EQUALITY'S EVERYONE'S JOB

A REPORT ON THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BRITISH SOUTH ASIAN PEOPLE WORKING IN MANAGERIAL, ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE POSITIONS ACROSS FOOTBALL IN ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND.

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FOREWORD

I HAVE ENJOYED WATCHING FOOTBALL FOR AS LONG AS I REMEMBER: BUT THE ONE OBSERVATION I HAD AS A CHILD WHICH REMAINS WITH ME TODAY, WAS THE LACK OF SEEING ANYONE THAT LOOKED LIKE ME.

As a child that observation concerned the players on the pitch and as I grew older, into my teenage years, the scope of that observation widened to include team managers, coaches, officials, referees, and those involved in the match day, generally. Older still and I noticed that as the camera panned towards the stands, there were no South Asian people near the club personnel i.e. the senior management and directors of the respective Clubs of whose match I was watching on TV.

These observations were in stark contrast to the beliefs that I had instilled into me from a very young age: the belief that I could be whatever I wanted to be if I worked hard enough and if I believed in myself.

I very quickly realised in early adulthood, that these two facets alone were never going to be enough if I really wanted to aim for the senior roles – this was true in my own career (law) and clearly the same was and unfortunately still is the same in football.

The lack of South Asian involvement in football really hit me in 2017, when I became the first person ever of South Asian descent to be appointed to the Football Association's Board of Directors – spanning the entirety of 154 years of the Football Association's existence. The lack of people that looked like me within the top levels of the sport, suddenly became overwhelming – and there were times, in the initial few months, when I truly understood what imposter syndrome meant! But in the relatively short time that I have been a Board member of the Football Association, I have noticed change taking place and more so – a real desire and need to make diversity and inclusion a reality and not just buzz words peddled out to placate interest groups. This comes

from having strong leadership at the top: confident in themselves as principals and in their drive to create a game that reflects the nation we live in– this is something that the Football Association has in its current Board and senior management team.

There is still a long way to go and I am not naïve enough to believe that change will take place over night, or in days, or weeks or months. But diversity and inclusion are a permanent agenda item, and a lot of tangible work is being undertaken to make changes. Reports like this are crucial to elicit the real lived experiences of those from a South Asian heritage, as no two experiences are the same and only with this information can further work be done to address the issues raised. Reports such as this one, cannot however be single pieces of work – it is up to us in the South Asian community to continue to push to be heard and to raise our concerns and by doing so there will be successes and changes, as the barriers that once existed are not so firm anymore.

Rupinder Bains

FA Board and Council Professional Game Non-Executive Director

RESEARCH TEAM

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Two enduring debates that have been prominent in football in the United Kingdom (UK) concerning the representation of people of Black British and British South Asian heritage in football across the UK - over the past 20 years - have been:

(a) the underrepresentation of British South Asian professional (male) players; and

(b) the lack of Black British managers/coaches as leaders at the highest levels of the game (across Europe).

Few scholarly studies have focused on British South Asian (or Black British) experiences of managerial, administration and governance level roles, although there has been a small but significant rise in the number of British South Asian people working at managerial, administration and governance levels of football in the UK. Thus, understanding British South Asian experiences with/in football across the UK is highly valuable to ensuring the implementation, management and monitoring of racial equity at all levels of the game.

Despite approximately 7% of the UK population identifying as British South Asian, only 0.25% of professional male footballers in England are British South Asian, despite research illustrating young British Bangladeshi boys, for example, play football more regularly than young White British boys[1]. The underrepresentation of British South Asian people in men's professional football has been a topic of debate for over 30 years[2], but seldom has this debate attempted to understand the issue in the context of broader debates about the lack of ethnic diversity at governance levels of the game. In 2021 Sport England reported that 93% of board members across Sport England and UK Sport funded bodies are white. This helps illustrate the lack of lived experience of being from a minoritised ethnic background in senior roles. Conceivably, the lack of progress on the pitch may be somewhat explained by the lack of diversity in leadership and governance roles off it.

