

'Vague & unhelpful' | Companies could be told: 'Ditch use of BAME label'

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A racial disparities commission established by the Prime Minister is reportedly set to recommend that the term 'BAME' should not be used by public bodies and companies anymore – Sky News reported.

As was first reported by the Daily Telegraph, the proposal is said to form an important part of the report from the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, which is expected to be published this week.

BAME – which stands for black, Asian and minority ethnic – is a term that is widely used in the workplace and in wider society.

Yet, an anonymous source reported on by the Telegraph said that the term had become “unhelpful and redundant”.

As reported, there are fears the term could potentially mask the lived experience of individual groups.

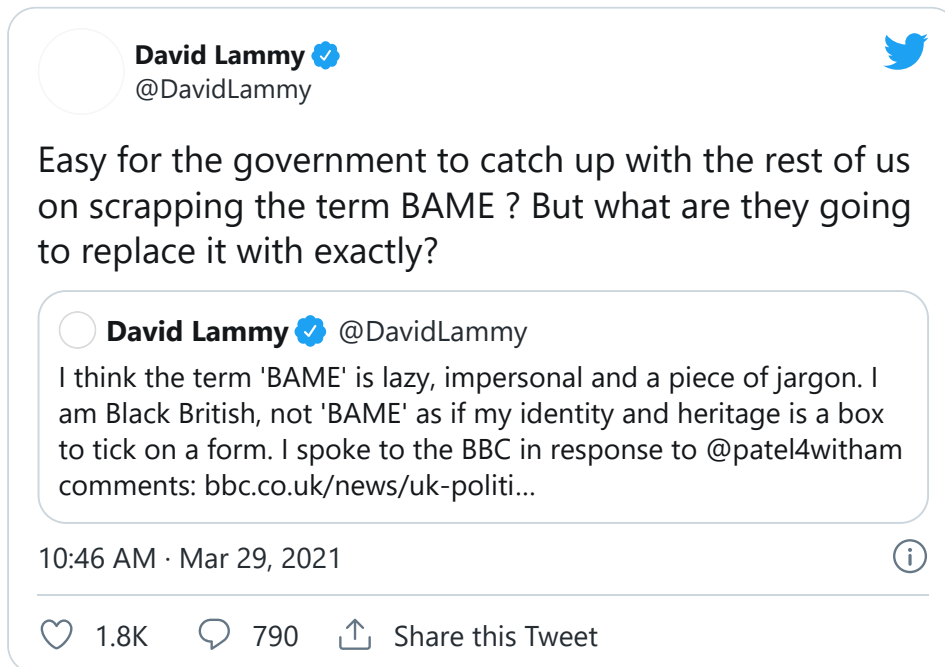
'What do you replace it with?'

This news of this report attracted the attention of Labour's Shadow Justice Secretary David Lammy.

In an interview with Sky News, he said: "The problem is there are vast differences across and within ethnic minority groups here in the UK."

He added: "I think there is a call to move away from it [the term BAME]. The question is what do you replace it with?"

"We will have to wait and see what the government come forward with this new commission."



Legal experts weigh in

Following this news, *HR Grapevine* spoke to several legal experts to find out more about what this could potentially mean for the HR function and the world of work.

Pranav Bhanot, a Litigation Solicitor at law firm Meaby & Co Solicitors and Founding Chairman of the British Hindu Report, said he feels the term 'BAME' is "incredibly vague and unhelpful".

He told *HR Grapevine*: "The term BAME is incredibly vague and unhelpful in understanding to what extent organisations (public and private) have prioritised the issue of a diverse workforce.

"People of BAME background can include people from the South Asian, South East Asian, African, South American and European backgrounds.

“Therefore, when a company or organisations states that they have a certain percentage of employees from a BAME background, we are none the wiser as to the true ethnic or regional composition of the workforce,” Bhanot added.

What impact could this have on the workplace?

Anthony Sakrouge, Partner and Head of the Employment Team at Russell-Cooke told *HR Grapevine* that “replacing BAME with some other term is unlikely to have a significant impact on the workplace, as the Equality Act 2010 does not refer to this term”.

He added: “It provides only that ‘race’ is a protected characteristic and that race, for these purposes, includes colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins.”



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As well as ascertaining the impact that this could have on the workplace, the legal expert also explored whether this could have an impact on workplace diversity.

He said: “The recommendation made by the report, when published, will probably only improve the monitoring of workplace diversity.

“It will presumably be either to use a less confusing term than BAME or not to use any term which lumps so many different minority groups together.

“In my view this would be sensible advice to any organisation which is still using this term in monitoring its statistics,” the legal expert added.

‘Removing the term should not have a day-to-day impact on HR’

Charlotte Farrell, Associate Solicitor in the employment team at Paris Smith said that, arguably, potentially removing the term should not have an impact on day-to-day HR or work life.

This, she told *HR Grapevine*, is because all workplaces should ensure that people are treated equally and fairly and that no discrimination – on the grounds of race, nationality or ethnic origin – takes place. “Whether or not the term BAME is used or not shouldn’t affect this,” she added.

Instead, the legal expert said that a more important question to look at is “how do we make sure that organisations do not subconsciously discriminate against people based on their race, nationality or ethnic origin – and how do we ensure that across our society and workplaces opportunities are open and available to all?”

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“Whether or not the term BAME is used or not shouldn’t affect this practical action,” Farrell added.

In fact, the legal expert went on to explain that removing use of the term ‘BAME’ could possibly help encourage diversity in the workplace.

This is because she said “it will avoid people incorrectly ‘labelling’ groups of people and should make it easier to look at people individually.

“Not everyone with the same nationality will experience the same issues or see things in the same way, so removing the term BAME could potentially avoid stereotypical views being formed about certain groups,” Farrell added.

Consider the language

Jane Farrell, Co-Founder and CEO of EW Group, a UK-based D&I consultancy, told *HR Grapevine*:

“The principle is to use the language that groups on the receiving end of discrimination want others to use.

“Language is always in transition, it is particularly in transition around how to describe groups of people who experience racism.

“Those of us who have never experienced racism have a responsibility to educate ourselves and listen very carefully to those people who have.



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