

DIVERSITY IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY

1 REVIEW

The Network has been in existence for 12 years and during this challenging period, through the leadership of Robin, Rajinder and others including its numerous friends and supporters in the sector, we have managed to move the issue of Race Equality from the margins to the mainstream. Whilst we celebrate this significant achievement for the sector, we must not underestimate the contribution OFSTED has made in recent years and the favourable, political and financially environment in which we all operated in. Much has been achieved, but the task of further diversifying the management and leadership of our sector so that it is more representative of the BME population in the learning and skill sector, still remains and the task is far from complete.

2 FUTURE

The next 5 years are likely to see further and significant changes in how the sector is managed and operates. The political and financial framework is rapidly changing and cuts will begin to hit the sector from next year onwards. Whilst there are differences of opinion of the role and contribution of quangos in the sector, it is very likely they will diminish in number. This has financial implications for the Network as well as opening up opportunities to further diversify its work. Colleges and others will have to make difficult decisions in terms of their financial constraints and we all need to be vigilant to ensure that diversity does not become marginalised once again. If, when and where cuts (euphemistically labelled “efficiency savings”) are proposed, then they should be perceived as being fairly distributed across the organisation wherever possible and not disproportionately targeted at BME staff...

The enhanced role of local authorities from next year is another area where we need to be vigilant. Whilst some local authorities have an excellent record in terms of diversity, many have a poor record in terms of leadership and race quality.

The research carried out by Manchester University, published earlier this month in the TES, stated “the school system is guilty of an endemic culture of institutional racism’ that is barring (BME) teachers from Leadership roles”. Whilst the sample of approximately 550 BME teachers is only about 11% of BME teachers in the sector, their experience and perception is nevertheless worrying. With part of colleges’ responsibilities moving to local authority, this is an area which the Network will need to look at and to determine what it can do, in partnership with others, to improve the situation.

In brief, we can all take pride in what the sector has so far achieved in terms of race equality, developing staff talent, improving the nation’s skills base and contributing to community cohesion and social justice. But we must be ever watchful since the next five years will throw up significant new challenges. The foundations we have put down together over the last 12 years provides us with the solid platform to face the future with confidence and optimism and to tackle the new challenges successfully.

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