METHODS

The primary aims of the project were to:

- Document the lived experience of British South Asian people working at managerial, administration and governance levels of UK football;
- Identify recruitment mechanisms enabling and disabling British South Asian people working or aspiring to work at managerial, administration and governance levels of UK football;
- Inform the inclusion, equality and diversity agenda across all levels of UK football, specifically policies and strategies on diversifying the workforce and organizational culture.

The methodology was as follows:

INCLUSION CRITERIA

BSA people who are employed, or who have been employed, in "lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations" or in "higher managerial and professional occupations".

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis via Nvivo.

Opponents of positive action initiatives and quota systems have often feared such processes mean the 'best person for the job' will be overlooked. However, the validity of this argument is arguably more questionable than it ever has been insofar as, despite the Social Mobility Commission (2017) reporting that increasing numbers of British South Asian people possess relevant qualifications for managerial, administration and governance work - outperforming other ethnic groups - a significant number are not finding equivalent employment. It would be remiss not to acknowledge a small rise in the number of British South Asian people working at managerial, administration and governance levels of English football; however, there has been no previous attempt to locate or understand the experiences of those people, until now.

The purpose of this report then is to appraise the performance of the football industry and understand its relationship to broader de-bates about leadership cultures, ethnicity, work, employment, and career progression, as well as offer empirically grounded recommendations.

1 Kilvington, D. (2019). Two decades and little change: British Asians, football and calls for action. Soccer & Society, 20(4), 584-601.

2 Lawrence, S. (2017). A critical race theory analysis of the English Premier League: Confronting the declining significance of 'race' and racism myth. In The English Premier League (pp. 133-149). London: Routledge.

SAMPLE
21 interviewees (Female = 5; Male = 16) = circa 36 hours of recorded testimony.

DATA GENERATION
In-depth, semi-structured interviews via Zoom/ Teams.

MEMBER CHECKING
Initial findings were shared and discussed with key stakeholders via an online event and feedback was sought on the findings.

FINAL OUTPUTS PRODUCED & DISSEMINATION

FINDINGS

THE PROBLEM WITH BAME

Amongst our participants, it was clear that the term Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) neither captured a sense of how they saw themselves and neither was it a practical nor political label through which greater ethnic diversity could be realized in leadership and governance roles across the football industry.

"I didn't know what BAME was until a few years ago and then you just buy in to it when **we should really be challenging it"** *-* Interviewee 16

*"BAME – **I don't like the term"** -* Interviewee 16

*"I've had to write documents for different things like operating procedures and I can kind of see why these terms occur, because … when you are writing documents it's almost easier if you just make it a very very broad brush, but **BAME is quite irrelevant actually, it doesn't tell you anything"** –* Interviewee 20

*"**I don't think BAME is a helpful acronym or terminology at all** because we don't all sit under the same umbrella, it's not one size fits all at all"* – Interviewee 13

The term BAME is one the industry must move away from if it is to capture more succinctly the lived experiences of those people participating in football at all levels. It is a term that holds negative meaning and serves as a shorthand way, when used, to trivialize the experiences of those people for whom it was intended to represent.

BAME treats the experiences of minoritised groups as being overly similar to one another, which for some results in unhelpful institutional sector-wide policies. To this end, the term BAME can lead to a 'one size fits all' approach when it comes to Equality and Diversity work, especially when departments

and individuals without relevant expertise engage in such work that although is often well-intentioned results in a 'white people and the rest'-type approach.

British South Asian diasporas are nuanced and initiatives/policies need to account for such differences. And so, a further reason a shift in terminology is needed was exemplified by our participants who were keen to recognise that the term British South Asian, too, although not problematic, had a tendency to overlook ethnic and cultural differences:

*"Asian communities, as do Black communities, have different communities within them so you've got the Bengali Community, you've got the Pakistani community, you've got the Indian community that would largely fall under the Asian of the BAME. **Bengali, Pakistani and Indian experiences are all very very different, now from my perspective if you want from the experience that I have and the knowledge that I have I would say out of the three Indians fare better, followed by Pakistanis, followed by Bengalis.** I feel the Bengali community is probably more discriminated against than the Pakistani and the Pakistani is more discriminated against than the Indian"* – Interviewee 13

*"**people have said things to do with me in relation to being Muslim, and I have found myself saying "I'm not Muslim",***

