

TUC Anti-Racism Task Force Evaluation

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Acknowledgements

Thanks to all those who participated in the interviews and focus groups for this evaluation exercise. This report intends to represent the diversity of views expressed by the different groups of participants including general secretaries, union officers and staff, activists and members.

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Contents

Executive Summary.....	4
Introduction.....	7
Background.....	7
Evaluation objectives.....	7
Evaluation methodology.....	8
Structure of the evaluation.....	8
Anti-racism Task Force framework.....	9
Terms of Reference and aims of Task Force.....	9
Structure and composition of the Task Force.....	11
Task Force Workstreams.....	12
Post ARTF Roadmap.....	13
Implementation and Oversight Group.....	14
Summary.....	15
Relevance of the Anti-racism Task Force in the historical moment.....	16
Summary.....	20
Effectiveness and impact of the Anti-racism Task Force.....	21
Main work delivered by two-year Task Force.....	21
Perspectives on overall effectiveness and impact.....	22
Union engagement.....	24
Effectiveness and impact of Workstreams.....	26
Summary.....	31
Sustainability of the Anti-racism Task Force and its work.....	32
Summary.....	38
Recommendations for sustainability.....	39
TUC leadership and co-ordination of the union movement’s anti-racism work.....	39
Union accountability for anti-racism Action Plans.....	39
Black member/activist engagement and involvement.....	40
Developing and spreading good practice towards race equality.....	40
Appendix 1: ARTF Terms of Reference.....	42
Appendix 2: ARTF Membership.....	43
Appendix 3: Implementation and Oversight Group Terms of Reference.....	45

Executive summary

- The ARTF was a time-limited (2-year) Task Force which ended with a presentation of its work and findings at TUC Congress, October 2022. The TUC commissioned this evaluation to consider the effectiveness of ARTF in renewing the trade union movement's commitment to campaigning against racism at work and to assess whether it represents an appropriate framework to steer the TUC and its affiliates towards building sustained and consistent work on race equality.
- The evaluation report makes recommendations in four key areas developed from the insights and perspectives of the different groups of participants:
 - TUC leadership and co-ordination of the union movement's anti-racist work
 - Union accountability for anti-racism Action Plans
 - Black member/activist engagement and involvement
 - Developing and spreading good practice for race equality
- Drawing from the experience of the earlier TUC Stephen Lawrence Task Group, the starting premise for the ARTF was to be more action focused and attentive to core areas of union activity including collective bargaining and organising. Equally, the Task Force clearly signalled to unions that it was time 'to get their own houses in order' as regards internal black under-representation.
- The structure and composition of the Task Force modelled an inclusive approach to anti-racism work whereby the work is not left to Black trade unionists and Black structures/networks but framed as a project that all trade unionists should be concerned with and from which all workers and union members benefit.
- The Task Force had the hallmarks of a good governance structures: a clear and agreed vision; a strategy for delivering on the aims; appropriate leadership; accountability mechanisms; a strategy for continuing and building the programme of work.

- This historical moment with its constellation of high-profile external events spotlighting racism, compelled the union movement “to step up to the plate”, but the stakes are high with Black union activists/members as well as some union officers describing this moment as the union movement’s ‘last chance’ to act on racism in the labour market.
- Black officers, equality officers and activists were critical about the extent to which the Task Force was rooted among Black workers and activists including whether there were sufficient links to, consultation with and input from Black activists as regards the agenda.
- The resources produced under the auspices of ARTF deliver on the promise to create the foundations for renewing the union movement’s work on anti-racism and race equality, but those resources will not in themselves be enough to ensure sustained and consistent work across unions.
- The Task Force has created the conditions for an extra impetus and in some cases extra resources, for work that some unions had already started on anti-racism or had been doing for many years.
- There was a lot of positivity around ARTF from Black member structures, but also some impatience in the context of the perception that action had been limited and progress on race equality extremely slow over many years; there was a hunger for action.
- The Black Talent leadership programme stands out as a much needed and well received outcome of ARTF but with some concerns about rolling it out nationwide and following it up with ongoing support for the development of Black activists.
- Starting the challenging conversation about the experiences of Black workers as employees inside trade unions was also widely seen as a significant step forward.
- ARTF has promoted the concept of ‘strategic litigation’, a strategic approach to legal race cases, which has great potential to gain traction within the collective

bargaining arena as it would represent a significant shift from the current individualised approach which unintentionally helps employers to stay out of the spotlight and avoid reputational damage for structural workplace racism.

