



#BlackLivesMatter: how UnLtd needs to show up to tackle racism and create equity in social enterprise

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News

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The murder of George Floyd, and the heightened focus on the powerful systemic racism in the UK, have made us reassess where UnLtd is in its efforts to be as equitable, inclusive and diverse as it can be. We realise that we have fallen short of where we need to be in tackling racism. We now need to correct that, and with real urgency. Our plans are outlined below.

UnLtd's board, executive team and I know that as an organisation we have contributed to both racial and other inequity with our systems and actions. We recognise we need to change significantly.

This is not the beginning of that journey. UnLtd was set up to unlock potential from across the UK, with the belief that people who have experienced a social issue play a vital role in developing solutions to address that issue. While back in 2002 we didn't use the term 'leader with lived experience', this principle has underpinned our mission and our support offer.

Two years ago we reviewed our support and found that we needed to do more to embed our commitment to inclusion. 2017 data showed that there were still many social entrepreneurs, including from Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds, missing out on our support due to systemic barriers we had put in their way (or failed to remove). A disproportionate amount of our higher levels of funding and investment was distributed to people identifying as white. This had to change, so we ran a pilot project to co-develop a **manifesto for change** with a group of these leaders.

We made designing for inclusion training mandatory for all our staff and board. We dug deep into the root causes of inequality including white supremacy and patriarchy. This led us to begin redesigning our application process and our support offer, while committing to ensuring 30% of our awards would go to leaders with lived experience. We actively reached out to leaders and social entrepreneurs from Black Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds to be part of our board and staff team across the UK. We committed to our values of being brave, inclusive and accountable.

Looking back, we know we have come a long way. **This was highlighted** by a former trustee, Stephen Bediako, recently when he commented that we were among the organisations who had worked hard to put a mirror up to ourselves and put inclusion at our heart.

But as the historical moment we are living through has challenged us all to reflect, we know we have made mistakes and have some way to go. The deep dive of inclusion training was good, but we haven't done enough to keep that conversation, energy and action alive. Our Director of Social

Entrepreneur Support was chair of the Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF) Diversity, Equity and Inclusion working group, but we have yet to implement all the nine pillars of action from that.

So what will we do about it? Firstly, we have reviewed our 2018 Diversity & Inclusion strategy and identified gaps which we will fill, guided by grassroots movements including #CharitySoWhite and the ACF recommendations.

Secondly, we are appointing an independent consultant to undertake an equity audit to address unconscious inequalities within our organisation.

Thirdly, we will set up an equity taskforce to build our collective understanding, accountability and develop solutions to systemic issues. This will run across our staff, board and social entrepreneurs.

We will publish our commitments and changes to reinforce our accountability and transparency.

Finally, we are making more ambitious commitments for our own funding and support. Our goal is to have 50% of our awards from Q2-Q4 go to social entrepreneurs who identify as Black, Asian, minority ethnic and/ or disabled people. As we shape our 2025 strategy, we will also include funding goals for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. We will publicly share our progress annually.

We know we cannot address systemic racism and inequity alone. We will respectfully challenge partners and funders who shy away from committing to equity and hope they will join us in not remaining silent. We do believe that by being a better ally we can help break down barriers, create lasting change and ensure that we lead with equity (a step beyond equality), so every social entrepreneur has the same opportunity to thrive.

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Author Info



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I joined UnLtd as CEO in May 2016. I have over 20 years' experience in the charity and social entrepreneurship sectors, most recently as Chief Executive of CW+, the charity for Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. Prior to this I was a Partner at Leader's Quest, developing a global community of purpose-driven leaders across private, public and social sectors. I was also a Trustee of the foundation of impact investor Bridges Ventures. Before this I grew INSEAD's Executive MBA to be a top 5- ranked program and co-founded the business school's Social Innovation Centre. I have an EMBA with distinction from INSEAD and studied Psychology and Philosophy at Oxford University.