> ❝
> ## I DON'T THINK BAME IS A HELPFUL ACRONYM OR TERMINOLOGY… IT'S NOT ONE SIZE FITS ALL AT ALL

I'm not Muslim but that's not the point, I found myself trying to separate myself from being Muslim and that's ridiculous, a) I grew up in a Muslim country, I did Islamic studies at school, I'm not Muslim but that's not the point, I think it's more palatable to be Indian because you're perceived as not Muslim. I've been ashamed of myself for so quickly feeling the need to say I'm not Muslim because that should have no bearing on anything and any conversation, and obviously it's not something I would do now but I have definitely said it." - Interviewee 12

The category 'BAME' when it is deployed to understand the experiences of ethnic minorities can often be skewed in an overly positive way by the performance of British Indians and, in this research, we also identified qualitative testimony that supported this in the football industry. That is, our participants recognised that British South Asian people who identify as 'Punjabi' were more likely to fare better in leadership and governance positions than those belonging to other British South Asian groups. To this end, it is important footballing institutions recognise and celebrate British South Asian representation where it exists but also reflect more deeply on the differing experiences of other British South Asian groups. Avoiding the temptation to treat (some) British Indian representation as a validation of diversity agendas and polices is an important place to start.

FEELING OF BEING BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF 'FOOTBALL FAMILY'

Many of the participants discussed strategies for navigating the various spaces within the football world. Some highlighted how they would downplay aspects of their own identity and heritage to 'fit in' to a system privileging whiteness.

Others spoke of 'culture clashes' and how they had to dilute aspects of their personality to feel included and progress. And, for some interviewees, they felt defenceless and isolated as 'casually' racist comments and jokes were being expressed by senior figures in corporate settings without rebuttal. Rather than feeling empowered to challenge such comments, some participants opted to remain quiet in fear of being branded a 'trouble maker' or perceived to be unable to take a joke.

"in the Asian culture... certainly in the Indian culture, to look someone in the eyes is seen as rude, you have to respect authority... if I was speaking to someone elderly I'd look down, I wouldn't stare at them and so culturally I'm navigating two sort of cultures [in football]" - Interviewee 9

"at times I've probably diluted my personality... you have to flex your communication style in order to suit the environment you are working in." - Interviewee 7

"I was agreeing with [racist comments] even in boardroom meetings and they'd say certain things, certain cultures do this and that and I was agreeing with it" - Interviewee 9

Overt racism, so-called racial banter and micro-aggressions were common experiences that British South Asian people in football have to endure. The following examples illustrate how such occurrences are experienced and navigated.

"we had an Asian Muslim lad

working with us. We went on a day out for the football club and it was at the dogs. One of the dogs was called Bomber, and a staff member went up to the Muslim lad and said "I take it you'll be putting money down for him, for Bomber?" He came up to me and said "You're not going to believe what she just said to me", so he told the Commercial Director, who had a word with this lady and she denied it and said **it wasn't racist and just a bit of fun.**" - Interviewee 9

"There are things that happen that often fall under banter... I think they are micro-aggressions and they frustrate me because it's that layer of disadvantage... I'm extremely passionate, especially when I speak about things that I care about. I get told a lot when I'm in the middle of a passionate rant or conversation that "Oh it's so funny, your accent gets really Indian when you get excited" and that happens to me all the time, I'm right in the middle of arguing my point, what do you think that is going to do to my point because immediately I stop and I'm like "Right, okay, where was I" that is a micro-aggression." - Interviewee 12

Institutionally, such racially motivated comments are commonplace and recipients are left to simply deal with them because action/support is largely unavailable. British South Asian people therefore have to employ various coping mechanisms against racism. On the one hand, some resist and confront racist behaviour and on the other hand, some simply accept it and choose to 'play the system' (Kilvington, 2016). Some interviewees spoke of feeling helpless and were worried about how they would be perceived if they were to call out and publicly challenge racist behaviour.

