



# NHF Board Members Conference 4 February 2020

Shruti Bhargava, Chair,  
Unity Homes & Enterprise



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## Why I no longer want to talk about the business case for diversity...



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## About diversity...



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## Diversity & Representation



### Clip 1: Riz Ahmed

The Daily Show with Trevor Noah, October 2018

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/xfdmykzd8hnp91p/Riz%20Ahmed%20-%20Representation%20720.mov>

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Representation without inclusion is  
tokenism: voices are silenced

Inclusion without representation is  
discrimination: power structures are  
distorted

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## Diversity

- Professional
- Personal / identity
- Life experience
- Personal challenges

...contributing to diversity of thought, the way we understand &  
see things, make decisions etc

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## Diversity of Self



How can we bring our whole selves to the role of Board Director?

How can we stop squeezing ourselves into narrowly defined roles?

How can we appreciate that we do not have to conform to a particular type?

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## Inclusion & Diversity of Self



*“Find me a large organisation, and find me an employee from a minority group who feels they are able to bring their true self to work today.”*

Naga Munchetty, The Guardian, 1 Feb 2020

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## Lets Talk About Race...



Not the whole story, but...

- Why can't we talk about it ?
- Whataboutery
- One of the most visible (colour), and obvious (e.g. names) diversity traits
- Can opener for unpicking barriers to broader diversity

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## Myths



- BME people are only qualified to talk about diversity, work in equalities or with communities of colour...
- Meritocracy
- Lack of diversity is because they are not good enough
- Its them not us
- If we put them through a development programme we have done our bit and will solve the problem
- Certain groups are better than others
- We apply the same process to everyone so we're being fair and equal
- We score everyone to make sure that we treat them fairly
- We don't discriminate
- More....

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Understand and be willing to learn about the history & ideologies that underpin the design of our institutions, systems, practices, conventions, beliefs & assumptions.

Listen & learn from people's experiences.

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## Disability & Discrimination

Richness of insight, empathy, authenticity gained through hardship, personal challenges, being on the receiving end of institutions.

Makes better Board Directors, better Boards, better organisations.

How can we make sure we utilise that ?

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## Don't Forget...



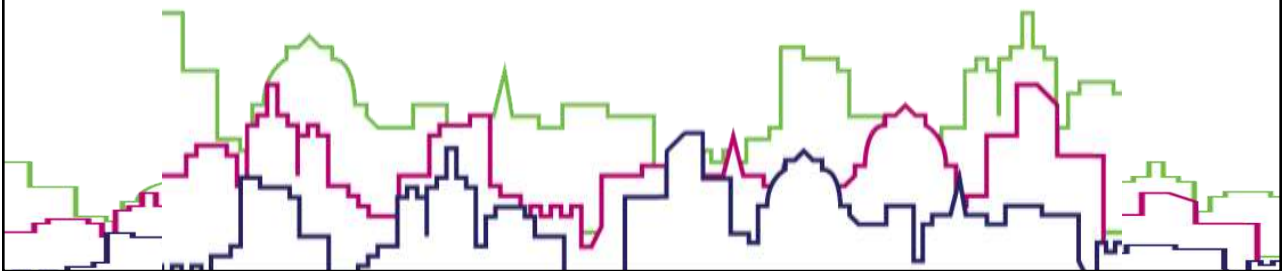
In the Housing sector, our diversity also means people from the communities that we serve, and our tenants

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## The Housing Sector



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## Housing Facts & Figures: Boards (Inside Housing 2019 Survey)



### All 61 (self selecting) respondents...

- Male/Female: 58.9% / 41.1%
- BME: 13.6%
- LGBT: 2.4%
- Disability: 4.8%

### Landlords 10000+ Homes

- Male/Female: 60.3% / 39.7%
- BME: 9.1%
- LGBT: 3.5%
- Disability: 3.2%

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## Housing Facts & Figures



- Only 61 housing associations completed the survey
- Those that completed more likely to be diverse / value diversity
- Survey reported poor data collection & analysis of diversity amongst housing associations

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## Housing Programmes



### Achieving and Harnessing Board Diversity Scheme

- a housing diversity partnership between the Housing Diversity Network, Progress Housing Group, Together Housing Group
- Highly commended in the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Team of the Year category at the Housing Heroes Awards

But where do candidates end up when they finish the programme?  
What action do this & other programmes have on changing the sector?

