

CAREER INSIGHTS

Race and Ethnicity: What the firm is doing

Head of Inclusion and Corporate Responsibility, Uzma Hamid-Dizier,
in conversation with Associate and DIVERSE Committee Chair, Lorna Nsoatabe

In light of the Black Lives Matter protests there has been a renewed focus on the issue of race and ethnicity in the workplace. Uzma Hamid-Dizier sat down with DIVERSE committee Chair Lorna Nsoatabe to talk about how the firm can tackle inequality in and out of the workplace.

Uzma: It's important that we focus on how to engage everyone at the firm in understanding the lived experience of our black and BAME colleagues.



Lorna: Yes, over the last few weeks a group of us has been regularly coming together to share how we were all feeling - for me and hopefully others, it was cathartic, worthwhile and a unifying experience. Our aim was to ensure that there was a space for everyone to share their thoughts, worries and frustrations,

but we also wanted the meeting to result in action. We came up with a wide range of ideas, some of which, such as reverse mentoring and focus groups, are already being developed by the firm.

We agreed that a panel style event, similar to other events we have run on mental health, would help highlight the lived experience of black colleagues and what allyship means at the firm.

We also want to continue to work with the other networks to stimulate a dialogue on race and ethnicity. For example, we are supporting Pride by collaborating with PRISM, the firm's LGBT + Network, on a joint panel event around authenticity at work. In conjunction with the Family Network, we've discussed running a session on how to talk to children about racism.



Uzma: We already had a BAME action plan in place and this conversation has certainly brought greater attention to it. There is a partner working group who will oversee the delivery of the plan.

Ultimately, this affects everyone. It's important to engage in a firm wide dialogue around inclusion, what we are seeing externally, what this means for individuals and the firm and the role that each of us can play.

The firm is due to launch a reverse mentoring scheme, following a successful pilot in 2019. This scheme aims to provide a mutual learning experience to enhance understanding and encourage inclusive leadership and role modelling at all levels.

We are also exploring working on a pro bono basis with charities on racial justice, anti-racism or work that focuses on issues facing black and BAME communities.

Our Inclusion Allies initiative and training programme encourages us all to consider how we can actively promote an inclusive environment through simple, everyday language and behaviours. We've planned sessions from now until the end of the year.

Lorna: A number of people have said to me that they want to talk more at work about racism and inequality but do not necessarily know how or what would be the appropriate forum. The aim of the DIVERSE Network is to encourage that much needed conversation. But outside the DIVERSE network the firm has been active for a while.

Uzma: Yes, we were the first firm to engage Rare Recruitment, who specialise in sourcing exceptional people from diverse backgrounds into some of the world's leading organisations. We were the first firm to set up a cross-company mentoring programme for BAME employees in partnership with INVOLVE, four years ago. It's essential that we keep the energy and momentum going and continue to take collective responsibility for driving change as a firm.