

# Equality, Diversity and Inclusion amongst Academy Trust CEOs

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# Equality, Diversity and Inclusion amongst Academy Trust CEOs

Analysis and recommendations for the trust sector, system leaders  
and national government

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# Who we are

## About Forum Strategy

Forum Strategy is a national membership and consultancy organisation supporting CEOs and executive leaders, with a particular focus on those leading academy trusts. Forum Strategy's thought-leadership, national network, and annual conference for Chief Executives has ensured it is a sector leader, informing the sustainable development of the academy trust sector through harnessing the views, experiences and ideas of CEOs and experts from within and beyond the sector. Forum Strategy was established in 2013.

## Introduction

***“With quality diversity and inclusion, it does take a lot of courage, you do have to be very brave. It's not easy stuff.” – Head of HR at a Trust in the West Midlands***

At Forum Strategy, we believe in the power of the trust sector. Amongst our CEO and executive leader membership, we see incredible work to improve the education and life chances of children. Trusts provide an opportunity for autonomy and flexibility – empowering our leaders to tailor education around the needs of their children and communities, and ultimately, have a positive impact on their lives.

However, it is natural that with such influence on thousands of children and young people, comes greater scrutiny and expectation. We know that when our children look up to us, they see role models. Trust leaders have a vital role in shaping the future of our children, and therefore demonstrating what is possible.

And that is why we have chosen to focus on equality, diversity and inclusion amongst trust CEOs as the topic for this research. Because when children from protected groups, don't see 'people like them' in leadership roles, they notice. And therein lies a vicious cycle, where children from protected groups don't aspire to be leaders, and so the leaders of the next generation lack diversity, and this pattern keeps repeating itself.

***“We need a forum where we can talk about this between trusts, share our experiences and share best practice.” – Regional Director at a National Trust***

We want to help break that cycle. We know how passionate our colleagues in the system are about this – and we want to provide the platform to give voice to that passion. We want to bring to the forefront valuable insight and evidence, both about the problems but also, crucially, open up a dialogue about potential actions to address those issues. We want to be both optimistic and pragmatic, working with the sector to discuss routes forward which can gain momentum over time.

***“We need more research, to explore any structural or cultural barriers that are maintaining workplace inequality... perhaps it's a national body that might be able to provide that information.” – Executive Principal in London***

After all, combatting discrimination and barriers, whilst challenging, should not be impossible – whether it's having diverse recruitment panels or implementing mentoring systems for aspiring leaders from protected groups, there are so many tangible actions we can take within individual trusts, which could make a substantial difference to the lives of aspiring leaders and the children who look up to them.

***“Well, there's obviously the big groups like Forum Strategy and CST who do bring CEOs together to have conversations... and local networks, geographical networks... that for me, is probably my best source of CPD and learning.” – Chief Executive at a MAT in Yorkshire***

We hope you find this report illuminating and we look forward to discussing it with others across the sector and making progress on this important issue in the coming years.

Alice Gregson, Chief Operating Officer, Forum Strategy

*In partnership and with thanks to advisory board members: David Watson, CEO, Venturers Trust; Nav Sanghara, CEO, Woodland Academy Trust; Ranjit Manghnani, Executive Coach & Associate; and Sir Steve Lancashire, CEO, Reach2 Academy Trust.*

*With thanks also to Public First - Ed Dorrell for supporting the advisory board and Ed Reza Schwitzer for co-authoring the report and supporting the analysis in it.*

## Methodology

Forum Strategy commissioned research and polling organisation Public First to undertake analysis to help understand diversity amongst trust CEOs, and identify ways to drive improvement in this space.

They undertook three main forms of analysis:

- A poll of 115 trust CEOs and other senior trust leaders on their attitudes towards diversity, inclusion and discrimination – this represents coverage of almost 10% of the multi-academy trust sector
- Three focus groups made up of a mixed sample of participants from senior trust leadership, including varying geographies, trust size, role, and protected characteristics
- A literature review of available evidence, including from beyond the education sector

We augmented this through a desk-based analysis of the gender of trust CEOs across the North East, East Midlands, West Midlands and South West, covering 396 trusts.

We have used this analysis to find answers to three fundamental questions:

- What is the current level of diversity among trust CEOs and those aspiring to the role?
- What drives diversity and inclusion issues?
- What are some potential solutions to these diversity and inclusion issues?

Within that, we have looked to understand issues at individual, trust, and system level, as we want to ensure everyone can take something away from this work and implement it in their day to day working lives. We want to move the evidence base on and support trusts, who we know are passionate about this, to have access to a national evidence base they can use in their own corporate strategies. We also want to work with representative organisations and local and national government in areas where there are system level issues that our analysis suggests need tackling.

A more detailed summary of the analysis is available as an appendix to this report.

Throughout the report we use the phrase ‘protected characteristics’ – for clarity, we intend the legal definition which covers: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. Socio-economic status and ‘class’ are not currently protected characteristics, and we therefore did not cover this in our polling or literature review. However, given these characteristics are likely to impact whether children feel trust leaders are ‘like them’, there was some discussion around this in our focus groups.

We also regularly refer to those who ‘identify with protected characteristics’ – of course, technically we all have protected characteristics that we identify with, such as age and sex.

When we say this we use it as shorthand to mean those who identify with groups within these characteristics that are typically underrepresented and/or marginalised.



## Headline findings

There is a wealth of information and detail in this report, and it is challenging to summarise it all without losing much of the context and depth which we think makes it so powerful, however, the key points we see emerging from it are as below. Underpinning many of these points were tangible actions proposed by focus group participants as solutions – we set these out in the following section under ‘recommendations’.

1. Across our evidence gathering there is general recognition that levels of **diversity amongst trust CEOs and aspiring trust CEOs is poor**, but there is also optimism that **things are getting better**, particularly on gender in recent years, and that things could improve further in future. Our analysis of four regions, just short of 400 trusts, highlights that there is a progressing picture for gender equality, though we know this is not the case for the best paid chief executives nationally
2. Across all of our analysis, a clear barrier to our work has been that the department for education does not capture, or at least not make publicly available, **general 'protected characteristic' data for CEOs at a national level**
3. Experience of **discrimination among leaders and trust senior management teams (SMT) is widespread**. Conclusions from our focus groups suggest overt discrimination is rare, but not unknown, and that many in academy trust leadership believe that hidden bias is widespread. Our results in the indicative poll support this, as did our literature review
4. There was **greater understanding of diversity, as a concept, than inclusion** – it took time in our focus groups for colleagues to really understand and vocalise what an inclusive environment might look like and consider that as being different to how increased diversity would look. Diversity and inclusion although inter-related are, of course, not the same thing – it is possible to feel more included even if there is a lack of diversity around you and likewise, possible to feel excluded, even with good levels of diversity. It's important to understand the nuances and relationships between the two.
5. There was also **greater understanding around more visible protected characteristics** such as gender and ethnicity than, for example, LGBTQI+ or disability which can be harder to 'see' in certain instances. This may mean more work is needed to empower colleagues to have discussions about these 'hidden' characteristics
6. **Recruitment has been identified as one of the biggest issues** driving a lack of diversity in the sector, with many participants in our focus groups feeling the problem starts right at the beginning of the teaching profession. There is a feeling that many new teachers, and especially those taking part in high potential graduate schemes, tend to adhere to a certain 'type'. Going even further backwards in the journey, many of the people we spoke to in our focus groups felt children from certain protected groups do not aspire to be teachers from a young age, and this needs to be addressed

7. We also heard, and read in our literature review, of the **challenges around boards of trustees and governors** – many leaders felt that without more diversity amongst the people in power it was inevitable that there would be implicit biases in recruitment and promotion decisions, and that improving both the actual diversity and the understanding of diversity in this group was paramount
8. There was strong support for **discussing diversity issues more openly**, accepting people may "say the wrong word or term", but providing a non-judgemental environment for question and discussion. There were also proposals to use more **direct mentoring and coaching as a tool** to build staff confidence and skills

## Recommendations

This work is not intended to be overly prescriptive – we think the trust sector works best when we empower leaders to implement policy in the way that best works in their own context. However, we have found some interesting and powerful solutions we feel trusts and system leaders (including national government) should all consider implementing or at least examining and exploring further.