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## BME Housing Sector



- Diversity & equalities is part of our DNA and social purpose. Join us, and learn from us !
- Ready made pipeline of diverse talent.
- Mainstream sector – tap into the talent that’s there.
- What can we do collectively to support the whole sector ?
- What can we do to stop BME housing professionals from being pigeon-holed?

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*“the appointment of mediocre middle-aged and older white men to positions of responsibility may be one of the housing sector’s most long-standing traditions, but we must consider whether that necessarily makes it a good one.”*

Rob Gershon, ‘middle aged white man’ (his words!),  
Housing Consultant & Tenant Champion, in 24 Housing on  
24 December 2019

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## **Barriers to Diversity, Discrimination & Inequalities**



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## Barriers to Diversity



### Clip 2: from “Hidden Figures”

Taraji P Henson as Katherine Johnson

<https://www.thecut.com/2017/01/hidden-figures-shows-how-a-bathroom-break-can-change-history.html>

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## Deflection & Delegation



- Diversity & Mentoring programmes
- HR, Recruitment Consultancies, “experts”
- Development programmes for diverse staff

“The problem is them, not us – they need help”

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## Dismantling Bias



- **Look at ourselves first**
- Structures, processes, systems etc.
- Personal behaviour & attitudes
- Recruitment practices & attitudes
- *Support* with mentoring / development schemes

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## Positive Behaviours



- Being inclusive, recognising different styles of being reflecting different experiences
- Encouraging / nurturing people to thrive
- Collective support & team behaviour
- Challenging ourselves & personal reflections
- Being active in a Board setting to draw out diversity and be inclusive.

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## Understanding Experiences



What kind of professional journey might someone who faces glass ceilings take ?

How does that help/ hinder their ability to break glass ceilings, or join a Board ?

What are the systems that perpetuate & reinforce inequalities and a lack of diversity ?

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## Recruitment



Conventional recruitment processes are about exclusion, discrimination and bias:

- Tick list culture
- Narrow focus on a narrow view & understanding of skills, careers, sector experience.
- Neglect of the richness of diversity
- Simple judgements of status, job titles, & salaries.

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# Recruitment



Lets rethink recruitment:

- Stop making applications & processes daunting
- Stop making applicants jump through unnecessary hoops
- Open questioning rather than fitting into **our** boxes
- No more scoring -> biases kick in
- Listen to their stories & experiences
- Understand the whole person
- Challenge ourselves & actively think about our own biases
- Think about individuals w.r.t. to our diversity deficiencies, and our social purpose

Until we have true diversity, Boards must own & lead recruitment, & get hands on in the details.

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*“there is a tendency to debate whether a particular comment or person is racist, rather than focusing on how institutions & policies result in racially disproportionate outcomes for particular groups.”*

Omar Khan, Director, The Runnymede Trust,  
blog post 18 July 2019

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*“Having courageous conversations is at the heart of developing inclusion. Failure to have the difficult conversations is at the heart of the maintenance of the status quo.”*

Carmen Morris, Diversity and Inclusion Consultancy /  
Kenroi Consulting, LinkedIn Post

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## Leadership



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## Leadership



### Clip 3: Joaquin Phoenix

Speech at BAFTA Awards Ceremony, February 2020

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/5sm36nn3sq94eby/Joaquin%20Phoenix%20-%20Oscars%20720.mov>

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*“Systematic racism requires systematic change, not diversity training, initiatives, open days.”*

Marcus Ryder, @marcusryder, Diversity Media champion, Twitter 3 Feb 2020 in response to Joaquin Phoenix’s BAFTA award speech

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*“We need to make the debate on racism less about personalities & words, and more about institutions, actions & outcomes. How we ensure public discourse & institutions don’t continue to produce unequal outcomes that are justified by that racism.”*

Omar Khan, Director, The Runnymede Trust,  
blog post 18 July 2019

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Boards must own and lead on diversity,  
inclusion, and addressing the barriers to  
equality.

We are the ones with the power and  
position to make a difference.

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## References



Lots of good modern references, and influencers: including:  
 Renni-Eddo Lodge “Why I’m no longer talking to white people about race  
 Akala “Natives”  
 Mee-Yan Cheung-Judge “The Self as an Instrument”  
 Afua Hirsch  
 Housing Diversity Network  
 The Runnymede Trust  
 Various respected key influencers on Twitter  
 Many more...

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**What action can we take to address barriers to diversity ?**

**Positive examples & experiences ?**



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