



Race to be heard 2022 survey

Summary of findings

Written by Dr Jami Rogers for Bectu and Marcus Ryder
from the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity





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Bectu is the union for creative ambition. We represent over 40,000 staff, contract and freelance workers in the media and entertainment industries. Our members work in non-performance roles in live events, broadcasting, film and cinema, digital media, independent production, leisure, IT and telecoms, theatre and the arts.

Find out more at
bectu.org.uk/about

Published by Prospect
New Prospect House,
8 Leake Street, London SE1 7NN
T 0300 600 1878

© Prospect, August 2022
22-0105/Aug22/PDF

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Introduction

The 'Race to Be Heard' survey was circulated to people working in film and television and received 353 responses. The questions were devised to understand members' experiences primarily of two issues: racism in the workplace and the workplace mechanisms for reporting racism.

The respondents were asked to describe themselves in terms of age, gender, ethnic origin and their professions. Workers who responded to the survey were from all age ranges and worked across the industry in roles that included film editors, producers, camera operators, support actors, stagehands, make-up and hair artists, runners, drivers, location coordinators, post-production engineers, animators and directors. Two-thirds of respondents described themselves as White, while the remaining one-third identified as a member of at least one Global Majority¹ heritages.

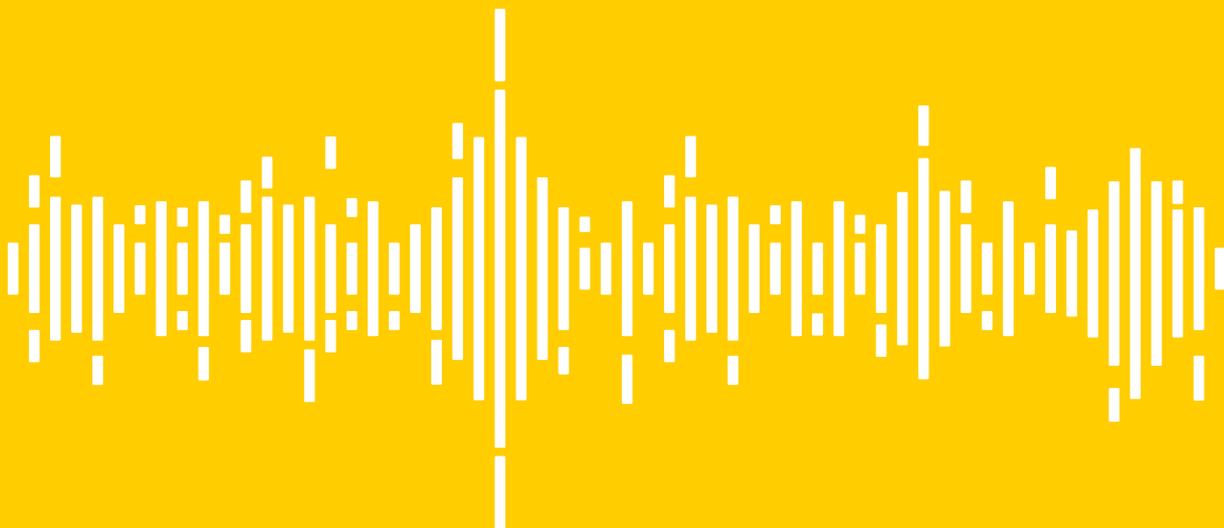
Each respondent was given the opportunity to detail their experiences in the comment boxes. The comments provide additional context to the statistics, which also point to both collective experience and the ways racism continues to impact workers from African-Caribbean, south Asian, east Asian, Middle East and North Africa and Latinx heritages. What follows is an analysis of the questions asked of survey respondents, providing statistics and organising individual comments into categories. The comments are invaluable in illuminating the complexity of the issues raised in the 'Race to Be Heard' survey.

This summary of findings is broken down into two main themes: racism in the workplace and reporting racism.

