



# **Where are the BAME Trustees? Under-representation of BAME people on the Boards of Charities in the UK**

## **Pilot Study Report**

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## Summary

Preliminary findings from ROTA suggest that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people are among the least-represented group as Trustees of charities in the UK. The Boards of many mainstream charities have few or no BAME trustees. Although no firm conclusions can be drawn at this stage, indications are that in the charities we surveyed, BAME people appear to be among the least-represented group - albeit with slightly better representation in the social or public welfare sectors. The charities in our survey were aware of the need to increase diversity amongst trustees, but there was little evidence that positive steps are being taken to address it. This report suggests some reasons why this may be happening and what might be done to improve the level of BAME representation.

## Background

In 2012, the Charity Commission identified a need for the Boards of Voluntary and Community sector Organisations (VCOs) to recruit trustees from a wide range of backgrounds.

*'The governance of charities will be improved where trustees are recruited from a wide range of backgrounds. This includes trustees from parts of the community which have traditionally not played a large part in charities, such as young people, people from minority and ethnic communities and people with disabilities. Creating a diverse board can also help to increase accountability and public confidence. (Charity Commission, 2012)*

To date, evidence about the under-representation of BAME people as charity trustees has been largely anecdotal. ROTA's pilot study was designed to gather data on the composition of mainstream UK charity Boards in terms of the ethnic background of their Trustees. Prior to beginning our study, we had found that the level of BAME representation as Trustees in the charity-run education sector is poor. For example, there is a clear lack of BAME representation on the Boards of Multi-Academy Trusts and on the Boards of Governors at free schools in England, many of which operate as educational charities (ROTA, 2016, 2014). By asking similar questions to those which we asked MATs and free schools, we sought to establish whether, in the charity sector overall, there is under-representation of BAME people as Trustees, and to draw out some explanations of why this might be the case.

## Aim

The aim of our project is to establish evidence of BAME under-representation as Trustees on the Boards of Charities in the UK, to discern some reasons why this is occurring and to put in place measures to support the recruitment and training of BAME people as Trustees.

## Methods

Phase 1 of the project, completed in November 2016, focused on gathering data about the composition of the Boards of Trustees of mainstream VCOs.

Through an online and telephone survey, we sought to establish details of the governance and composition of the Boards of up to 200 UK charities.

The charities examined were those with a turnover of £500,000-plus, in these sectors: health and social care, housing, youth, legal advice, employment and training. The sample was drawn from Charity Commission database, by type of organisation/size/turnover.

The survey asked the following:

How would you describe your organisation?

Do you keep data/monitor information about the number of BAME people on your Board?

If YES could you please supply the data broken down by ethnic category.

If NO, can you provide an estimated number?

Charities were also asked to comment, or to provide additional information about themselves and their organisations, through an open-ended question.

### **Analysis of survey data**

From the Charity Commission database, we identified 121 charities with a turnover of over £500,000 in the categories of health and social care, housing, youth, legal advice, employment and training. BAME-specific charities were excluded, because of their better-than average representation of BAME people on their Boards.

Of the 121 charities identified, contact details for 42 were not available/could not be verified/were missing from their websites/undeliverable.

79 charities were sent emails, inviting them to take part in an online survey. These charities were followed up with telephone calls to confirm that they had received the email and to ask if they would take part in the survey over the phone if they had not completed the online survey.

The response rate was 28 out of 79 (35.4%). 16 completed online, 12 over the telephone.

### **Type/characteristics of charity**

The majority of charities which responded to the survey categorised themselves as 'Social or public welfare' (13 charities) or 'Health or saving of lives' (12 charities). Two described themselves as 'Community Development' organisations and one as 'Legal advice'.<sup>1</sup> None of the following categories were represented by those responding to the survey: Animal welfare, Arts and Culture, Environmental, Faith or Ethnic.

### **Findings**

#### **The survey data was analysed in relation to the research questions.**

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<sup>1</sup> Where charities described themselves across more than one category, e.g. 'Community development, Educational, Social and Public Welfare, Relief of Poverty and International NGO' we used the information on their websites to determine which of their activities appeared to predominate.

Seventeen respondents provided information (actual and estimated figures) about the number of BAME Trustees/Board Member. Eleven declined to provide information.

The total number of Trustees/Board Members was 166. Their ethnic background is described here:

Table 1. Ethnic background of trustees.