"If I make a big deal about it (racism) I'm emotional and I'm taking it personally, **so you are stuck between a rock and a hard place**, well I'm not going to say anything but then if you don't say anything it keeps happening and then it's too late, it's like why didn't you say it the first ten times it happened." - Interviewee 12

"Me dealing with somebody behaving unacceptably towards me, very aggressively, dealing with it directly doesn't help the organisation realise that there's a problem ... but I think it would have led to a feeling within the organisation that maybe I'm not cut out for it." - Interviewee 14

"I'm always **worried** about being outspoken." - Interviewee 9

By being complicit in such spaces of whiteness, ethnically diverse people are more likely to be included in the football family. However, complicity and accepting racism as standard is not the solution. It is therefore paramount that such institutions, within football and wider society, devote significant time and energy towards diversity and inclusion, and equity policies, while victims of racism must be supported and empowered when speaking out against racist practices and processes.

There were, however, some discussions around when participants felt able to challenge racism, and who with. Crucially, whether someone was confident to challenge racism depended on the seniority of the participant and the seniority of the people they were challenging:

"**If they were working for me that's different, I would challenge them**, but if they weren't working for me and were on the same level as me I wouldn't challenge them." - Interviewee 9

SUBJUGATION, SUSPICION AND SURPRISE

British South Asian groups are still likely to be considered 'outsiders' as participants spoke of being met with suspicion and surprise while their footballing knowledge and culture is also routinely questioned. Participants recounted their experiences:

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WELL, YOU NEVER PLAYED THE GAME SO WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

*"It's a **'Be quiet, what would you know?'"** -* Interviewee 19

*"I've met people socially who were in the football network who've gone to me **"Do you like cricket?"** and I'm like "No, not at all, I've got very little interest in the sport", but I'm mad for football, literally ask me anything about football because I'll know the answer to it" -* Interviewee 10

*"**I almost felt subservient to everyone there** just to be there, yet I'd look at some of those people and I think you can't do half of what I can do." -* Interviewee 9

The interviewees noted that their racialised identities were often considered paradoxical to football bodies. Their knowledge, understanding and seat at the table was, at times, questioned verbally or through 'looks'/micro-aggressions. The response would be to work harder, do more, go the extra mile to showcase that their role in the game is deserved and based on merit. The latter interviewee noted that they generally felt grateful to be in a leadership and governance position despite routinely being one of the most qualified and experienced people at the top table. Not being considered from the football world was a theme shared by the participants:

*"Well, **you never played the game so what do you know?"** Which is true, I've never played the game at the highest level... but I believe if I had not been Asian I don't believe that this would have would have been thrown at me. I did qualifications, I did some FA talent ID qualifications but none of those seemed to kind of change the perspective of, "Well **you're not from this environment".** I felt that quite regularly". -* Interviewee 14

British South Asian people working in football leadership and governance positions are therefore still met with surprise and suspicion.

Although football has been a part of British South Asian cultures for well over a century, the Asian 'culture' is perceived as static, unitary and traditional. Moreover, because there are fewer role models in football when compared with other sports such as cricket, it helps maintain stereotypic thinking about their right to belong. What is evident is that racism is something that is consistently experienced by British South Asians in football in a variety of ways. That it is often ignored and denied as banter is commonly used as a defence mechanism by those operating inside the system of whiteness. It is fundamental that ethnically diverse personnel are empowered to call out such behaviours and when doing so, they are thoroughly supported to ensure that such cultures and behaviours advance. With greater education (otherwise known as cognitive diversity), more robust moves to diversify spaces of leadership and governance, and policies/practices embedded around diversity and inclusion, it is likely that these racialised experiences will recede.

SIGNIFICANT BARRIERS TO RECRUITMENT AND PROGRESSION

ISSUES DISCUSSED IN THIS SECTION REFER VARIOUSLY TO A LACK OF TRUST IN THE SYSTEM AND THE PERCEPTION THAT THERE ARE NO CAREERS IN FOOTBALL FOR BRITISH SOUTH ASIAN PEOPLE, ENTRY TO AND PROGRESSION WITHIN THE INDUSTRY IS HEAVILY RELIANT ON TRAILBLAZERS AND WHITE ADVOCATES, THE IMPORTANCE AND EXCLUSIONARY EFFECTS OF RECRUITMENT AGENCIES AND NEPOTISM, AS WELL AS THE NEED FOR MORE DIVERSITY WITHIN FOOTBALL ORGANISATIONS.

