

Going forward: an action plan to build an anti-racist trade union movement

For our unions to thrive, recruiting Black members and addressing racism at work has to be at the core of our work. This will grow our movement, make it diverse and truly representative of the working class of modern-day Britain.

We must recognise that every one of our unions has its unique challenge when addressing racial equality and justice – from the diversity of recruitment, organising, sector demographics and the priorities placed by their executives.

This set of actions are a key outcome of the ARTF during its two-year tenure. This work has been informed by centring the voice of Black workers through research, conversations, events, roundtable events, activist forums and feedback from officials throughout our trade union movement.

This list of actions and the Anti-Racism Manifesto, produce a robust roadmap for trade unions to take on the path to racial justice, equality and diversity.

The actions

Building our movement

Understanding racism: Trade unions should have mandatory anti-racism training for staff. Their education programmes for reps and activists should include anti-racist education.

Race and the law: Trade unions should develop a learning programme to take legal officers and reps through the mechanics of building a case, including identifying and dealing with racial discrimination in the workplace.

Strategic litigation: Trade unions need to train caseworkers to understand how strategic litigation is used to advance racial justice in the workplace. This includes integrating anti-racism principles into litigation and casework, and ensuring all staff follow an agreed litigation and campaign strategy for actively challenging racism.

Organising: Trade unions must develop a programme of work to identify Black activists, recruit new Black reps and engage them in a programme of work that builds a network of Black activists to help build membership. A key factor of this work should be to remove barriers to Black workers participation in their unions. Trade unions should create organising strategies in sectors and industries where Black workers are more likely to be employed.

Black leadership: Trade unions must establish their Black leadership programmes including developing modular based training that equips black activists to deal with the specific problems they experience whilst undertaking their duties.

Fighting for our rights

Fighting racism: Trade unions must build campaigns that tackle racism in the labour market and create better working conditions for Black workers, who are more likely to face insecure contracts and unfair pay. This includes campaigning on casualisation, outsourcing, fire and rehire, mass redundancies, the hostile environment and holding the government to account through the Covid public inquiry.

Representation: Trade unions should listen to their Black members to identify key bargaining issues and take steps to ensure that Black workers are represented at the negotiating table.

Monitoring in the workplace: Trade unions must tackle racism in the workplace by seeking workplace agreements to monitor and review their recruitment, retention and employment practices, and press for action by employers to tackle under-representation, outsourcing/two-tier employment and eliminate ethnicity pay gaps.

Decent work for all: Trade unions must campaign for the introduction of race equality requirements into public sector contracts for the supply of goods and services, in order to incentivise employers to improve their race equality policies and practices and to tackle the abuse of zero-hours and temporary and agency contracts and promote decent work for all. And campaign to demand that racial justice is an essential criterion for companies awarded a public contract.

Anti-Racism Network: Unions should participate with the TUC Anti-Racism Network. The network convenes a bi-annual programme of meetings with organisations working on race related policy.

Leading by example

Acknowledge experiences: Unions should engage with their staff on the findings from the ARTF unions as employers workstream. They should also acknowledge the experiences of their Black staff and officers.

Robust reporting: Unions should put together a robust mechanism for reporting racist incidents in the workplace. Incidents must be dealt with adequately and in a timely manner.

Promoting transparency: Unions must promote greater transparency and consistency in their HR practices, especially in hiring and promotion of staff. They should put together race action plans that monitor their progress on a regular basis. The plans should be reviewed, annually, and progress should be measured.

Supporting Black groups: Trade unions should support and resource Black staff affinity groups and regularly engage and consult with them to shift the culture of their respective organisations

Developing leaders: As employers, trade unions should create Black leadership programmes to support the progress and development of Black staff. They need to work to eliminate institutional barriers and blockages that have resulted in the lack of diversity in their unions at all levels.