### To trusts

1. **Create the right environment** to discuss equality, diversity and inclusion, including allowing staff the space to ask about what the right terminology might be so they can be confident in promoting and advancing solutions on this important issue. Regular discussion sessions, training sessions or setting aside time in meetings are just a few ways to create this space
2. **Make clear what your policy is** on equality, diversity and inclusion – leave staff in no doubt that discrimination is unacceptable, but also encourage individuals to challenge their own preconceived biases and consider how they can be more inclusive in their everyday activities
3. **Have a clear, public objective** – make equality, diversity and inclusion a strategic priority and ask yourself what you want to achieve in your trust and what measures will allow you to track progress in a defined timeframe. Set yourselves ambitious goals and make yourself openly and publicly accountable for them
4. **Consider auditing and improving your attraction and recruitment processes** – whether that is through contacting your ITT providers or recruitment agencies to ask for a more diverse range of candidates, using more diverse recruitment panels, or anonymising your initial recruitment sifts, there are a wide range of ways you can increase your chances of tapping into a more diverse and varied pool of talent
5. Ask whether staff from protected groups would benefit **from high quality coaching or mentoring** – we have found this to be very popular as a mechanism to boost staff confidence and give them the opportunities they need to advance to the next level
6. **Seek out good practice** – whether it's through Forum Strategy, or other national or local networks, the trust system is at its strongest when leaders learn from each other and don't seek to reinvent the wheel

### To national government and other system leaders

7. **We need more and better data on this issue**, nationally – we must begin a conversation about how we achieve that, as the current data for trust CEOs is non-existent and even wider diversity data for leadership in schools does not cover important issues such as proportions who identify as LGBTQI+. There should be tracking

of diversity from teacher level (or equivalent) to trust CEO and governance levels, only then can we get a full picture of what is happening across the system

8. We specifically need **a better understanding of diversity of entrants (across all the protected characteristics) to the teaching profession** – we cannot make improvements in this space without examining the pipeline into teaching, and therefore the pipeline to leadership
9. We also need to have greater ambitions and clear commitment to addressing **the diversity of the boards** who appoint and promote senior leaders, and what changes at national level could make it more likely and attractive for underrepresented groups to feature more on them
10. The sector would benefit from **stronger communications**, particularly from central government, about how important this topic is and what strategic objectives system leaders think are achievable in the coming years on it

# Levels of diversity amongst trust CEOs are poor, but there is optimism that things are getting better and can improve going forwards

Across all forms of our analysis, the evidence suggests trust CEOs are not a diverse group, with some nuance on this point when it comes to gender.

The first point to make is that the data on this is very poor. Our literature review shows there is a substantial lack of analysis on this specific issue of diversity at CEO level – whilst there is data on the school workforce and school leadership, there is nothing that focuses on trust leadership specifically. As is covered in more detail in our literature review, the main evidence on this is reporting from Schools Week in 2020 that highlighted the proportion of BAME leaders of England’s largest academy trusts has fallen, with 98% of the top chains run by white CEOs. This is based, however, on a relatively small sample of 98 Trusts, all of which were 15 schools or larger, and it looked very specifically at ethnicity rather than the full spectrum of diversity<sup>1</sup>.

***“From what I see of MATs, I would say they are largely run by white, middle-class men.” – Head Teacher from London***

Given the impact and influence trusts have – this clearly needs resolving. We cannot be in a situation where we have no data on the most senior leaders in our sector and whether, as a sector, they truly represent the children they ultimately work for.

Since the evidence base around executive level diversity in trusts is so limited, we need to look wider. A large majority of CEOs in trusts are drawn from leadership levels in schools, so it is useful to look at what existing data tells us about school leadership diversity and therefore the pool from which executive leaders are often drawn. This was a key focus of our literature review.

The evidence base at this level is strongest around ethnicity. The most authoritative data on leadership levels below CEO comes from the DfE 2019 School Workforce Census data<sup>2</sup>. The latest data show that White British people made up 92.7% of headteachers, 89.7% of deputy or assistant headteachers and 84.9% of classroom teachers. This shows a significant underrepresentation of BAME staff at leadership level than amongst classroom teachers.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/academy-trust-leadership-is-still-a-pale-reflection-of-our-communities/>

<sup>2</sup>

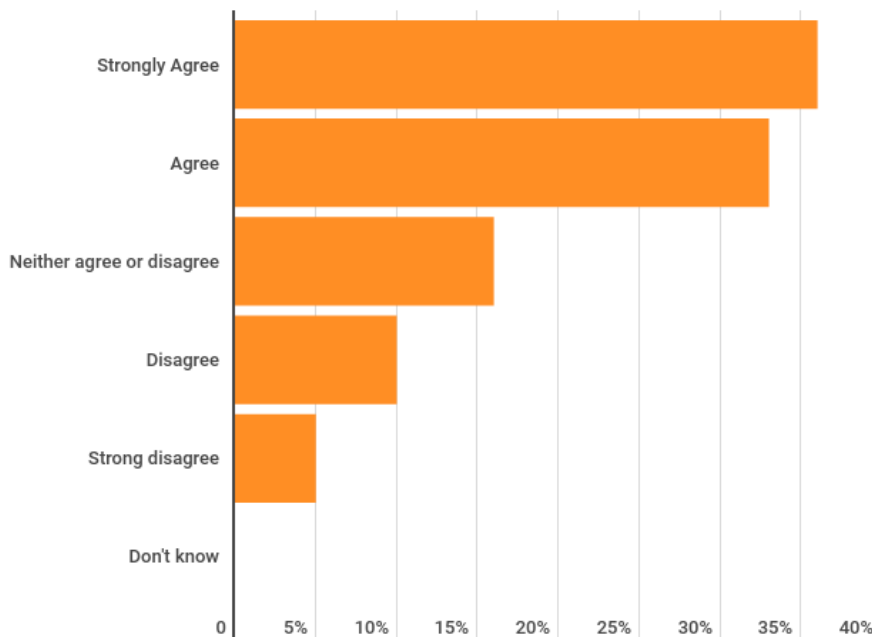
<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/workforce-and-business/workforce-diversity/school-teacher-workforce/latest#by-ethnicity>

There is no readymade analysis comparing these figures to the populations these schools serve.

*“How can we expect diverse leadership structures in schools and MATs if our teachers aren’t reflective of our population? In this secondary school I’m sat in, we’ve got between 40 to 50% black students, but we’ve got less than 5% black staff in front of those students. And that’s just one example.” – Head of HR at a Trust in the West Midlands*

It is worth highlighting at this point that we would argue the objective for trusts should be for schools’ leadership to be roughly as diverse as school staff, and similarly for both to be as diverse as the populations that schools serve. This is in contrast to what some others argue, that diversity should match national benchmarks. On staffing, we argue this because anything else suggests a bias and barriers in promoting staff. On comparing to the populations schools serve, we argue this because it is what will inspire and empower subsequent generations to achieve, and break the cycles of discrimination and hidden barriers which hold those who identify with protected characteristics back. This approach was supported by our polling which found that 69% of respondents agree or strongly agree that leadership teams should reflect the communities they serve.

**Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements: “Schools, academies and academy trusts should have leadership teams that reflect the communities that they serve”**



Returning to our analysis itself, there is a more nuanced story on gender, where schools generally have much higher levels of female participation than other sectors, though there is

still a significant gap between junior and senior levels within schools. DfE analysis<sup>3</sup> shows 75% of classroom teachers were female, dropping to 67% of headteachers. However, this does compare favourably to 29% when looking at senior managerial levels across the economy as a whole<sup>4</sup>. We cover gender specifically in more detail at the end of this section.

There is very little research currently around representation levels in leadership roles across education for sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, religion and belief, marriage/civil partnership and maternity/paternity. This once again points to the need for further work and analysis in this space, that places importance on all protected characteristics.

To improve our understanding, we need to expand our horizons to look at *perception* of diversity, in addition to the levels of actual diversity. Perception of diversity is important given its impact on the future pipeline and how likely people are to aspire to progression if they perceive diversity levels to be low. Analysis by Edurio<sup>5</sup> shows that school leadership teams are seen as generally less diverse than the wider staff body. While 15% of respondents to this survey felt the staff body in their school was very diverse, only 8% thought the same of the leadership team. Similarly, 4% felt that the staff body was not diverse at all, in comparison to 12% about the leadership team.