LACK OF TRUST IN THE SYSTEM

Many of the participants spoke of the importance of the visibility of British South Asian people in positions of prominence in professional football. That there are so few currently was a symbol of the game's exclusivity:

*"the reason why there aren't Asian people who are investing a lot of time and energy into football, both on the playing side, the coaching side or the administration side is because at the moment it doesn't seem like it's feasible … **Asian people know that football is not designed to allow them to succeed in their career there** … we know it because **we don't see people like us getting big opportunities."** - Interviewee 14*

It was common for trust, or lack thereof, to be inherited from the experiences of older relatives. This participant referred to the challenges experienced by his father being engrained throughout his own experiences:

*"One thing [my dad] told me from an early age **"Sport is not going to be a career, you don't even think about it"**, you know, he goes "I'm one example of where you can be as good as you can be" and he goes "I'm not sure you're going to be as good as me but I got nothing out of it and **you're not going to get anything out of it** either, so think of that."* - Interviewee 15

Notwithstanding perceptions about the exclusivity of the industry, many British South Asians continue to have aspirations of working in football. Participants in this research regularly spoke of the challenges experienced while trying to access the system. For this participant many British South Asian people do not possess sufficient knowledge of the system and its people, to gain access:

*"**people weren't talking to the right people and therefore you were excluded**, so local Asians I was working with didn't know what a County FA was. I know that sounds absurd to a lot of people but that was the case. These organisations can be quite difficult to get a hold of if you don't know the right people and it's still very much the case I think in some respects."* - Interviewee 17

Time and again, participants referred to the existence of nepotism. There was a view that nepotism was a feature at all levels of the industry - from entry level jobs up to senior leadership roles.

*"… it's all based on nepotism, it still is, **it's about your mate's mates**, it still is and I'm doing the same thing, I'm going through [named contact], **I'm going through other people that I know, that's the way it is."** - Interviewee 9*

For higher level roles, the importance of having your own 'brand' was regularly identified. That brand was thought

to originate from former playing days. As British South Asians are under-represented as players at elite level, the ability to establish that brand is severely constrained:

> "*football likes to hire people who've already worked in lots of football clubs and have a brand name or have been ex-players*, and the head-hunters, they circulate the same people round and round so you've got to try and break into that system of being on the inside of that system, but if you're not a player and we know that Asian people don't get… there's just not that many Asian people that play [professionally]… There aren't that many that are qualified coaches, there aren't that many, certainly not at the professional level, so *your ability to build a brand name is really, really complicated and the system works against you* in that regard … *opportunities all come through a network*". - Interviewee 14

In addition to the constraints imposed by an arguably weaker brand identity, largely the result of having a weaker network of advocates (discussed below), participants identified the exclusionary influence of recruitment agencies at higher levels of the game:

> "… *now it's slightly different, the higher you go up in executive jobs you've got the recruitment agencies … you might be missed out because* **you don't get that opportunity to go directly to show what you can do.**" – Interviewee 2

Some participants referred to direct experiences of working with recruitment agencies. Participants reflected variously on how agencies were not committed to recruiting the best candidates, had little interest in ethnic diversity and, when asked for advice, were rarely helpful. As a result, some participants had lost faith in their usefulness:

> "**I've given up with recruitment agencies** … I would say probably at least three years

I've not even bothered with a recruitment agent. In fact there was one recently in the last year …obviously unsuccessful … I had a nice conversation (with an agent). I said "I'll tell you what, I'll send you my CV, can you have a look again and just give me some feedback?" … that recruitment agent was very very positive about how committed he was to race equality, the clubs he'd worked for, the changes that he'd made at all these clubs … And when you say "just give me some feedback because obviously you're in the know what they're looking for" … Never ever heard from them again." – Interviewee 16

> "*Recently I was going to apply for two jobs and I didn't because I suppose I might have a perception, a wrong one maybe, that* **it's not worth applying because it's going to go a recruitment agency.**" – Interviewee 2

Participants also spoke of experiencing significant barriers to their progression. Most participants spoke about not wanting to be the odd one out and identified as different because they felt this would limit their progression through the organisation. Aligned with this, and as introduced above, participants regularly spoke about the importance of towing the line and not making waves. This participant had progressed quite quickly into senior positions in organisations, both from in and outside of football. He believed a key to this success was to put the organisation's interests first:

> "[I] got promoted pretty quickly and made director by 33, and I guess why I'm explaining that is because my experience told me that if you worked hard, you did well and **you behaved well and you embrace the values of an organisation** and all those kinds of good, solid things your career will prosper, if **you don't work hard or conscientiously and you don't put the organisation's interests first then you will stagnate or you'll get managed out.**" Interviewee 14

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Asian people know that football is not designed to allow them to succeed… we don't see people like us getting big opportunities

ALLIES AND ADVOCATES

THERE WAS A WIDELY HELD VIEW ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A NETWORK OF ALLIES AND ADVOCATES. SOME OF THE PARTICIPANTS FELT THEY HAD BENEFITED FROM HAVING INFLUENTIAL ALLIES WHO WERE ALREADY FIRMLY EMBEDDED IN FOOTBALL LEADERSHIP.

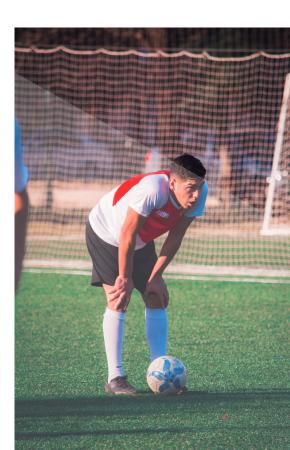This participant's first experience of professional football came via an advisory role he had on the Board of a Club. As a result of that role they felt confident approaching other members of the Board for advice on making a career switch:

> "I was able to I guess build a little bit of a rapport with both [named contact] and [named contact] in particular, I just said "Can you give me 20 minutes of your time one day? I'd like to work in sports, I'm in the process of kind of managing a career trajectory, a life trajectory towards that goal, I'd love to pick your brains", and they were very kind. [named contact] gave me some perspective and gave me his views. [named contact] invited me to his office, we spent time talking about it, **he put me in touch with some head-hunters … he literally went out of his way to make introductions and it went from there.**" - Interviewee 14

While by no means the case with all, the vast majority of participants referred to the importance of having white allies and advocates. Indeed, these participants were keen to quash any suggestion that white people were unwilling to help:

> "[named contact] has been a godsend. I've not given up hope, there's a lot of good people out there that are white people … **people that have helped me have been white, so I want to say that genuinely and I want that on record, my mentors are white.** So let's balance this." - Interviewee 9

Similarly, this participant referred to the importance of actively seeking a diverse network of allies:

> "**I know the importance of allies** and the fact that … yes you can have allies from your own background etc., but there's very little, not very little, it's wrong to say, there's not as much value in having a network of peers... **have a network of different people who think differently… that's how to make a difference, that's how to get across how you can influence.** You might go into an 'Asians in Football' meeting and everyone has the same issue and you are like "okay, great, we've all agreed we've got the same issue but how the hell are we going to make a difference?" - Interviewee 10

" I KNOW THE IMPORTANCE OF ALLIES

INTEREST CONVERGENCE

The final element pertaining to the lack of trust emanated from the widely held view that any action taken by the football authorities concerning race equality is principally borne out of obligation, rather than a true commitment.

Overall, participants were cynical towards football's leaders, citing disingenuous motivations. Indeed, interest convergence occurs when organisations implement changes which, on the surface, appear to create positive change for minorities, while also furthering their own reputation or commercial interests in the process. In other words, ethnically diverse communities will be afforded greater opportunities when doing so serves the interests of football.

It was widely perceived that race equality is not considered to be essential to the business of sports organisations. Take this respondent, who has a background in equality and diversity activism:

> "I think it [equality work] was always an add-on, it was never integrated … **it needs to be a golden thread integrated right through all your functions and all your policies. It needs to be like that, but the problem at the time was it was always an add-on, and in the sports sector it's always been an add-on…** the whole race equality and equality and diversity agenda wasn't being talked about at the board level, and that's why board diversity is very important. You need to be talking about it there, you need to be asking your executive teams where are you with this agenda, and **you need to understand the business case for your organisation.**" - Interviewee 15

