# Racial diversity initiatives: how will we know what works?

*Professor Sarita Malik*

**Policy Context:** The public sector is trying to increase racial diversity but, since previous diversity initiatives were rarely evaluated, there is limited evidence on how to achieve this goal.

**Research:** A review of UK film and TV racial diversity initiatives found an absence of reliable data and monitoring, particularly of direct testimony or data which captures the nuances of different identities. Also, efforts to increase representation have diverted attention away from addressing discriminatory practices.

**Advice:** Evaluate with qualitative data, as well as using quantitative data which captures nuances of different identities. Do not only increase representation – tackle racist practices.

## Key research findings

Professor Malik and Dr Clive Nwonka examined the evaluation and outcomes of significant racial diversity initiatives in UK film and TV. They found that:

> Organisations are reluctant to be transparent about the impact of their diversity plans, so there is an **absence of reliable data** and monitoring of specific diversity initiatives. This has curtailed the ability of subsequent diversity programmes and discussions to learn their successes or failings.

> **Fluid terminology and data categorisation** makes it difficult to discern the targets and outcomes of diversity initiatives. In particular, the term 'BAME' (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) is a broad category which does not make the nuanced experiences of different ethnic and cultural groups visible. This has implications for resource allocation and outcomes for ethnic groups.

> **Available data also does not capture how experience varies** with intersectionality (having multiple protected characteristics which interact), work area, seniority or geographical location.

> **Lack of space for direct testimonies from ethnic minority groups** has limited understandings of the barriers to achieving diversity, particularly of how inequality, discrimination and racism determines the lived experiences of ethnic minorities.

> There was an **unwillingness to address structural discriminatory practices** such as in funding awards or recruitment methods. Emphasis on improving diversity through training or mentorship and increasing on-screen representation diverted attention away from addressing discrimination.

## Policy advice

> **Acknowledge and understand the differences between improving diversity and tackling racism.** 'Diversity' initiatives are often remedial measures to address under-representation, whereas 'anti-racism' tends to tackle discriminatory practices. Ensure that your policy aims respond to the experiences of ethnic minorities in your policy area.

> **Develop datasets that capture the nuances and variables across identities,** including data on regional variation and levels of seniority, to enable more informed policy decisions in the future.

> **Complement quantitative data approaches with qualitative ones,** including anecdotal evidence from people from ethnic minority groups. Consider collaboration with individuals, advocates and community groups with lived experiences of inequality, discrimination and racism, to better inform the aims, design and delivery of initiatives.

> **Make your data publicly available for external review** of the effectiveness of your diversity initiatives. Ensure that organisations in receipt of public resources do the same.

> **Develop stronger and more transparent relationships with external researchers** to ensure objective analysis of this data. Distribute the benefits of these relationships across a number of non-elite institutions in areas of the UK that capture students from ethnic minority groups and lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

> **Evaluate diversity initiatives robustly, at least annually.** In particular, re-evaluate the legitimacy and efficacy of 'skills and training' approaches to employee inclusion, with greater consideration of the duration, destinations, career progression, attrition and age ranges of the participants. Make the evaluations easily accessible and open to public scrutiny.

> **Ensure that resources are available for racial equality policy activities,** including monitoring, data capture and evaluation and its public dissemination.

### Work with me

Professor Malik is Professor of Media, Culture and Communications at Brunel University London. Over the past two decades her research on cultural representation, production and policy has made a major contribution to understandings of cultural sector inequalities and the language of diversity. She has also been appointed to the DCMS college of experts.

Contact Professor Malik at sarita.malik@brunel.ac.uk if you would like to learn more about her research, invite her to speak at your event, or collaborate with her to improve or evaluate your racial diversity initiative.