***“It’s only two years ago that I went into an RSC conference in a football stadium. And I would say 75% of the people in that room were middle aged men. And I was absolutely in the minority, because I think probably at least another sizeable proportion of the women who were there had clipboards, doing admin roles.” – Chief Executive at a Trust in the North West***

This very much tallies with the results of our polling. 53% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree that “the education sector is an equal playing field for people like me”. And 58% of respondents agree or strongly agree that “some barriers to progression for people like me are hidden”. This demonstrates a majority view that there are inequalities baked into the system and that these manifest in a way which is not immediately obvious to an observer. Of course, it is these hidden inequalities which can be the most pernicious because they can be hard to unearth and tackle.

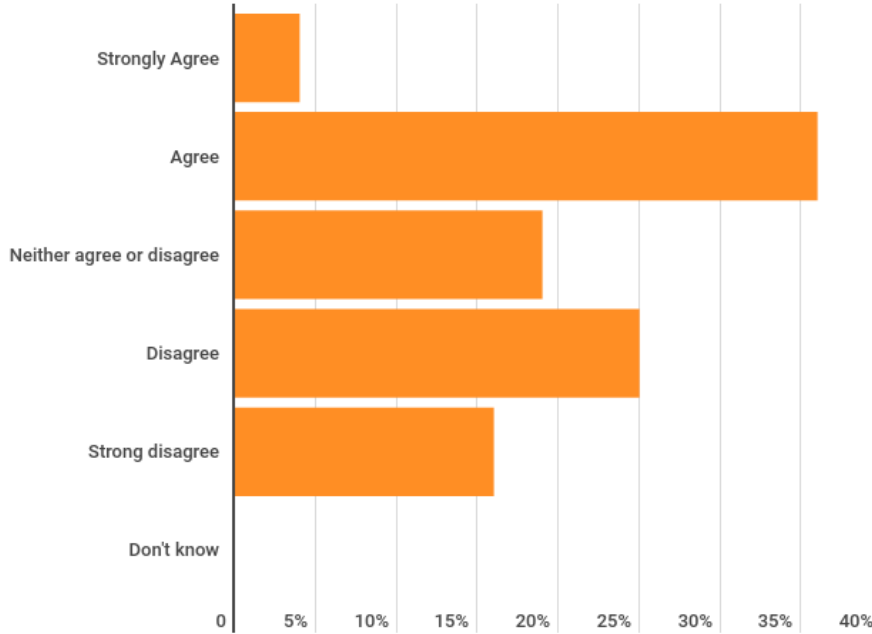
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<sup>3</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england>

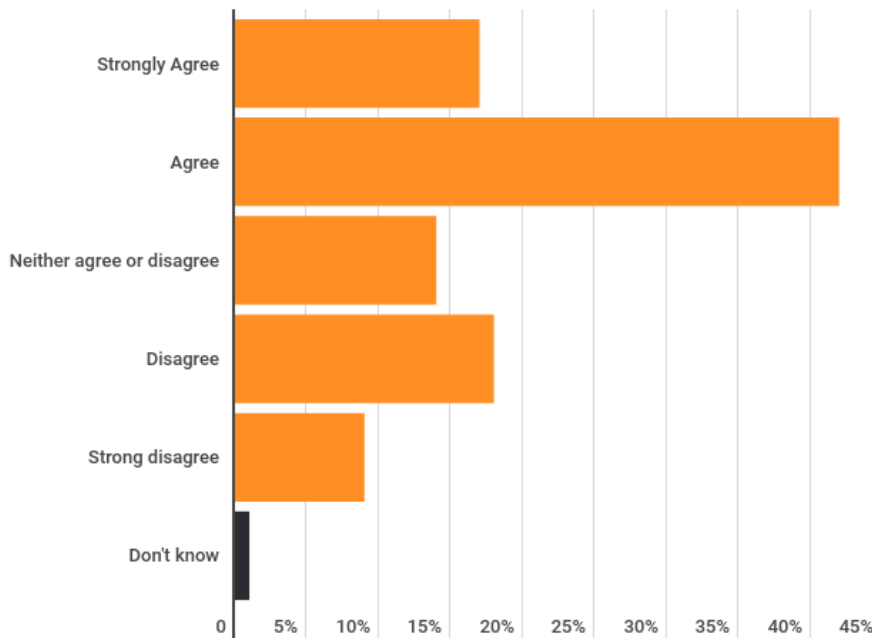
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-management/>

<sup>5</sup> [https://home.edurio.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/EDI\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](https://home.edurio.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/EDI_Report_Final.pdf)

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements: "The school sector has barriers to progression for people like me"

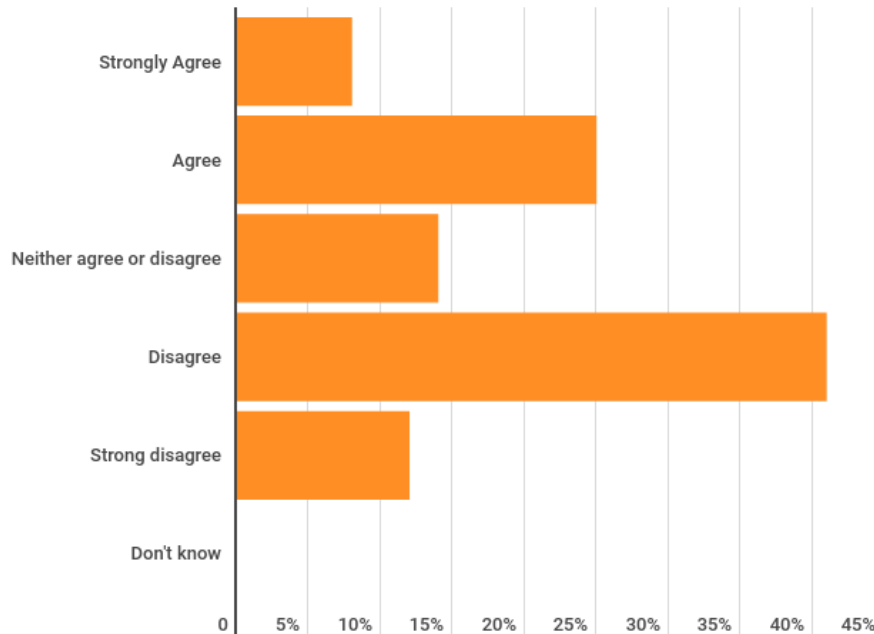


Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements: "Some barriers to progression for people like me are hidden"





Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements: "The education sector is an equal playing field for people like me"



It also matches the findings from our focus groups. The strong opinion of all our focus group participants was that trust CEOs were not diverse at all – in fact there was even some amusement that it was a question with anything other than an obvious answer. Participants noted they encountered more female CEOs than they used to, particularly in the primary sector, but were clear this was the exception and that, particularly for trusts which ‘government is most likely to call on to speak on things’, the vast majority of CEOs were white men.

*“The student population we serve... is in no way representative of the staff and particularly the school leaders and governors. And one of the things we’re really clear on is that it’s really important our students see themselves in the adults who teach them and support them. And we’re miles off with that.” – Chief Executive at a Trust in Yorkshire*

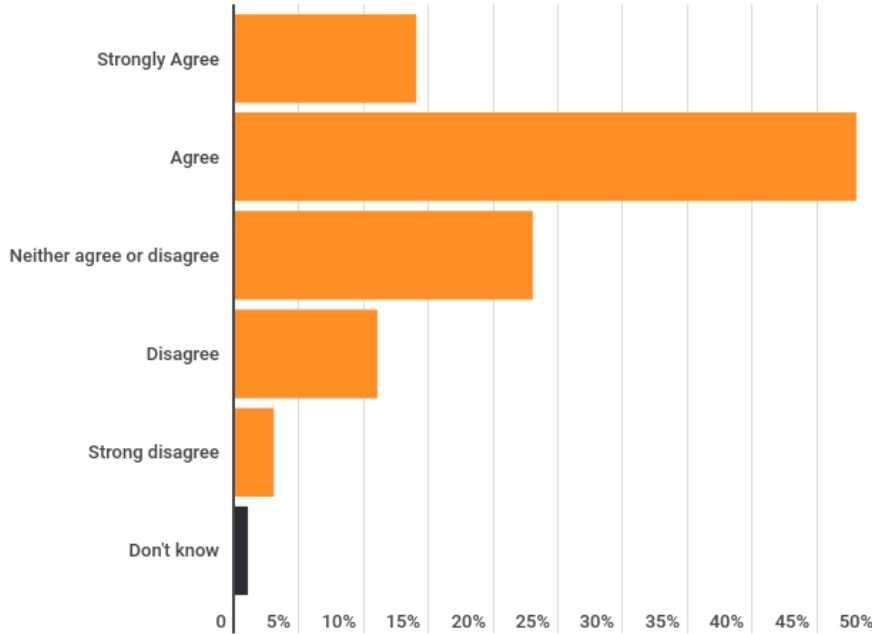
*“Our staffing structures do not reflect the communities we serve. It is something that affects the perspective of the leadership discussions we have – and there is an unintended lack of empathy for the experiences our students have.” – Chief Executive at a Trust in the South East*