Participants regularly spoke of how football organisations are primarily interested in "being seen to be doing". Others commented on how action was the result of obligation:

> "**I think things are changing, partly because they are being forced to change**, things like the UK Sport Governance Code, it's sad, the FA's Diversity Code now, **it's sad that we have to force people to have equality, but there are more opportunities because they are being forced to**. You look now and Board positions they want, they encourage BAME people to apply, they encourage minorities to apply and women to apply … **My perception of the industry is it's still trying to do a bit of a tick box exercise.**" Interviewee 12

Similarly, some referred to action being due to the threat of sanctions and reputational damage:

> "**So many organisations are driven by a guilty feeling when it comes to diversity**, and there will be clubs who've signed up to the code who've done it because they think I can't not sign up because we'll look like we're against it and we're not inclusive and we're racist."- Interviewee 10

As we have seen with the way Yorkshire County Cricket Club has mishandled former player, Azeem Rafiq's, allegations of racial discrimination and bullying, it is often only once sanctions have been imposed (withdrawal of sponsors and international fixtures) that positive action is forthcoming. While any action aimed at making sport more inclusive was welcomed by participants, there was a view that it is all too often reactive and disingenuous.

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> ## MY PERCEPTION OF THE INDUSTRY IS IT'S STILL TRYING TO DO A BIT OF A TICK BOX EXERCISE

BURDEN OF REPRESENTATION

This section is concerned with the burden that British South Asians possess within the football industry, how, irrespective of their paid role, they come to be the (lone) voice of equality and diversity, and the emotional cost of undertaking these roles; most of which remains unremunerated.

BEING THE LONE VOICE

All the participants in this study who occupied positions of leadership within the football industry accepted that their position brought additional responsibilities, including being a role model to others and, on a day to day basis, being an often lone voice on race equality.

This participant, for instance, spoke of how they had taken it upon themself to be the "mouthpiece" for British South Asian communities. They had not been asked to do this. Rather, due to their position, and lack of other diverse voices, they felt obliged to:

"... **I'm the only Asian person really**, even up in senior management level I'm the only Asian face apart from one other chap ... I guess I wanted to be well, I think **I am the mouthpiece for a lot of those in the Asian community who need help** in thinking "well how do I get to work within football?" ... whether it's in playing terms or whether it's someone wanting to work, "how do I get involved?" So in that sense, **I've taken on that role and I feel I need to take on that role because I'm privileged enough to be in a position that I can affect change."** Interviewee 18

While burdensome, this role was accepted with knowledge over it's expectations. The same could not be said for the vast majority of participants in this research. Given the homogenising effects of the term 'BAME', as already discussed, it is often the case that ethnically diverse people are asked to speak on behalf of communities to which

they do not ascribe or belong. This participant for instance, spoke passionately about her objection to having her experiences (con)fused with all other British South Asian people's experiences:

> "***That's a microaggression, and asking me to speak on behalf of an entire gender, race, population, sub-section I can't do that; I can only speak for my own experience*** *and my experience as a brown Asian woman in sport is still not the same as the next brown Asian woman in sport who is Muslim or who is gay or who has a disability, all of those things … that assumption that you can ask me and I will have all the answers, that for me is [micro-aggressive] …* **I would never assume that of you***, I would never say to you "How do all Scottish men think?" – how the hell would you know, you're not Scottish!"* Interviewee 12

Others articulated their frustration at being included in conversations for the sake of having a British South Asian person present; not necessarily for having something important to say:

> "*so I kind of worked with them [Board] but* **I soon realised that it was very tokenistic, I was there as just a brown articulate face when there wasn't many brown articulate faces.** *I know that sounds quite brutal but that was the reality."* Interviewee 17

Similarly, there was a perception that many of these roles are exploitative because they are rarely paid. Indeed, British South Asian people are expected to take on these roles as an add-on to their everyday paid roles:

"how many (South Asians in leadership/governance roles) have actually made a career out of it in terms of paid roles? That would be telling in terms of full-time executive positions … There was a need on this journey for the governing bodies and whoever else, wherever else we've all been, there was a need for them to tick boxes and to work with people for them to get where they wanted to or what they wanted … So whilst it may seem that the likes of [X] have been successful, but have they because **how many have transferred that experience into a career? It's largely been voluntary."** – Interviewee 16