- ARTF has renewed the focus on anti-racism within the union movement in a co-ordinated effort and defined a shared vision of what the union movement should be seeking to achieve as regards representing Black workers.
- ARTF raises the stakes in terms of what is demanded of unions and their anti-racism work so that Black members and activists do not write it off as a 'talking shop'.
- The ARTF Manifesto sets out a common purpose for the union movement which the TUC needs to ensure is enacted.
- Recommendations focus on: TUC leadership and co-ordination of the union movement's anti-racism work;
 - i. union accountability for anti-racism action plans;
 - ii. Black member/activist engagement and involvement;
 - iii. developing and spreading good practice towards race equality.

Introduction

Background

The TUC General Council launched the two-year Anti-Racism Task Force (ARTF) in September 2020 with the aim of renewing the trade union movement's commitment to economic and social justice for Black workers, members and union staff.

The ARTF was set up amidst the growing number of deaths of Black and Ethnic Minority people due to Covid-19¹, the death of George Floyd at the hands of American police² and the global Black Lives Matter demonstrations, events which brought racism to the forefront of public consciousness and debate.

The ARTF set out to refresh the TUC's campaigning, organising and bargaining work and to guide how the union movement should be tackling race inequalities in workplaces and communities. Ultimately the ARTF sought to define the framework for the union movement's current and future long-term work on race with the aim of putting economic and social justice for Black workers at the centre of the movement's work.

Evaluation objectives

The ARTF was a time-limited Task Force which ended with a presentation of its work and findings at TUC Congress 2022. Now that the ARTF's two-year lifespan has come to an end, the TUC deemed it important for this programme of work to be independently evaluated in two main areas:

1. Its delivery of renewing the trade union movement's commitment to campaigning against racism at work. The agenda it has set for trade unions for taking on this work within their own structures.
2. Assessing the ARTF as an appropriate framework to steer the TUC and its affiliates towards building sustained and consistent work on race equality.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/drivers-of-the-higher-covid-19-incidence-morbidity-and-mortality-among-minority-ethnic-groups-23-september-2020/drivers-of-the-higher-covid-19-incidence-morbidity-and-mortality-among-minority-ethnic-groups-23-september-2020--2>

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-52861726>

The TUC wants to learn from this process so that it can form a basis for future planning. In 2023 the ARTF entered its second phase of work, which is a five-year plan to keep race at the top of the movement's agenda. Therefore, the evaluation brief was to provide critical perspectives and reflections deriving from the range of ARTF participants. The evaluation considers the following:

- Relevance – extent to which the ARTF objectives were/are consistent with requirements of unions from the perspective of senior leaders, officers, activists, and members
- Effectiveness – extent to which objectives were achieved
- Impact – positive short and longer-term effects
- Sustainability – prospects for continuation of anti-racism work in the union movement

Evaluation methodology

- Review of all the minutes and documentation that have resulted from the ARTF
- 12 semi-structured interviews with a selection of: TUC ARTF staff, the ARTF main membership and the co-opted members of the ARTF workstreams
- 3 focus groups made up of other union staff (including equality officers) and union members/activists who participated in one or more activities of the ARTF

Structure of the evaluation

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Consideration of the Anti-racism Task Force (ARTF) framework
- Relevance of ARTF
- Effectiveness and impact of ARTF
- Sustainability of ARTF
- Recommendations
- Appendices

The first section draws on the review of ARTF meeting minutes and other documentation together with TUC senior leadership and union officer interviews. The next three sections draw largely on the interviews and focus groups and therefore offer a range of perspectives from those of ARTF Main Task Force Committee general secretaries, to TUC and union officers (including equality officers), to activists and members. The intention here is to represent the range of participant views from their different perspectives and from the standpoint of their different roles. Discussions were conducted in confidence with the assurance of anonymity of individuals, therefore, the

categories used in the report are loose and individuals are placed where they best fit: general secretaries (including of TUC); union officers (including equality officers, tutors, union full-time officials, TUC officers); activists.