*“When we look at the people who are always quoted whenever anything comes out from the DfE, those CEOs, they’re still men, particularly from the largest trusts” – Chief Executive at a Trust in the North West*

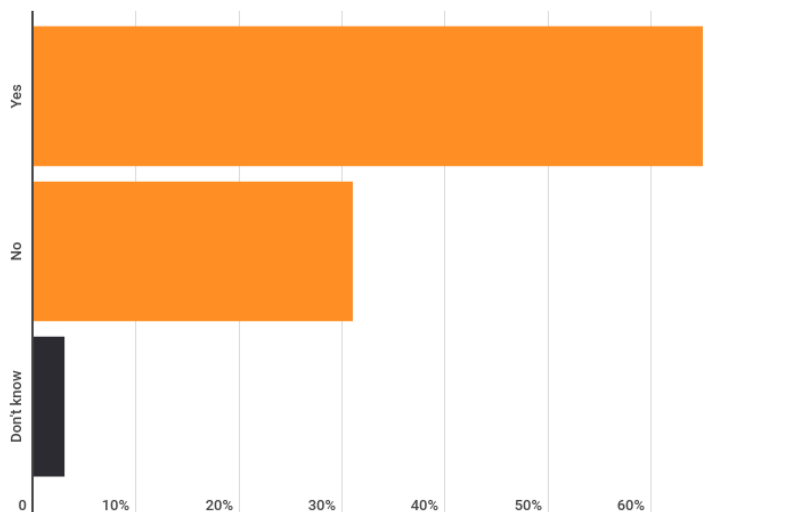
One positive finding in both our poll and focus groups was optimism that things are improving, and that they can improve further. Over 60% agreed or strongly agreed in our poll that “career

prospects for people like me in the education sector have improved in the last decade". And in the focus groups we were struck by the passion and optimism participants showed. Despite describing really challenging situations, many participants expressed a sense that things had improved a lot in recent years, and that things could get better if we all took action together. Our polling also highlighted that the vast majority of trusts do currently have some level of strategy around equality, diversity and inclusion, which is equally encouraging.

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements: "The career prospects for people like me in the education sector have improved in the last decade"



Does your Trust currently have in place a strategy around workforce diversity, equality and inclusion?



*"There are more females popping up, so I don't think it's as bad as it used to be. I think there has been some improvement on the ethnicity side too" – Chief Executive at a Trust in Yorkshire*

These findings match the results of our analysis of 396 trusts across the North East, East Midlands, West Midlands and South West regions [where data were available], where we found the following gender splits:

- North East – across 78 trusts: 36 female and 42 male – so 46% female and 54% male.
- East Midlands – across 107 trusts: 45 female and 62 male – so 42% female and 58% male.
- West Midlands – across 107 trusts: 48 female and 59 male – so 45% female and 55% male.
- South West – across 104 trusts: 42 female and 62 male – so 40% female and 60% male.

When compared with other sectors, this shows a progressing picture for academy trusts when it comes to gender. In comparison in the FTSE 100 in the Top 3 roles (Chair, CEO & CFO) there are just 36 women in total (12.2%)<sup>6</sup>. In policing, 35% of Chief Constables are female<sup>7</sup> and data also show that just 29% of Vice Chancellors in Higher Education are female<sup>8</sup>. Data from the NHS in 2018 showed around 44% of CEOs in NHS Trusts were female<sup>9</sup>. So, there is still progress to be made when we consider the predominantly female education workforce CEOs are often drawn from, but it does also show that the trust sector compares favourably when looking beyond education. However, we must also consider that there is still an issue when we look particularly at the top paid trust CEOs – only one of the 20 listed CEOs were female<sup>10</sup>.

Finally, there was some debate about the most likely way for improvement to occur, but a number of participants expressed a view that overly top-down dictation on this issue would not work, and you needed to win ‘hearts and minds’.

***“I think telling us how to do it will alienate people. And what we’ll find is people doing tokenistic tick boxes. I think the reason we’re doing it is because I really believe in it and really care.” – Chief Executive at a Trust in Yorkshire***

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.green-park.co.uk/insights/green-park-business-leaders-index-2021-ftse-100/s239697/>

<sup>7</sup>

<https://j4mb.org.uk/2021/07/02/third-of-chief-constables-are-now-women-as-police-arrest-macho-canteen-culture/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/womens-leadership-in-higher-education>

<sup>9</sup>

<https://digital.nhs.uk/news-and-events/latest-news/narrowing-of-nhs-gender-divide-but-men-still-the-majority-in-senior-roles>

<sup>10</sup> <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/the-emerging-super-league-of-academy-trust-ceo-pay/>

## Individuals experience both direct and indirect discrimination in the school system, which deters them from seeking out leadership positions

We heard unacceptable stories of discrimination in our focus groups – such as one woman being asked to make coffee, despite being the CEO of a trust, and a headteacher from a minority ethnic background being ignored by contractors on site in favour of white colleagues. These are clear examples of discrimination – the people in question have baked in views about what those from protected groups are ‘capable’ of doing, and their assumptions have led to them treating their colleagues in a different, less respectful way. Both participants in our focus groups were clear incidents such as these undermined their confidence and angered them – but in neither case did they or anyone else feel comfortable addressing it.

*“I can think of an example where I’ve gone into a room with regional union reps, and they’ve asked me to make the coffees. And I was the Chief Exec...” – Chief Executive at a Trust in the North West*

*“I was in the playground with members of my leadership team. And a contractor came and started talking. I was looking right at him, because I knew what he wanted. But he just dismissed me, I could see it, because I’ve seen it so many times before, assuming she can’t be the head teacher, it’s got to be the white women who are wearing suits.” – Head Teacher from London*

*“I wonder with staff whether everybody is as inclusive as you would want... for example, yesterday, my nursery teacher was talking about a new woman that was going to be supporting her and said she didn’t think [the new woman] would be very good at that job. But she said [the new woman] proved her wrong and is absolutely brilliant and so she’ll eat her words. That lady that she was talking about was from an ethnic minority, and I wonder whether she put up a barrier as a result?” – Executive Principal in London*

A report prepared for NASUWT corroborates this – its analysis found that over half of all teachers and headteachers who responded to the survey felt that they had experienced discrimination during their career: 44% ethnic discrimination, 11% gender discrimination, 10% age discrimination and 10% faith discrimination<sup>11</sup>.

This makes it less surprising, but still worrying in our opinion, that one participant in our focus groups felt the environment around leadership in trusts was worse than she experienced working in the private sector, from a diversity perspective. In our focus groups there was general acceptance that very few people in the sector want to be deliberately unkind to their

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<sup>11</sup>

[http://www.equitableeducation.co.uk/uploads/1/5/5/9/15597724/the\\_leadership\\_aspirations\\_and\\_careers\\_of\\_black\\_and\\_minority\\_ethnic\\_teachers.pdf](http://www.equitableeducation.co.uk/uploads/1/5/5/9/15597724/the_leadership_aspirations_and_careers_of_black_and_minority_ethnic_teachers.pdf)

colleagues, rather people have innate views and biases which they do not necessarily recognise or understand. This tallies with much of the established literature around the root of discrimination in schools – with such biases being allowed to affect people’s perception of and engagement with others.

*“I’ve had advice from male senior leaders, who’ve told me that I should dye my hair, or not talk about wanting a family, because that would hold me back. Or maybe I should just have the family quickly and get that out of the way, and then I’ve got a chance of being promoted. These are not evil people. These are just people that think they’re helping you and I look back now, and I think, why did I not say, what the hell are you talking about? But I didn’t, I actually said, thank you!” – Chief Executive at a Trust in the North West*

*“So recently, at a conference, the chair of the board described all the males on the board, their accomplishments, their long history of success, and then described the CEO who’s a woman as the “lovely” and their name, with no precursor to this, no mention of their very successful career.” – Chief Executive at a Trust in the South East*

In terms of the potential solutions to this, participants in our focus groups highlighted that having a zero tolerance approach to discrimination was important, but so was having more open and honest discussions around these issues – something we cover in detail later in this report. Our literature review also found a substantial amount of evidence from wider sectors of success around stopping direct discrimination. A report by McKinsey highlights that successful companies “should uphold a zero-tolerance policy for discriminatory behaviour, such as bullying and harassment, and actively help managers and staff to identify and address microaggressions. They should also establish norms for open, welcoming behaviour and ask leaders and employees to assess each other on how they are living up to that standard.<sup>12</sup>” The CMI has also recently produced a practical guide for managers to better “move the dial” – covering topics from discussing race to ending microaggressions<sup>13</sup>. And these are just two examples of a wide range of useful literature out there – providing food for thought for trusts who feel they can do more in this space.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters>

<sup>13</sup>

<https://www.managers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/moving-the-dial-on-race-practical-guidance-cmi-race-2020.pdf>

## Some forms of diversity and inclusion are more visible than others

When we asked about inclusion in our focus groups there was a mixed response – participants were comfortable talking about diversity, but when asked whether they felt the sector was inclusive they were sometimes less sure. There was potentially a lack of understanding of the difference between the two terms and that, for example, it is possible to be inclusive without being diverse, and vice versa.

Where discussions did centre around inclusion, participants felt an inclusive atmosphere involved making staff feel at ease in the workplace and making the workplace more accessible to those from underrepresented groups. There was a specific discussion about flexibility on hours, with some participants arguing there was further progress to make on this, notwithstanding barriers such as needing to have teachers in front of children, in person.

*“It’s rather strange in education, that the majority of the workforce is female, and yet there is an astounding lack of flexibility.” – Chief Executive at a Trust in the East of England*

*“I would say one of the easier ways that we found to be more inclusive has been in terms of flexibility. So from a from a gender perspective, I work four days a week as a Chief Exec... but one of the biggest barriers to flexibility in school is the timetable. At the end of the day, if you’re in a private organisation, working from home or reducing hours is a lot easier to do than in a school environment.” – Chief Executive at a Trust in the North West*

There was also less discussion in our focus groups around challenges including LGBTQI+ staff or those with a disability – which suggests some of these issues may be even harder to uncover than biases around gender or ethnicity, which may be more ‘obvious’ [noting of course that within the category of disability can come a wide variety of conditions, with some more visible and others much less so]. Where there was a discussion on LGBTQI+ issues, participants were broadly positive about how other staff and children were inclusive and supportive of staff who identify with this group – but also identified this did not translate to representation at leadership team level.

*“We’ve got sixth formers, many of whom are thinking about their own sexuality and it’s really important they see role models as well. And we have somebody who has transitioned from one gender to another as a teacher, and that’s something we’re really very proud of. And it’s making sure that there are those opportunities to support that person, and to coach and mentor them as they come to get to grips with that role and look at promotion opportunities in the future... Where we’ve had teachers who are gay or lesbian, they’ve always been quite upfront with the children about it. And they find it much easier to just go and say, yeah, I’m a gay man, I have a partner at home. That’s the end of it, let’s move on. And I think us giving support to that member of staff to be able to just head it off at the pass, and then be able to focus on their job, is a really important thing to be able to do.” – Chief Executive at a Trust in the East of England*

*“We do have staff who are lesbian and gay but they are not represented on our leadership team – and that is very poor. We want to investigate why – and are worried it’s our own unconscious bias.” – COO at a Trust in the North West.*



## Solving diversity issues when recruiting teachers and staff is vital to ensuring there is a diverse pool of applicants to draw from at more senior levels

Recruitment was identified by focus group participants as one of the biggest issues driving a lack of diversity. Participants argued that the pool from which trust CEOs are drawn already lacks diversity and this has a dramatic effect on leadership levels. Many felt that lots of new teachers, including those taking part in high-potential graduate schemes, tend to adhere to a certain 'type'. Interestingly, some participants described this 'type' as middle class, white and female, suggesting some potential progress on gender, and introducing a socio-economic element to the discussion which, given it is not a protected characteristic, does not feature prominently elsewhere in our analysis. Nevertheless, socio-economic background is clearly important in terms of children and staff feeling their leadership is 'like them'.

*"There's a kind of type... we've got to keep making sure that promising trainees and teachers are not all from a certain kind of mould... in terms of racial diversity, we're not getting it from teachers at the moment. They are largely white, middle-class women, especially in primary school." Head Teacher from London*

Going even further backward in the pipeline, many of the participants we spoke to felt children from certain protected groups do not aspire to work in education from a young age. They argued that if children from minority ethnic groups do not want to be teachers in the first place, they will make career decisions which reinforce this and, coupled with non-diverse recruitment practices, this will further cement teaching and then leadership as lacking diversity. Interestingly, this did give some participants a sense of influence over the pipeline, as they said the best thing they can do is encourage those who identify with protected characteristics to aspire from a young age to professions like teaching.

*"It needs to go down to primary school, because children at primary school write themselves off a whole host of jobs before they even get to the end of year six." – Chief Executive at a Trust in the East of England*

Focus groups also highlighted a number of tangible activities that could help make improvements in this space, from diverse interview panels, to anonymised applications, to contacting ITT providers directly. Many participants reacted positively to these ideas and felt they benefited from hearing ideas from other trusts.

*"I think a really easy thing that any school can apply is diverse interview panels – panels that are formed of at least three and involve people from different departments and you make sure you've got diversity on that panel. Is there a gender balance on that panel? Is there somebody that you can include on that panel that has a disability?" – Head of HR at a Trust in the West Midlands*

*“We have a recruitment officer as part of our HR team and when applications come in, she anonymises them... we found that a really good way of giving assurance that we have that inclusiveness” – Chief Executive at a Trust in the East of England*

*“What you can actively do is contact initial teacher training providers and ask for people from different backgrounds to come in.” – Chief Executive at a Trust in the East of England*

There was also a sense that driving improvements in this space can build momentum, because once you are known as an inclusive trust, others might be more likely to apply for roles there on that basis. One participant described actively asking members of staff who identify with a protected characteristic what attracted them to the trust, so she could amplify that message to other potential applicants going forward.

*“We need to think hard about how we recruit. What are we saying that isn’t working? What are the barriers that we are unconsciously putting up?” – COO at a Trust in the North West*

*“You do feel that when there’s a bit more diversity, whether it’s women, ethnicity, etc., the word then goes around that this MAT has more open recruitment, and there’s a perception that you will progress there.” – Head Teacher in London*

*“I said to my headteacher, you didn’t get the job because you’re an Asian man, you got the job because you were the best candidate. But I would love to know what attracted you to come to the trust.” – Chief Executive at a MAT in the North West*

Finally, some participants did feel that there was only so much you can do at school and trust level, without support from the DfE or other national bodies.

*“In some schools, we literally do not have any members of staff to whom we can reach out to be inclusive. In some smaller schools they are exclusively one gender and one ethnic background.” – Chief Executive of a Trust in the West Midlands*

## If boards of trustees and governors are not diverse, this will negatively affect diversity of trust CEOs, who they are responsible for recruiting

We heard from participants of the challenges around boards of trustees and governors – many leaders we spoke to felt that without more diversity at this level it was inevitable that there would be implicit biases in recruitment and promotion decisions. One participant spoke of seeing a mass of older, white men when she first entered trust leadership, and how important she knew it was to change that if there was to be the right culture at the trust. There is currently no regular data collection on the representativeness of boards of governors and trustees.

*“When I became CEO, we had a predominantly white male board, the average age was probably about 75. It did not at all reflect our communities... What we’ve wanted to do is attract good people to apply to be interviewed. And so consequently, we changed quite a lot, and our board is now just over 50% from a mix of backgrounds, which is brilliant.” – Chief Executive at a Trust in the East of England*

*“We recently got a new chair of trustees who is young and from a minority ethnic background. He couldn’t believe how white everyone was.” – Chief Executive at a Trust in South East England*

What we do have from our literature review is recent analysis by the NGA which sets out that individuals from Black, Asian and other minority ethnicity backgrounds are underrepresented on governing boards, meaning that boards often lack the diversity of their pupil populations or wider school communities which they serve. 94% of governors and trustees surveyed identified as white, 1% identified as Black/ African/ Caribbean/Black British, 2% identified as Asian/Asian British, and 1% identified as mixed or being of multiple ethnic groups.<sup>14</sup>

Participants in our focus groups were clear that seeing a lack of diversity in positions of power above them, coupled with some of the more direct discrimination highlighted earlier, leads aspiring leaders from underrepresented groups lacking confidence and having less trust that they will be treated fairly when it comes to promotion or progression decisions.