1 **Note to readers:** In this summary we use the term 'Global Majority' to refer to people who are Black, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the global south, and or have been racialised as 'ethnic minorities'. This is a collective term that first and foremost speaks to and encourages those so-called to think of themselves as belonging to the global majority. In using this term we recognise that these ethnicities are often defined in the UK as 'minority', but that globally, they make up the majority.



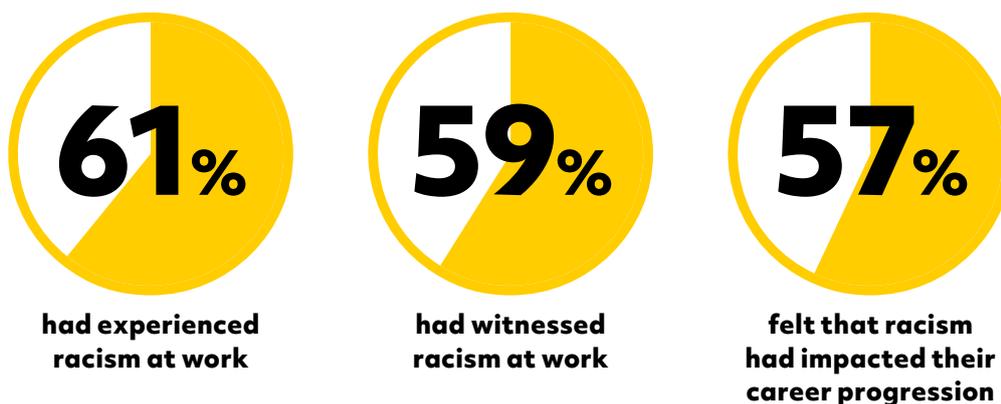
I have worked in other industries and been promoted and my skills, work and capabilities recognised and fast tracked. **Here I am invisible.** There is a deep issue with racist elitism and token diversity.



1. Racism in the workplace

There were four survey questions that explored racism in the workplace and its effect on career progression.

The responses from Global Majority respondents show that the majority of them continue to experience racism in the workplace:



In contrast to the 61% Global Majority respondents who had experienced racism at work, 7% of White respondents felt they had been the targets of racism.

The respondents' additional comments help to illuminate the types of racism respondents have encountered in the workplace.

Some experiences relayed by survey respondents are redolent of the overt racism experienced by generations of people from the Global Majority in Britain:

"I have heard people use words that are no longer acceptable."

"My experience is of overtly racist individual freelance crew members."

"I witnessed an AD expressing a racially motivated act and verbal abuse."

"Casual racism on set, especially with all-male productions with military scenes/cast."

However, the majority of comments were concerned with the subtler forms of racist behaviour that occur in the industry:

“The micro-aggressions are much more rife and accepted but these add up to a big problem – and requires more work to stamp out.”

“It is rarely aggressive name calling and usually far more subtle side-lining and evidence of bias.”

“Micro-aggressions are very much rampant than blatant racism.”

“It’s most definitely still endemic in the industry, at least in Cardiff/Bristol. It’s there in microaggressions, ‘jokes’, talk of ‘diversity hires’, ‘box-ticking exercises’, etc.”

“The vast majority is unintentional, and comes from a place of people acting or speaking without realising what they’re doing or saying – accidental through ignorance, almost always forgivable.”

“Micro aggressions, being overlooked or considered unsuitable for certain roles (director). Unfair criticism over collaborative work.”

“A lot of the time it is played off as a joke, and it often comes from the most senior members of staff.”

Some respondents provided greater detail of the subtler forms of racism that respondents have encountered in the workplace:

“I believe I experienced unconscious bias. In the past when I got promoted as a senior edit assistant, I was promised more responsibilities, but it was frustrating to see my white colleagues (male and female) who started after me get the training and more complex jobs. Whereas I felt for 3 years a glorified junior edit assistant. I went to management multiple times about this issue and they would make sure I got the training and same jobs for a couple of months but I always was reverted back to doing basic responsibilities. The same pattern happened when I became an editor, I felt all the freelancers and new started got regular clients to work with, whilst I was given odd jobs. I spoke to my manager and at this point I realised I was experiencing unconscious bias to which she promptly even out the workload across the edit department.”

