

# UK businesses join diversity scheme to hire 10,000 Black interns

PwC, Linklaters and the NHS are among the members of the #10000BlackInterns programme, which has pledged to cumulatively hire 10,000 Black interns as part of efforts to boost workplace diversity and representation.

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The programme will provide paid internships in sectors that are falling behind in improving diversity and follows the 100 Black Interns scheme launched in August by the same former investment industry professionals, geared toward tackling underrepresentation in the investment management sector. The scheme is backed by the UK's largest business lobby group, the Confederation of British Industry, and is planning to offer internships over 2020 and 2021.

## Why does this matter?

Although it is positive to see more initiatives emerging across various facets of diversity, there is still significant ground to cover. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, furloughed ethnic minorities have been among the hardest hit by redundancies, while the Black Lives Matter movement has also renewed attention on the systemic diversity issues existing across society.

While steps towards more diverse recruitment is commendable, it is only part of the equation for more holistic, systemic-level change. Ethnic minorities have been found to have to work harder to succeed than their white colleagues in

the banking industry, according to large-scale research in the US, for example. Meanwhile, in the UK, Black, Asian and minority ethnic millennials are at a greater risk of unstable employment, and have a 47% greater likelihood of being on a zero-hours contract. Another controlled study conducted by Nuffield College, Oxford University, also found “significant religious discrimination”, and that minority candidates have to submit 60% more CVs for employer call-backs, even with the same qualifications, skills and work experience.

Perhaps one solution for firms looking to improve diversity via recruitment is to start accounting for hitherto unconsidered factors. Socioeconomic background, for example, could be taken into account given poverty rates among minorities are often higher than their white counterparts, denying candidates opportunity early in life. Firms may also want to drop requirements for minimum scores in higher education, taking into account the “attainment gap” at universities that impacts minority students. Another approach would be to engage with the employees of the future by engaging with underrepresented ethnic groups at school in a similar way to programmes that have engaged with female school students.

Companies can also start by finding creative solutions to engage with ethnic minority communities, and tackle factors behind the racial wealth and opportunity disparities in society more broadly.

## Lateral thought from Curation

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and green recovery initiatives to rebuild the economy, there is a unique opportunity here – to merge green jobs and diverse recruitment. Governments, corporates and civil society could converge their goals by simultaneously tackling both the low-carbon skills deficit and the employment gap for individuals from diverse backgrounds. Innovative public-private outreach schemes, like National Grid’s partnership to support 100,000 south London pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds in joining the net-zero workforce, pave the way for future initiatives.

Given the UK’s energy sector is estimated to require a substantial number of low-carbon positions to be filled by 2050 to attain its Paris Agreement-aligned climate targets, for example, it is an opportune moment for stakeholders to address both social and environmental efforts in one go.

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