*“I was talking to a CEO of a trust and she said several times, this is my next move, and this is what I’m doing. And I’ve always sort of thought oh no, I can’t do that. I don’t think I’m alone*

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<sup>14</sup>

<https://www.nga.org.uk/getmedia/3b313a00-2e13-4ae5-8d9f-7445de07f395/School-Governance-Report-2020-WEB2-AW.pdf>

*in lacking that confidence... because actually on paper, I probably should be going for the next stage” – Head Teacher from London*

The previously referenced analysis by Edurio corroborates this – according to that report, four in ten staff do not feel confident that decisions on promotions are made without bias i.e. even where there is not direct discrimination, a significant proportion of staff believe decisions are being influenced by some form of hidden bias. This was echoed by one participant in our focus group, who identified as being from a minority ethnic group, who said he had no evidence he has ever been discriminated against, but would naturally suspect so if, for example, he unsuccessfully applied for a promotion.

*“I think if I was turned down for a promotion, it would always cross my mind, is it because of x, y, z? I wouldn’t verbalise that. I wouldn’t vocalise that. But sadly, it is the covert stuff that gets to me.” – Head of HR at a Trust in the West Midlands*

One of our focus group participants argued that the fundamental makeup of the system, and particularly having one CEO who carries an enormous weight of responsibility, makes it even more daunting for those from protected groups to have the confidence to aspire to that role.

*“The business model of MATs, which is a one named CEO, is a systemic block to women. I don’t want to generalise too much because it’s far more nuanced than that. But people from different cultures and different sexualities bring different things to the table, they’re more collaborative, but here we have that very old model of leadership.” – Chief Executive at a Trust in the South East*

## Discussing diversity issues openly and without recrimination is an important part of the solution, as well as providing high quality coaching and mentoring opportunities to underrepresented groups

Our focus groups brought out a real need for open and non-judgemental dialogue in this space. One participant described his fear of discussing issues openly because he had been told the word 'BAME' was no longer acceptable. Focus group participants reflected that it will be hard to make progress in this space if allies are scared to act for fear of recrimination – they felt we must reward an attempt to improve things, not punish it. This is not, of course, to say we don't challenge language that is not inclusive, but more to aim to challenge in ways that educate and improve understanding rather than quieten people's desire to do something. There was some discussion about how open and honest training sessions can be an excellent way to achieve this – providing a welcoming environment to ask questions and discuss issues in a positive and collaborative way.

*“So, the term BAME – there was something on the radio about how that was unacceptable. And you just think, I'm not even going to face this issue, because I'm going to put my foot in my mouth... It's hard to keep up.” – Chief Executive of a Trust in the West Midlands*

*“I was on a call with some other sector leaders on this subject – and these were all white people from the Midlands. They were very worried about putting their foot in it.” – Regional Director at a National Trust*

*“In an FE setting, we had staff leading informal sessions, coffee and cake type sessions, where staff from different groups, disabled staff, etc., were willing to go and sit in a room and say, come and ask me anything you want.” – Chief Executive of a Trust in the North West*

*“People must not be afraid to have this conversation.” – Regional Director at a National Trust*

Specific development programmes can also help to target under-representation and empower individuals to progress into leadership. The Edurio report highlighted earlier described the case study of LGBTed, who “have successfully run two cohorts of our Proud Leadership programme, where 75% of participants achieved a promotion in their school as a result. We are also working in partnership with the National College of Education to launch a series of programmes including a Senior Leadership Masters and an Education Management Programme to increase the number of authentic, visible LGBT+ teaches and leaders for the benefit of the young people we teach.” Given our focus group participants had often

described lacking confidence as a significant barrier to progression, a programme which provides a supportive setting and enables participants to take part in a clear framework where they have external validation of their abilities, could be one of the best solutions.

Mentoring and coaching was also something discussed in the focus groups, potentially as a more informal arrangement. Participants felt that talking through issues and having someone to help them through difficult times would build their confidence to apply for roles they may not have felt able to without this sort of opportunity. Mentoring and coaching from someone within a protected group can also provide a role model – giving a sense of “if I can do it so can you.”

*“It can often be difficult to get candidates from a range of backgrounds. And we are trying to identify and spark that potential, and actively mentor people into those roles.” Chief Executive of a MAT in the East of England*

*“I’m not sure how many programmes there are for MAT executive leadership; it’s all still fairly new... you’re just going to look after your own MAT, you’re not going to be talent spotting leaders and thinking oh, you’d be a really good potential CEO.” Head Teacher from London*

*“We need more role models in these roles to show leadership.” – Regional Director at a National Trust*

In our literature review we found case studies from a previous report by Miller and Callender<sup>15</sup>. In it a black, male headteacher says: *He nurtured me. He spotted my raw talent. He has had a pivotal impact on my life (P2). X also affirmed me and told me I could do it. He had a high national profile but he made time for me (P2).* The report therefore also highlights the power a mentor can have in increasing confidence and opportunity for underrepresented groups.

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<sup>15</sup> [https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1575801/1/Callender and Miller\\_2017.PDF](https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1575801/1/Callender_and_Miller_2017.PDF)

## Appendix 1 – polling tables

These will be made available at <http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/latest-news.html>

## Appendix 2 – headlines from focus groups

**There is overwhelming support for diversity and inclusion:** we saw passionate participation from across varied backgrounds and roles in the sector – people have often taken part because they have pursued this as a personal mission in their role, and were incredibly keen to share best practice with each other in the hope of making things better.

**There is a sense that things are not diverse at the moment:** we heard shocking stories of discrimination – such as one female, trust CEO being asked to make coffee and a headteacher from a minority ethnic background being ignored by contractors on site in favour of white colleagues. We heard repeatedly that trust boards and governing committees are dominated by “older, white men”. We also heard extensive evidence around how problems stem from the recruitment phase of new teachers, and that diversity at more senior levels is always likely to be an issue if high potential trainees tend to conform to a certain ‘type’.

**But there is also optimism that things can improve:** we heard an array of ideas for potential ways to improve the system, from diverse recruitment panels, to direct requests to ITT providers for more diverse candidates, to setting up mentoring and development programmes. Participants were very positive about the value of discussing this issue openly and without fear of recrimination. They were clear that you need an open and honest environment where everyone feels comfortable discussing this issue, if you want to make progress. Participants were also encouraged by the very fact this project was taking place and the work Forum Strategy and others are doing to push this issue forward and share best practice.



# Appendix 3 – literature review

## Abstract

The diversity of Multi Academy Trust (MAT) CEOs is an area lacking in substantial research or analysis. Analysis of the wider education sector suggests potential issues around underrepresentation of certain groups in leadership positions, but it is not conclusive and there is a more nuanced picture when looking at individual protected groups. Across the literature, there are many theories proposed about the key drivers of this underrepresentation in the sector, but no credible evidence which actually measures their impact. Similarly, whilst potential solutions to the problem have been suggested, no credible work has yet been undertaken to assess feasibility or likely impact in comparison to each other. In short, whilst there are many ideas in circulation, there is very little understanding of the realities of impact and delivery that one would need to actually drive improvement in this space. All of this points to the need for greater research and understanding of the problem, drivers and potential solutions.

## Context

Forum Strategy has commissioned Public First to help the sector better understand diversity amongst MAT CEOs and to identify ways to drive improvement in this space where the evidence shows it is needed. Key to this work is first understanding the existing evidence base on where the gaps and challenges exist at executive leadership level, the possible causes and opening up discussion around potential solutions.

As wider sectors such as the NHS[1] are showing tangible commitment to increasing diversity at executive and board level as they recognise the positive impact this can have on the wider workforce – it's important the trust sector joins in this commitment by exploring and understanding the current position around executive diversity and opening up discussion around how we can do better in future.

## Methodology

The overall research project focusses specifically on Chief Executive Officers in trusts, however, this literature review does look more broadly both at leadership teams in English schools and other sectors to get a sense of the wider picture. Since diversity, equality and inclusion have long been discussed as being of vital importance to better governance and leadership in education (and across sectors), this literature review assumes the reader already has a level of understanding and appreciation as to why diversity is important, so does not focus in on aspects related to the business case for diversity [for those in need of a refresher – this is an articulation[2]]. Rather, it explores what data currently exists around executive leadership diversity and which contributing factors and solutions are often cited within literature in this field.

Through this short literature review we create a foundation of understanding around what research already tells us around executive leadership diversity, equality and inclusion and identify areas of further exploration within our own work.

## Diversity challenges at executive level

There is very little evidence that examines trust CEO diversity specifically. Schools Week analysis[3] from 2020 highlights that the proportion of BAME leaders of England's largest academy trusts has fallen, with 98% of the largest chains now run by white CEOs. This is based, however, on a relatively small sample of 98 Trusts (from an overall number in England of over 1000), all of which were 15 schools or larger, and it looked very specifically at ethnicity rather than the full spectrum of diversity. As well as being the only analysis on this issue and having a small sample size, the methodology for this work was not robust, which suggests a need for more to be done. The analysis relied on going through a list of MAT CEOs one by one and 'assessing' through a combination of their photos and their name what their ethnicity is, rather than there being a robust data set from which to draw. Whilst this is useful in raising the issue, it clearly does not constitute a thorough or scientific analysis.

Since the evidence base around executive level diversity in trusts is so limited, we need to look wider. A large majority of CEOs in trusts are drawn from leadership levels in schools, so it is useful to look at what existing data tells us about school leadership diversity and therefore the pool from which executive leaders are often drawn. The evidence base at this level is strongest around ethnicity. The most authoritative data on leadership levels below CEO comes from the DfE 2019 School Workforce Census data[4]. The latest data show that White British people made up 92.7% of headteachers, 89.7% of deputy or assistant headteachers and 84.9% of classroom teachers. This shows a significant underrepresentation of BAME staff at leadership level than amongst classroom teachers. There is no readymade analysis comparing these figures to the populations these schools serve.

There is a more nuanced story on gender, where schools generally have much higher levels of female participation than other sectors, though there is still a significant gap between junior and senior levels within schools. DfE analysis[5] shows 75% of classroom teachers were female, dropping to 67% of headteachers. However, this does compare favourably to 29% when looking at senior managerial levels across the economy as a whole[6].

There is very little research currently around representation levels in leadership roles across education for sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, religion and belief and marriage/civil partnership and maternity/paternity. This once again points to the need for further work and analysis in this space.

In order to improve our understanding, we can expand our horizons to look at *perception* of diversity, in addition to the levels of diversity themselves. Indeed, perception of diversity is also important given its impact on the future pipeline and how likely people are to aspire to progression if they perceive diversity levels to be low. Analysis by Edurio[7] shows that school leadership teams are seen as generally less diverse than the wider staff body. While 15% of respondents to this survey felt the staff body in their school was very diverse, only 8% thought the same of the leadership team. Similarly, 4% felt that the staff body was not diverse at all, in comparison to 12% about the leadership team.

In any event, it is clear that further research is needed in this space given a lack of data, particularly looking beyond gender and ethnicity. We know there is more data across a broader range of protected characteristics, outside of education, that indicates that the diversity challenge goes far beyond education. Given some trust CEOs are recruited from wider sectors and industries (and that data from these sectors provides a helpful comparison with how much progress the trust sector is doing when considered against others), this is important context to consider. For example, on gender, women are about half of all those employed in roles across the EU and yet were just 18% of senior executives in 2019[8]. Among the largest publicly listed companies in the European Union in 2020, only 19.3% of executives and 7.9% of CEOs are women. Looking domestically, in the FTSE 100, in the Top 3 roles (Chair, CEO & CFO) there are just 36 women in total (12.2%)[9]. This is an increase of 23 roles since Green Park's first analysis in 2014, where females made up 4.3% of the top roles. At this rate of change (three additional females a year) it will be 2059 before women hold 50% of the Top 3 roles. In policing, 35% of Chief Constables are female[10] and data also show that just 29% of Vice Chancellors in Higher Education are female[11]. Data from the NHS in 2018 showed around 44% of CEOs in NHS Trusts were female[12]. On ethnicity, the top three roles in FTSE 100 organisations – CEO, CFO and chair – were found for the first time this year to include no black leaders[13]. In the police, 92.7% of police officers are White and 7.3% are from Asian, Black, Mixed and Other ethnic backgrounds. Looking at senior officers only, this figure falls to 4.3%[14].

On sexual orientation, research by McKinsey shows a significant gap for LGBTQ+ staff when looking for role models at leadership level. They found that only roughly half of LGBTQ+ survey respondents (compared with two-thirds of non-LGBTQ+ respondents) said that they saw people like themselves in management positions in their organisations[15]. On disability, according to 2020 annual reports, there are no executives or senior managers who have disclosed a disability at any FTSE 100 companies (though some 'prefer not to say' or otherwise do not disclose, so this may not mean there are no senior leaders with a disability)[16]. Again, this makes it challenging for disabled staff members to find leadership role models to identify with.

## Potential drivers of the problem

The evidence base sets out a number of different potential drivers of the problem, though there is no analysis that comprehensively evaluates and compares these different drivers. It is therefore impossible at this stage to conclude what the *main* drivers are, without further research. As set out previously, evidence on MAT CEOs specifically is very limited, and we have therefore considered drivers of the problem more broadly in terms of school leadership.

The evidence base is clear that some teachers and leaders with protected characteristics experience direct discrimination at work. Callender and Miller's analysis follows a small number of black, male headteachers and documents their experiences[17]. One of the heads articulates the problem clearly when he says: *"People assume you are always the caretaker. I attended a conference in York and one White headteacher said to me, 'You must have a proper steel band in your school'. I said to her, 'Why can't we have an orchestra? Why must we have a steel band?'. Within the BAME community and different religious groups, the evidence also demonstrates experiences significantly vary, for example research suggests certain religious groups are more likely to face (and/or perceive) discrimination than others.*

So, in thinking about this, we must delve into the experiences of individuals rather than see protected characteristic groups as homogenous in their experience. A report prepared for NASUWT corroborates this finding around experience of direct discrimination in the workplace – over half of all teachers and headteachers who responded to the survey felt that they had experienced discrimination during their career: 44% ethnic discrimination, 11% gender discrimination, 10% age discrimination and 10% faith discrimination[18]. Clearly, direct discrimination creates a negative, non-inclusive atmosphere which makes it much harder for those from protected groups to thrive.

As with discussion of diversity outside of education, the role of hidden biases and structures which inadvertently hamper progression for those with protected characteristics is mentioned frequently. For example, Harris et al. (2003) found that informal networks that exclude some groups are a factor influencing teacher progression generally, and BAME teacher progression specifically[19]. The previously referenced analysis by Edurio corroborates this finding on the impact of hidden biases – according to its analysis, four in ten staff do not feel confident that decisions on promotions are made without bias i.e. even where there is not direct discrimination, a significant proportion of staff believe decisions are being influenced by some form of hidden biases. However, no research has been found specifically about progression opportunities for diverse groups into executive roles in education and how indirect discrimination affects this.

There is a suggestion by Callender and Miller that a focus away from wider diversity by the government to look more narrowly at white working class issues in the classroom has limited progress in the wider diversity space in schools. The implication is that whilst diversity in terms of white boys in 'left behind' areas is a pertinent issue for government, the diversity of executive leadership through the lens of those from protected groups may not be high up their agenda[20]. This explains relatively little visible government involvement in this space, compared to an issue such as MAT executive pay. Other elements of government policy that are noted to impact diversity in schools are requirements for teaching, such as the lack of recognition of overseas experience and qualifications[21]. This means that otherwise well-qualified teachers may be passed up for promotion if those qualifications are not recognised and therefore limit the pool from which future leaders may be drawn.

Given what we know about education policy more generally, it is not surprising that the inspection ratings of educational institutions seem to impact their diversity too. The Edurio analysis referenced earlier shows staff perceive their institution to be more committed to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in settings with better Ofsted ratings. The same analysis also shows that region and rurality/urbanity substantially affect staff perceptions of EDI – more people in a rural setting agreed that their (less diverse) staff body does reflect the student population than those in an urban area. However, more research would be needed to explore whether this was a causal or purely correlative effect.

Another barrier to diversity in senior leadership in schools is the diversity of the boards appointing them – given hidden biases tend towards people employing in their own image. According to recent analysis by the NGA: "Individuals from Black, Asian and other minority ethnicity backgrounds are underrepresented on governing boards meaning that boards often lack the diversity of their pupil populations or wider school communities which they serve. 94% of governors and trustees surveyed identified as white, 1% identified as Black/African/

Caribbean/Black British, 2% identified as Asian/Asian British, and 1% identified as mixed or being of multiple ethnic groups.[22]”

## Potential actions to address barriers and representation challenges

Similarly to previous sections of this report, whilst there is considerable discussion in the literature of potential solutions to the issues and drivers outlined, there is very little attempt to compare these and assess potential impact. We have therefore sought to mention potential solutions – further work would be needed to develop potential recommendations about which to pursue.

Outside of education, this is a much discussed topic. A recent McKinsey report highlights that successful companies “should uphold a zero-tolerance policy for discriminatory behaviour, such as bullying and harassment, and actively help managers and staff to identify and address microaggressions. They should also establish norms for open, welcoming behaviour and ask leaders and employees to assess each other on how they are living up to that standard.[23]” The CMI has also recently produced a practical guide for managers to better “move the dial” – covering topics from discussing race to ending microaggressions[24]. Both of these solutions offer routes towards tackling both direct and indirect discrimination. The FRC has also published a report covering solutions in relation to governance of FTSE 350 companies – it points to good practice such as undertaking a skills assessment, manage the pipeline of diverse talent, setting clear targets, and reporting regularly and publicly on progress.[25]

Several reports in this space have called for better analysis of the problem and monitoring of the data, which the authors of this literature review have themselves alluded to repeatedly. For example, Sameena Choudry, co-founder of WomenEd, has called for the government to collect data on trustee characteristics to reveal whether more diverse boards do definitively hire more diverse leaders[26]. This is only one example of a range of different research projects which could provide further clarity in this space. Better data would also help support clarity of focus i.e. what specifically the objective should be. Without clarity on the problem, it is very difficult to articulate what the end goal should be. Of course, data on its own will not solve the issue, but can be effective as one of multiple recommendations looking at addressing gaps. Kitemarks such as Stonewall’s Top 100 Employers List have also shown to have a positive impact and become well known and respected.

Moving from data to staff in schools, if teachers and staff are more diverse there is a better chance this will filter through to leadership and eventually through to executive level. That is to say, if the pool of candidates is not diverse, it will make it more likely that leadership positions will also be less diverse. Callender and Miller call for the initiatives that aim at increasing the overall number of available trainee teachers to specifically target BAME recruitment and retention[27]. This could lead us to ask whether adverts for getting into teaching and/or routes such as Teach First appeal enough to a diverse range of candidates. Similarly, it might lead us to question whether the ITT process, the Early Career Framework, and other features of the early career of teachers sufficiently encourage retention of a diverse range of teachers. Speaking more widely than the education sector, the independent review led by Sir John Parker into board diversity puts the point clearly when it comes to progression into more senior positions, “Members of the FTSE 100 and FTSE 250 should develop mechanisms to identify,

develop and promote people of colour within their organisations in order to ensure over time that there is a pipeline of Board capable candidates and their managerial and executive ranks appropriately reflect the importance of diversity to their organisation.[28]"

Formal development programmes can be a mechanism of targeting underrepresented groups and supporting them to progress into leadership. The Edurio report highlighted earlier includes the case study of LGBTed, who "have successfully run two cohorts of our Proud Leadership programme, where 75% of participants achieved a promotion in their school as a result. We are also working in partnership with the National College of Education to launch a series of programmes including a Senior Leadership Masters and an Education Management Programme to increase the number of authentic, visible LGBT+ teaches and leaders for the benefit of the young people we teach." The DfE have also run their own programme in this space[29]. In 2018 they appointed eight lead schools to act as Equality & Diversity regional 'hubs' and coordinate delivery of multiple school-led projects across each of the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) regions. 96% of participants agreed that their programme 'improved my confidence to apply for promotion', with 89% of those stating that their programme either met or exceeded their expectations in this aspect. The London South Teaching School alliance has provided a further, more in depth summary of their experience using this funding, which has supported 64 emerging leaders from ethnic minority backgrounds to develop the confidence and skills to progress into leadership roles[30].

However, potentially more fundamental than individual programmes is the culture in the organisation. One of the heads from the previously mentioned study of black, male headteachers says: *"Going back to my football analogy if someone is actually not performing that well regardless of your race, they are not going to keep them on the team. We need to get to a place, I believe in which education system where the colour of one's skin does is not what determines your progress as teacher, but what determines your progress is your own merit. If it is done on you own merit, we might see people from global majority backgrounds doing well."* This is a regular theme in the evidence which suggests that much talent and skill is there but simply overlooked amongst underrepresented groups. Building on this, in research with Leeds Beckett university, Choudry found having proper appraisals to "argue their case" for a promotion particularly helped ethnic-minority women with their careers i.e. their issue was not ability but being given a chance to communicate that ability and be properly heard. There are links between this approach and some of the other solutions highlighted in this review. For example, looking more widely outside just education, McKinsey argues that you need to "Enable equality of opportunity through fairness and transparency. To advance toward a true meritocracy, it is critical that companies ensure a level playing field in advancement and opportunity. They should deploy analytics tools to show that promotions, pay processes, and the criteria behind them, are transparent and fair; debias these processes; and strive to meet diversity targets in their long-term workforce plans.[31]" This shows that greater data transparency can have impact if applied directly to internal processes around promotion and progression.

Another interesting quote from a head in the previously referenced study of black, male headteachers reads: *"He nurtured me. He spotted my raw talent. He has had a pivotal impact on my life (P2). X also affirmed me and told me I could do it. He had a high national profile but he made time for me (P2)."* The report therefore highlights the power a mentor can have in increasing confidence and skills for underrepresented groups. Whilst distinct, there is a clear



link between development programmes and mentors – whilst you can obviously provide mentoring outside of a formal development programme, an effective development programme may well use mentoring to increase its impact even after the programme has finished.

Of course, and in the absence of any specific analysis combining these approaches, it is generally the case that solutions can work more effectively in tandem than alone. One of the headteachers interviewed by Miller says: *“The strategies have been very effective but more BAME people need to apply/put themselves forward. It’s frustrating there isn’t broader [national] strategy that the school’s effort could dovetail into. We need a strategy to help us grow leaders from all areas.”* It can be difficult for schools, trusts, and other organisations to develop solutions unless these are coordinated nationally and working towards a clear objective.

Finally, one of the potential solutions mentioned in Schools Week coverage is positive action during the application/interview process, in this case specifically anonymising applications[32]. This can make bias less likely by removing information such as gender, university attended etc. This is standard practice now in the civil service and elsewhere.

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[1] <https://www.nhsconfed.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/Strengthening-NHS-board-diversity-report.pdf>

[2] <https://www.frc.org.uk/getattachment/3cc05eae-2024-45d8-b14c-abb2ac7497aa/FRC-Board-Diversity-and-Effectiveness-in-FTSE-350-Companies.pdf>

[3] <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/academy-trust-leadership-is-still-a-pale-reflection-of-our-communities/>

[4] <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/workforce-and-business/workforce-diversity/school-teacher-workforce/latest#by-ethnicity>

[5] <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england>

[6] <https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-management/>

[7] [https://home.edurio.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/EDI\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](https://home.edurio.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/EDI_Report_Final.pdf)

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- [16] <https://www.tortoisemedia.com/disability100-report/>
- [17] [https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1575801/1/Callender and Miller\\_2017.PDF](https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1575801/1/Callender%20and%20Miller_2017.PDF)
- [18] [http://www.equitableeducation.co.uk/uploads/1/5/5/9/15597724/the\\_leadership\\_aspirations\\_and\\_careers\\_of\\_black\\_and\\_minority\\_ethnic\\_teachers.pdf](http://www.equitableeducation.co.uk/uploads/1/5/5/9/15597724/the_leadership_aspirations_and_careers_of_black_and_minority_ethnic_teachers.pdf)
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[26] <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/revealed-the-lack-of-diversity-in-education-leadership-roles/>

[27] [https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1575801/1/Callender and Miller\\_2017.PDF](https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1575801/1/Callender%20and%20Miller_2017.PDF)

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