Anti-racism Task Force framework

This section of the report describes the structure of the Anti-racism Task Force (ARTF) and begins to identify its strengths and weaknesses as a framework for the union movement's anti-racism work, which is more fully discussed in the subsequent sections from the perspectives of the various Task Force participant groups.

The ARTF set out with the aim of leading the trade union movement's renewed campaign against racism at work in its two-year tenure. To this end, between September 2020 and October 2022, it engaged with Black workers across the UK to hear about their experiences, and to provide a framework for affiliates on tackling structural racism in the UK, in workplaces and in unions themselves.

Central to the work of the ARTF was the aim to set a direction for the trade unions in a way that would transform the effectiveness of the union movement's work on anti-racism. Integral to this, it was recognised that there was a need for affiliates to engage with Black members and their senior activists to enable unions to formulate action plans that would produce a new impetus and result in substantive change. The ARTF's intention was to focus on the implementation of concrete actions from a devised programme of work, with the aim of paving the way to make a positive difference for Black workers, members and staff in unions.

Terms of Reference and aims of Task Force

The TUC General Council set the Terms of Reference for ARTF and established an ambitious and comprehensive set of aims (see Appendix 1) focused on action to accelerate progress on race equality which to date senior TUC leadership acknowledges as slow whether looking at the external labour market or internally within the unions themselves.

The Main Task Force inaugural meeting in December 2020 noted that ARTF was not established to 'reinvent the wheel' (i.e. it was acknowledged that there is ongoing anti-racism work in some unions), but to get things done across the union movement. It was also noted as important to remember that the ARTF was set up to tackle the institutional racism in the labour market first identified by the landmark Macpherson Report (1999) (the outcome of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry), and to encourage dialogue amongst affiliated unions, their partners, and members about how to progress the longstanding anti-racism agenda.

At the inaugural meeting of the ARTF, members who had been on the Stephen Lawrence Task Group some 20 years earlier were given the opportunity to share their experiences and what they expected as outcomes for the current Task Force. Key points from that discussion were:

- It was agreed that the Stephen Lawrence Task Group was a defining moment for the union movement which had secured commitment to tackling racism from senior union leaders.
- The biennial TUC Equality Audit was one of the substantive outcomes of the Task Group which has been used to quantify what the unions are doing regarding race, a process which has held the individual unions to account as well as opening a dialogue between the unions. It was seen as a powerful and insightful tool/resource.
- The Task Group had challenged the government which had denied there was institutional racism.

While the Stephen Lawrence Task Group was seen as a defining moment in setting a new agenda for anti-racism work in the union movement, there was now a sense in senior TUC leadership that thinking around how best to set about tackling racism had moved on over the last couple of decades and that 'new' thinking influenced the ARTF structure. It is noteworthy that while it was seen as important for white union leaders to be committed and involved, greater Black representation within the ranks of senior union leaders meant that it was deemed essential to ensure that that Black representation was reflected within the structure of ARTF. Therefore, senior TUC leadership proposed a new way of working, namely installing a senior black leader at the helm as well as aiming to have more black union officers and reps/activists involved in informing its agenda and actions.

The main lesson senior TUC leadership had drawn from the experience of the Stephen Lawrence Task Group was that ARTF needed to be more action focused and attentive to core areas of union activity including collective bargaining and organising. Equally, the

ARTF Main Committee understood that it was time for unions 'to get their own houses in order' as regards internal black under-representation and this became an accepted refrain and leitmotif for ARTF within and beyond the Unions as Employers Workstream. Another frequently used phrase to define the overall aim of ARTF was 'action not words' with a strong sense among participants that not enough had been done or achieved within the union movement since the Stephen Lawrence Task Group.

