimination.