

DIVERSITY IN MEDIA: HOW TO SOLVE A PROBLEM LIKE ETHNICITY? PUT A RING ROUND IT.

In 2014 Sir Lenny Henry highlighted a 30% drop in BAME workers in the UK's TV industry between 2006 and 2012 in his damning [speech at Bafta](#). Ever since then diversity in TV has been high on the agenda.

Stuart Murphy, the former director at Sky, was the first to propose bold and challenging targets. Followed by the BBC, ITV and Channel 4 who also launched a raft of their own targets and training initiatives.

Fast forward to 2016 and optimism is starting to wane, as results of the various schemes are yet to be forthcoming change still feels so painfully slow.

Here at [The TV Collective](#) we like a number of other organisations have been campaigning for a more inclusive industry for nearly ten years and we know from personal experience that this debate has been raging on well before our existence.

Last year nearly 200 of our members took part in our [study](#). As we support diverse talent primarily from BAME communities working in TV reach their career aspirations, by showcasing their work and talents, as well as providing networking, employment and training opportunities. We were keen to find out what impact this current diversity drive had had and highlight any issues our members still faced.

64% of our respondents stated that there had been no added opportunities to progress their career since this diversity drive.

One respondent said that broadcasters had just implemented more schemes, while another commented that they "are done on a piecemeal basis – there's no follow-through and no consistency".

46% of people, however, had had more meetings to discuss potential projects and work. But this didn't necessary translate into a job.

The overriding feeling was talent felt the industry viewed them as a 'risk'. The lack of trust in their abilities was denying them the opportunity to progress and in some cases get an actual paid job.

[Director UK](#) undertook their own study that echoed similar thoughts. BAME directors make only 1.5% of all UK television.

The report highlighted "BAME directors are not only critically under-represented and under-employed in UK television as a whole, but that they are being given a far smaller proportion of directing opportunities. Some of the most popular drama, comedy and entertainment shows have never been directed by a director who is of black, Asian or minority ethnic background"

Thus far the industry's overall response to the lack of diversity is to focus on training and entry-level positions, this has further compounded the problem. At the [BBC](#) alone in the last 15 years there have been 29 initiatives to achieve ethnic diversity while in fact the numbers have actually been declining.

Training schemes and initiatives inadvertently creates the perception that the reason why black, Asian and ethnic minority talent are leaving the industry or not striving in their careers – is because they are "not good enough" for existing roles.

Even diverse talent exploiting new opportunities on digital platforms such as BBC3 and All4shorts have found them selves faced with a new kind of snobbery. Although production companies seem happier offering opportunities to work on digital shorts there is little or no progression onto longer form shows.

As a final straw talent are turning to platforms such as Youtube and vimeo to share their content. They often find it hard to make a regular income forcing them to reconsider their future in the industry.

The delayed launch the latest industry diversity initiative promises to be the answer to all our prayers. [Project Diamond](#), a simple data-gathering exercise will for the first time ever ensure “diversity is properly monitored” and hopes to “focus production companies to address diversity issues both on and off screen”.

Critics have questioned how diversity stats will drive change, while others have said Diamond highlights an issue we already know exists.

Given the amount of time and effort taken thus far to convince the industry that BAME and ‘minority’ talent are not a ‘risk’, I personally am yet to be convinced.

With programme budgets being squeezed, jobs being cut and broadcasters having to face new funding models, how long can the focus on diversity last? More importantly will it actually lead to more people being employed, particularly where it really matters before the money and inclining run out?

We need more diverse company owners, more diverse leaders, more diverse decision makers and more diverse influencers. These are key to any long lasting and sustainable change.

When Actor Idris Elba, recently spoke before the UK Parliament earlier this year he called for a “Magna Carta moment” in the UK TV industry to reflect the reality of the contemporary UK.

“We need a different approach towards risk,” Elba told the committee of MPs. “Let’s be honest, too often commissioners look at diverse talent and all they see is risk”.

Now honestly, What are we going to do with a problem like ethnicity? The problem with race is there is nothing tangible to fix. For example if someone is in a wheelchair you can build a ramp and make work more accessible, women with children you offer flexi hours and childcare but – how do you solve a problem like ethnicity? Especially when the needs of the talent is exactly the same as anyone else. There needs to be a change in mindset. If reasoning

and persuasion aren't working you're going to need something with a bit more teeth.

Here at The TV Collective we are not convinced the diversity drives alone will work, even with the combination of the important work organisations like us are doing it's still not enough. We constantly support people who have dealt the same frustrations long before this drive and have little faith they will go away.

The British TV industry is haemorrhaging skilled and experience talent at an alarming rate and losing audiences as a result.

We recommend the time has come for a drastic intervention. The time has come to deal with ethnicity once and for all and put a ring around it!

The BBC's charter renewal for the first time in ages, provides a very real opportunity to tackle the issue and force the BBC and the industry as a whole to take ethnic diversity seriously.

Ever since his 2014 Bafta speech Lenny Henry suggested what most diverse talent now feel is the only workable solution. He has repeatedly called for Ofcom to mandate ring-fenced funding for BAME productions.

The issue of the lack of diversity has been discussed for over twenty years with no long-term resolution. We have tried everything else so what have the industry got to lose by trying this apart from my more skilled diverse talent, audiences and revenue!

Simone Pennant

The TV Collective