*"**I will have donated over 150 days of my time in the time I've been in the [organisation].** Months I've been here, but that's because I want to do it, no one forced me to do that, that was my choice"* Interviewee 19

That roles are unpaid implicitly devalues them. Moreover, representation of ethnically diverse groups is considered to be the end-goal, change will be slow to manifest. Instead, as this participant identified, there needs to be diversity at all levels of the game, and better guidance is needed to help ethnically diverse groups traverse the pathways:

*"… **you've got me on the Board, but what are we doing to encourage more then? If I'm that role model we need to show people the way in**; how to come forward, and that's mainly at County FA level and I think that's where there is a huge roadblock at the moment, you've got say [X] FA or [X] or other areas where the local community is densely Asian but yet there's none at County FA Board level, and you think why is there this disconnect then? … **There's no point in just placing people at the top level and saying "here you go, here's your role model", but you don't show the pathway."*** Interviewee 18

PIGEONHOLING AND STEREOTYPING

Continuing on from the issue of the burden of representation, a number of participants reflected on persistent stereotypes surrounding their ethnicity and the roles they are most suited to.

These stereotypes related to medical, ICT and equality and diversity roles specifically:

*"**I think for medical it is more accepted now [to employ BSA people]**, I think it's fairly normal,*

I mean I can think off the top of my head at least three or four other doctors that are involved in just the Premier League from a South Asian background. There are some very prominent ones and some less prominent ones,

"THE RUMOUR...WAS APPARENTLY THAT I WAS WORKING IN CRICKET NOW

*but I think a cultural stereotype is there probably, yeah, and I genuinely believe it is from the fact that i**t is now normal for anybody to go to an A&E or an E[quality and] D[iversity] or a GP practice and see South Asian doctors there, they all accept that.***" – Interviewee 20

This participant reflected on a damaging rumour that emerged once he left an executive role in football. The rumour, which was completely unfounded, only went to emphasise his view that he was never accepted in football:

*"**After I'd left [organisation] the rumour that went very quickly around [the organisation] was apparently that I was working in cricket now. I mean how much more stereotypical can you get, right, which is not true at all.** I mean, I'd be happy to be working in cricket but it's not true and I haven't even applied for a role in cricket, so God knows how that started. But in my absence, that's the common conclusion somehow somebody came to and then that spread..."* Interviewee 12

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following is what the data points to as useful and tangible policy innovations to address some of the findings and concerns raised throughout this report:

1   **Commit to inclusive and diverse recruitment – (i.e. destabilise existing networks)**

    a.   The introduction of fairer recruitment processes such as open selection, 'blind CVs' and other anonymised selection tools for senior roles to the recruitment process to mitigate against bias.

    b.   Critically review the use of recruitment agencies when seeking to fill vacancies given their vested financial interest in placing a candidate that remains in post for at least 12months.

    c.   Seek out talent beyond traditional routes and value potential achievement over university degree classification.

    d.   Ensure selection committees and interview panels are balanced and suitably diverse.

2   **Commit to retain and support – (i.e. changing the organisational cultures within institutions)**

    a.   Resource mentorship schemes and support existing role models.

    b.   Value the evidence strongly linking business performance with a diverse executive board, leadership teams and workforce.

3   **Agree to educate - (i.e. understand diversity of thought and experience)**

    a.   Mandatory education for the entire workforce of an organisation, which mandates everyone with responsibility for EDI - not simply a few people or a department.

    b.   Enhanced education across an organisation and workforce to understand the commercial benefits as well as moral obligation to ethnic diversity.

    c.   Adopt an intersectional approach to future internal research and/ or policy development to address the limits of BAME-based approaches.

4   **Introduce targets – (i.e. hold organisations accountable if they are not met)**

    a.   Cascade 'locally representative' diversity targets throughout an organisation's business structure to counter the clustering of British South Asian people and other minoritised groups in pockets of an organisation.

    b.   Embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion targets and duties within ALL employees' job roles.

    c.   Introduce timebound commitments and targets for Board diversity and attach personal EDI objectives to annual performance targets to ensure accountability

EQUALITY'S EVERYONE'S JOB

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