“I was given a promotion in 2006 via an attachment for a year and a half, that should have been made permanent. As it came to an end, the job was re-advertised. I had to re-apply and re-interview. They took the post away and it was split and given to two new white people from outside the company without the experience. The reason was given that I lacked a specific qualification but that was never an issue while I was doing the job.”

“It is through subtle scrutiny, where a transgression has taken place by an ethnic employee they are reprimanded swiftly and harshly relative to their white counterparts. The reprimand in and by itself is not the issue but the measure by which it is enforced across the workforce. Same applies to pressures surrounding working performance.”

“I am frequently confused with other people of similar ethnic backgrounds. The majority of the time completely by accident but I feel there’s a major element of cultural ‘they look different from me’ and are therefore categorised as ‘different’ even though I am equally as White as I am Asian. ”

Few respondents addressed the issue of career progression in the comments, but those that did were clear:

“I lost out on a full career in film making because of racism.”

“My head hurts from hitting the imaginary glass ceiling.”

“Overlooked so many times because ‘my face/you don’t fit’.”

“Huge discrimination. Including my scripts being given out to White writers to poach off.”

“All the BAME/people of colour holding 95% of low-grade roles. People who have been encouraged to apply for jobs or assisted in career progression have been white because they are seen and their ‘face fits’. I feel isolated in the workplace as I am essentially ignored because of my ‘low status’. I am highly qualified and had another career prior this freelance role, but no one is interested in me as an individual band what I can offer. I have worked in other industries and been promoted and my skills, work and capabilities recognised and fast tracked. Here I am invisible. There is a deep issue with racist elitism and token diversity. When you are in an entry position, as a BAME, you are deemed not worthy of acknowledgment or incapable of doing work that is high level, or be involved with projects to gain training or opportunities.”

It is worth noting that some White respondents have corroborated the experiences of their Global Majority colleagues, several of whom provided examples of having observed racism in the workplace:

"I see that our team is split along racial lines with White colleagues in dev and leadership roles, and Black and Brown people predominantly in test roles, which typically come with fewer perks and short-term contracts."

"It is ingrained in the industry."

"I saw racism as a junior member of staff but felt I couldn't speak out."

"Unfortunately some people in the workplace do not understand why certain racist comments and behaviour is racist, sad but true. There remains a lot of ignorance around racism."

"It happens far too often, especially with older generation of workers who are the ones who employ us, give us references, so it is very difficult to report and to challenge."

"Micro-aggressions that lead to individuals feeling excluded. Individuals being held back when opportunities were given to others with less experience."

"The vast majority of SFX/Armourer that I come across are White and male. Their attitudes include far too much casual prejudice to outright racism. It is more prevalent amongst armourers."

"Racism exists and is everything from subtle micro aggressions to more overt language and behaviour."



Often complaints are to go through HODs, production management etc, but **they are sometimes the people involved in the racism** or are related to or have an invested interest in the person you would like to report.

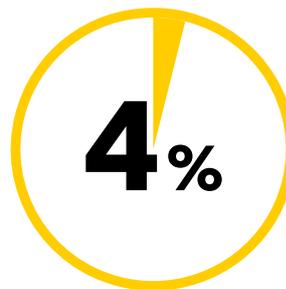


2. Reporting racism

The survey asked a series of questions about whether respondents had reported racism to either a broadcaster or a trade union and, crucially, whether those entities had dealt with their reports effectively. There was an overwhelming lack of confidence with the way both broadcasters and trade unions had handled reports of racism:



of those who reported racism to a trade union felt their complaint had been dealt with effectively



of those who reported racism to a broadcaster felt their complaint had been dealt with effectively

The context added by respondents provides an indication of some of the issues that have led respondents to have negative views of the reporting mechanisms of broadcasters and trade unions. For some respondents who encountered racist behaviour in the workplace, there were no effective reporting mechanisms available to them:

“There is no effective mechanism. Unions are non-existent.”