Structure and composition of the Task Force

Membership of the ARTF Main Committee was decided by the TUC General Council. It was made up of General Council members, TUC Race Relations Committee members and members from civil society and academia (Appendix 2). As the Task Force proceeded, it was largely union-side members who steered the work while the relationships with external members did not seem to fully mature or translate into substantive contributions. How the union movement works with and alongside external 'stakeholders' (e.g. voluntary sector and community organisations) is a longstanding conversation and conundrum.

The Main Committee identified and co-opted additional members for the four Workstreams. The various tasks contained within the work of the ARTF were largely carried out by TUC staff who were highly praised by Task Force participants for their hard work and dedication.

It is noteworthy that the Main Task Force on the union side consisted of a selection of the most senior union leaders – General Secretaries – most of whom are white. The thinking behind the TUC senior leadership's and the General Council's decision to assemble a Task Force comprising the most senior union leaders had been that it was essential to gain top-level commitment (and therefore the main holders of power) if ARTF was to have the desired impact and achieve the aim of becoming a new framework for union anti-racism work that would embed anti-racism across all aspects of union activity rather than leave it siloed in an equality space with which engagement is usually more or less voluntary and spasmodic (at best) on the part of mainstream union leaders, officers and committees. There was also concern that the Task Force should model an inclusive approach to anti-racism work whereby the work is not left to Black trade unionists and Black structures/networks but framed as a project that all trade unionists should be concerned with and from which all workers and union members would benefit. The inclusion of white union leaders symbolised this approach. Those who were invited were 'delighted', 'honoured' and generally it was seen as an invitation that was hard to refuse given the wider context outlined earlier.

One question raised by a few general secretaries and union officers as well as activists was where was the grassroots representation of Black workers and members? This became a recurrent theme in the evaluation exercise. One general secretary elaborated:

“I suppose my concern would be how much the TUC project was really rooted amongst rank- and-file Black workers in unions. Representation on the body seemed to me to be drawn from the TUC leadership, the TUC Executive Committee. So the question raised in my union from our Black workers was why aren’t we on it? I think we didn’t have strong enough links into those Black structures across our movement. I think that’s a weakness. It leaves you vulnerable to the charge that it’s all top-down and optically looks very appealing, but what is it achieving at grassroots level?”

The Main Task Force Committee met quarterly and was reasonably well attended throughout the two-year period. The first year of the Task Force concentrated on the establishment of structures and ways of working as well as a programme of research and evidence gathering, which added to extant evidence revealing the scale and impact of institutional racism and systemic race inequalities across the labour market and wider society. This work was carried out by the four Workstreams.

Task Force Workstreams

In addition to the Main Task Force Committee with overall oversight, the ARTF established four individual workstreams on (i) Collective Bargaining, (ii) Organising, (iii) Public Policy and (iv) Unions as Employers, to undertake its work. The Workstreams were each chaired by a union general secretary from the Main Task Force Committee. Other members included individuals representing a range of unions in different capacities, the TUC (including members of the Race Relations Committee) and other interested parties (academics, journalists) working in the anti-racism space. It is noteworthy that general secretaries of the larger unions were able to delegate much of the actual work of the Task Force Workstreams to equalities or HR staff. For the smaller unions with few officers and staff, it was much more difficult to get the practical work done although general secretaries were of the view that this was largely achieved.

The intention had been for Workstreams to meet monthly or bi-monthly. In practice, there was inconsistency among Workstreams around frequency of meetings, but all four met regularly through 2021 and 2022. Attendance at meetings was also inconsistent and uneven across Workstreams with the number of delegates from unions in each meeting being quite small (3-5) which was somewhat demoralising for the TUC officers tasked with supporting the ARTF and with executing most of the practical work arising from the Workstreams. The intention to gain not just commitment but active involvement of the most senior trade union leaders was laudable but given that they are very busy people (with somewhat unpredictable and necessarily responsive schedules), it seems hardly surprising that attendance among

them was inconsistent. Some commented candidly in interview that they had been 'honoured', 'delighted' to take part in this important initiative, but that it had been challenging to make the necessary time available. While the general secretaries of the larger unions had the resources to nominate a substitute to attend Workstream meetings and participate actively in the work, such resources were more difficult to marshal for smaller resource-stretched unions. Nevertheless, despite the challenges most Task Force participants agreed that it was the right thing to do to involve smaller unions since they bring different perspectives to the table not least due to the often single occupational/industrial group they represent.

