



The Report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities

AFSA Response

The Commission's report into racial and ethnic disparities in the UK.

8th April 2021

Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities report published

The [Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities](#) has published a [report](#) investigating race and ethnic disparities in the UK on Thursday 31st March 2021.

We are aware many of our BAME staff have concerns about the report. In addition, other staff and senior leaders within the fire and rescue services are likely to be grappling with the report and associated media.

Our approach to any reports that have been published has always been to focus on communicating a measured response and helping our corporate members make sense of the findings and recommendations.

The 258-page independent report highlights race and ethnic disparities in education, employment, crime and policing and health.

The report advances the view that geography, family influence, socio-economic background, culture, and religion have more significant impact on life chances than the existence of racism.

It also highlights the need to move away from using the abbreviation BAME as the ethnic minority population is now far too diverse for the BAME acronym to be of much use instead the commission advocates the use of the term 'ethnic minority.'

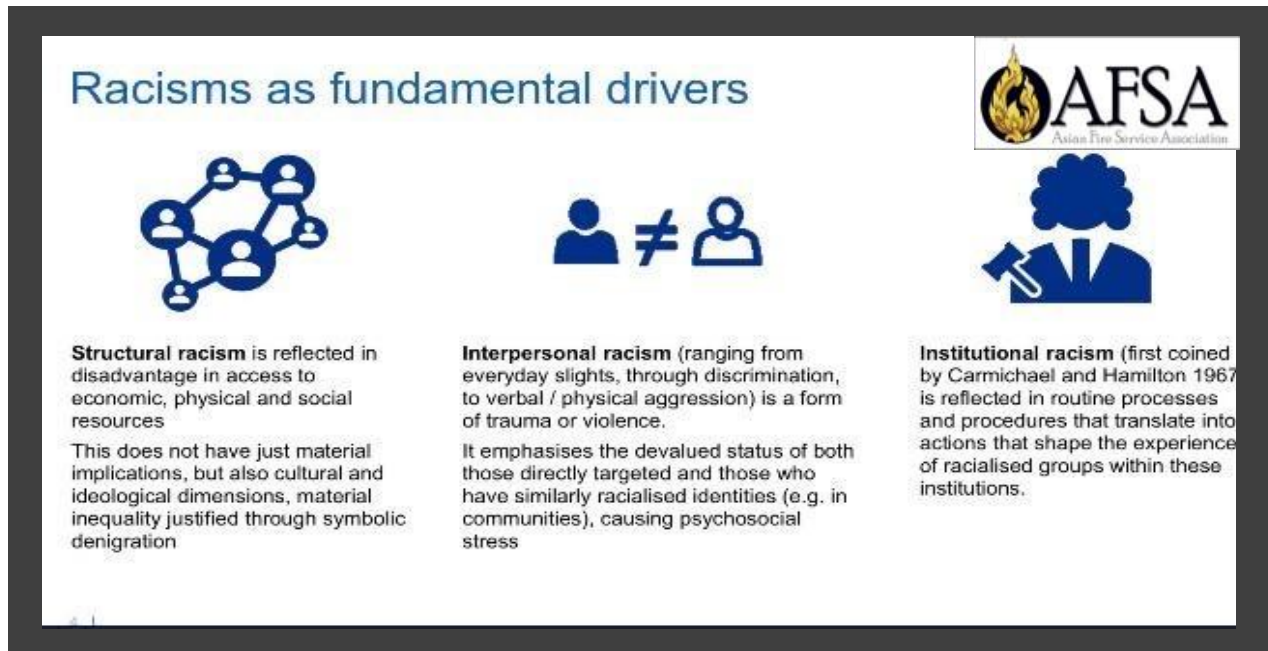
Also, the report recommends scrapping unconscious bias training. Despite the evidence to suggest biases and prejudices exist with tendencies for a societal reality to favour the familiar and members of in-groups. In response AFSA is of the view that unconscious bias is one of many tools used in conjunction can help an organisation develop an inclusive culture.

At the same time, the report also highlights racism remains an issue. It acknowledges the continued persistence of racial biases and welcomes the greater sensitivity to racism among a more assertive younger generation and focuses more on tackling what it calls obstacles such as 'affinity bias' (the tendency to appoint and promote people who look like yourself) that can prevent the advancement of people from minority backgrounds rather than attributing to systemic or institutional racism.

Furthermore, the report argues the term 'institutional racism' should only be used when deep-seated racism can be proven on a systemic level. The report calls for a

broader use of terminology, including phrases such as systematic or structural racism.

The following diagram may help in terms of defining key terms that can sometimes be used interchangeably.



On behalf of AFSA ‘we reject the view expressed in the report indicating institutional racism does not exist as an evidence-based body, we have analysed the data and heard the lived experience of minority staff and working in the fire and rescue service and other large public bodies which indicates more need to be done to counter the continued prevalence of institutional racism.’

At the same time, the report encouragingly from a fire and rescue service perspective recommends strengthening the role of the Equality Human Rights Commission (EHRC), the focus on young people, investigating what causes ethnic pay disparities within the NHS, open access to apprenticeships and finally using data in a responsible way. These recommendations strengthen the work race equality already happening within the NHS.

Responding to recent events, Dalvinder Rai, Chair of the AFSA commented: **‘We are disappointed with some of the findings of the report. We urge leaders and colleagues across the UK fire and rescue service to continue their efforts to counter racism in all its forms.’**

AFSA recognises that the report may be causing anxiety and confusion within some fire and rescue services. AFSA therefore would be happy to set up a meeting with your organisation to address the key issues of the report. Please email afsafrs@yahoo.co.uk and we would be happy to set up a meeting.

AFSA will continue to support fire and rescue service in the UK, and we are happy to announce an all-day event that will be held on **May 14th, 2021**. More details to follow.

We will continue to review the recommendations and findings of the report and continue to provide insights to our members working closely with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and others.

Finally, it is crucial we all continue to work together to ensure equality, diversity and inclusion remains a top priority of fire and rescue service reform, policy, and practice as well as experience. Therefore, using themes, we are all very much familiar with – let's challenge *'racism within fire and rescue services through prevention, protection and response'*.