“Racism exists on a daily basis, I experience it as a witness. And feel there is still not structure for reporting it properly. Often complaints are to go through HODs production management etc, but these people are sometimes the people involved in the racism or are related to or have an invested interest in the person you would like to report.”

“When I was a runner I experienced racism and at the time found it annoying but put it down to banter. I also didn’t really know who to report this to. This occurred again and I spoke up and it never happened again. In hindsight I wish I had reported this to HR department.”

“I am an experienced individual in the television industry. The cost of that experience is too difficult to quantify, but I have paid personally for any small success. I understand the fear amongst my peers. I also understand the reasons for lack of support amongst my peers. There has been an inability to tackle racism head on because of the lack of opportunity to provide answers and implement ways forward. Diversity leaders often lack the power to implement change and often become a part of the corporations ability to change. Before I became an executive producer (and even then, because the battles become more important) I suffered racism at AP level by simply not being able to make progress while seeing others progress. Anyone reporting racism is usually going to be reporting it from their superiors. It is more likely to be institutional.”

“There are more HR departments now set up in film and tv productions, which is great, but they don’t have any way of anonymous reporting. This is essential if crew are to be able to feel comfortable reporting this behaviour.”

“Racism is very nuanced. It is political, sociological, economical, overt, subvert etc. Whoever is entrusted to deal with these incidences needs experience in all of those areas or it needs to be assigned to a team with those various skillsets.”

“Shocking reported it to line managers and Bectu and nothing was done shameful”

“Reported to Bectu who did nothing.”

While it is possible to implement a reporting mechanism, the conclusions of many respondents, including those self-described as White, were that their complaints were either ignored or not taken seriously. The comments below illustrate that there are many ways in which workers from the Global Majority are failed by the institutions for which they work:

“The onus is on the person to prove that they have been racially discriminated against and not the other way around. Also most cases of racial discrimination are heard by a White panel.”

“Most times when I do, I either get an apology which means nothing because it’s done again, or my contract is suddenly up or I’ve even had someone threaten to ‘blacklist’ me.”

“When I reported a racist incident I was gaslit, made to feel like I was making a fuss and because the production was close to finishing I was asked to change my job role in order to keep the perpetrator in his position. On another occasion I reported a micro-aggression I wasn’t happy with and I was told by head of production the MD of the company it is just like that and if that’s how they want to run their company there is nothing anyone can do.”

“It was a total whitewash and the person involved was promoted afterwards.”

“I escalated it to my director of photography and he escalated the incident to production and I was told nothing would be done because the job was nearly over.”

Some responses also indicate that the ability to report racism is linked to the person’s status in an organisation or the longevity of their careers:

“I’m now in a position I can report this without it negatively affecting my career - not everyone is so lucky - ie junior positions.”

“I have reported racism before. In my early career I wouldn’t report it as I was too scared to lose my job and be out of work. However I am more comfortable reporting it now. It is disappointing however when it is reported and nothing is done about it.”

“Talking to colleagues the fear is always the consequences of being the person who makes the report. That is true across all issues of racism, sexism, misogyny, bullying and harassment.”

The sense of futility is apparent as well, as the reasons of several respondents for not reporting racist behaviour shows:

“I haven’t done it because in my experience reporting breaches of behaviour to Production gets nowhere.”

“Complete waste of time.”

“I reported racist incidents to the contractor who engaged the freelancer. Never felt it was taken seriously or dealt with properly.”

“It is too traumatic.”

With trust in reporting mechanisms low amongst the respondents, one person had a constructive alternative:

“Reporting racism is one thing, dismantling racist practices and screening for racists before employment would be great. Your black and other ethnicity employees and co-workers are sick of having to deal with racists at work. We don’t care if it reduces the number of people available.”

Conclusion

The results of the survey highlight the fact that racism continues to be prevalent in the workplace in the UK broadcasting industry.

The survey also illustrated that reporting mechanisms were, for the respondents surveyed, largely ineffective.

While there has been change in the industry, work is still needed, particularly in terms of the education needed for people to identify the subtle forms of racism that workers from the Global Majority continue to encounter in the industry.



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