Ethnic background	Number	%
White British	97	58.4%
White Other (unspecified)	34	20.4%
White Other (European)	9	5.42%
Black (unspecified)	6	3.6%
Black British	5	3.0%
Asian/Asian British	6	3.6%
S. Asian	4	2.4%
Chinese	2	1.2%
Indian (unspecified)	1	0.6%
Black African	1	0.6%

*n= 166*

The ethnic background of Trustees most frequently mentioned was White/White British /White European, accounting for 84% of the total. The least frequently mentioned ethnic groups were Indian (0.6%) and Black African (0.6%).

A number of ethnic groups were not mentioned by respondents.<sup>2</sup> These included: White Irish, Gypsy, Irish Traveller or Roma, White & Black Caribbean, White & Black African, White & Asian, Other Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Group, Asian British Pakistani/Bangladeshi, Other Asian, Black British Caribbean/Other Black British, Arab/Arab British.

In response to the question inviting respondents to comment, e.g. about the survey, their organisation or their Board of Trustees, the majority (19 charities) refused or skipped the question.

Reasons for refusing the question included:

*'No time, cannot usually respond to surveys' and*

*'We do not have the figures and do not wish to take part'*

Of those answering the question, there were nine positive comments and two negative. Positive comments included welcoming the research, emphasising a commitment to collect and monitor data on BAME presence, expressing a wish to make their Boards more diverse. For example:

*'We have become slightly less diverse... we have no Eastern European representation, although we work with increasing numbers of this group...we aim for balance across all diversity measures...'*

<sup>2</sup> We refer to the ethnic group definitions as recommended for surveys in England by the Office for National Statistics (ONS,2016.)

*'[No BAME Board members] but we do employ BAME staff and are interested in ROTA and the survey outcome'*

*'[One or two BAME] ... We are happy to take part in [further] research'*

*'Interested in the project and its outcomes...[our organisation] is also thinking of conducting a similar study'*

*'[Data] on every service user and member of staff is provided to the NHS so we can supply a breakdown for different categories'*

*'[We] are conducting annual surveys on representation of protected characteristics'*

*'This is a much-needed piece of work'*

*'We would like to see the published research'*

*'We are looking to recruit more trustees, specifically looking to encourage those from backgrounds with protected characteristics to enhance diversity'*

The two negative comments indicated a general resentment about the necessity to monitor BAME instead of focusing on what local people need and lack of interest in the project:

*'Politicians are two-faced and don't do enough for the indigenous populace''*

*' We would not like information [from ROTA] regarding support and training'.*

### **Commentary on the findings**

In relation to the aims of the study, we make the following comments based on the survey findings:

Because of the relatively small sample size and number of respondents to the survey, it has not been possible to present strong evidence of BAME under-representation as Trustees on the Boards of UK Charities overall. The picture is not clear-cut. It appears that the Boards of charities which work in the social or public welfare sector may have slightly better BAME representation than those which work in other sectors. This, however, does not apply to the education sector, where we know, from previous research, that many charitable institutions running Multi-Academy Trusts and free schools, have poor BAME representation as governors and trustees.

Establishing evidence has not been straightforward. The survey achieved an eventual response rate of 35%, but there were difficulties attaining this. Many participants preferred their responses to be anonymous. This may be an indication that some VCOs are resistant to discussing the composition of their Boards in relation to BAME representation, or are sensitive to the issue of under-representation, which they may perceive as reflecting badly on their organisation or Boards.

The pilot study was not able to examine in depth the reasons why BAME under-representation is occurring. Early on it was clear that there was a degree of reluctance to discuss the issue. At this stage, we can only say that the cautious responses to the subject, illustrated by the quotes and comments, may point to a lack of confidence or awkwardness in acknowledging under-

representation. Although showing awareness of BAME under-representation, actual engagement or positive actions were limited to *'thinking about'* *'aiming for'* or *'looking to'* address it. A few charities agreed to follow-up calls at a later stage. The next stage of the research will include a number of case studies and interviews which will explore the reasons –and the reluctance to give reasons - more fully.

The overwhelming majority of charities which participated in the survey gave positive, or tentatively supportive responses, to increasing the diversity amongst trustees but few saw a need to follow through with training or support. This needs to be more fully investigated, as there are indications that where organisations receive better training about the benefits of diversity and begin to implement policies which encourage and support BAME people as Trustees, this can have positive effects, not solely on the way the charity functions but on the way it is perceived by its members and supporters/potential supporters.

### **Next steps**

The pilot stage (Phase 1) of this study has been important in identifying the need for further research into BAME representation as charity Trustees. Phase 2 will involve:

- A larger and more detailed survey of charities, including interviews and case studies, e.g. to determine cases of good practice and to develop measures which will support charities to increase diversity on their Boards.
- A training programme for Governors and Trustees to increase awareness of the benefits of BAME people as Trustees and to support BAME recruitment and ongoing training needs.

### **References**

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