A lot of thought and discussion went into defining the four Workstreams which essentially comprised two externally facing areas of union activity – *Collective Bargaining* and *Public Policy* – and two internally facing areas – *Unions as Employers* and *Organising*. These are all core areas of union activity where it is undoubtedly essential to inject a race/ethnicity lens, but where this has historically been lacking or inconsistent even if not entirely absent. The four Workstreams accounted to the Main Task Force Committee with regular progress updates at meetings, showcasing practical work accomplished as well as pinpointing future action items.

Post ARTF Roadmap

The report to Congress in October 2022 included recommendations for the trade union movement as regards ongoing work to promote racial equality and encourage unions to continue building on the Task Force's framework in their own unions utilising the new or refreshed resources, from the toolkits to the evidence base.

- An Anti-Racism Manifesto covers pledges from each of the workstreams.³ Every trade union were expected to endorse this at their annual conference and put the ARTF report – *Building an anti-racist trade union movement*⁴ – in front of their NECs plus formally endorse the manifesto as a motion. This was seen as a first step to securing the commitment of individual unions to take the principles of the manifesto forward in their unions.
- TUC affiliated unions are also expected to develop an Action Plan⁵ to contribute to building an anti-racist trade union movement. In the ARTF report (above)

³ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/trade-union-anti-racism-manifesto>

⁴ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/building-anti-racism-trade-union-movement>

⁵ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/action-plan-build-anti-racism-trade-union-movement>

there are detailed actions/recommendations for the movement which cover 'building our movement'; 'fighting for our rights'; and 'leading by example'.

A rolling discussion within the various ARTF committees and forums was around how best to facilitate wider union engagement with the Task Force and its work and in particular engagement with general secretaries (and unions) that were not Task Force members. This issue remained a theme and a concern for some (discussion later) throughout the two-year period and is an ongoing concern.

Implementation and Oversight Group

At the end of the two years in October 2022, there was commitment to sustaining the programme of work that ARTF had initiated and it was recognised that to do this a structure to support affiliates would be necessary. The TUC established an Implementation and Oversight Group to take the work forward over the next five years (Terms of Reference in Appendix 3). The purpose of the Implementation and Oversight group (IOG) is to continue the work of ARTF as set out in the Manifesto⁶, to continue to champion the agenda of racial justice and equality, and to hold the trade union movement to account to deliver on the recommendations proposed and agreed from the ARTF. It is intended that this group will provide a strategic steer to the trade union movement, building on the ARTF work and additional anti-racism initiatives and programmes.

From 2023, the IOG is responsible for working with the Race Relations Committee and General Council to oversee and monitor the implementation of recommendations from the Task Force report to Congress (October 2022). Thus, through the IOG, the intention is for ARTF to act as an ongoing governance structure for the TUC's (and affiliates') anti-racism work. The IOG will report quarterly to the General Council and annually to TUC Congress on the progress being made in delivering the actions on collective bargaining, organising, public policy and unions as employers over the next five years.

The membership of the IOG is:

- TUC General Secretary
- TUC President
- ARTF Chair
- Race Relations Committee Chair

⁶ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/trade-union-anti-racism-manifesto>

Summary

The ARTF was set up with many of the hallmarks of a good governance structure for unions' anti-racism work comprising:

- **A clear and agreed vision** as communicated through the Terms of Reference
- **A strategy for delivering** on the aims through the Workstream set-up, each with its own discrete aims and objectives and committee
- **Appropriate leadership**, in particular a senior Black leader at the helm, but inclusion in the Main Task Force Committee of other senior union leaders as well as some representation from the TUC Race Relations Committee which spread ownership beyond Black trade unionists
- **Accountability mechanisms** to ensure progress, with Workstream committees reporting to the Main Task Force Committee, with links to the TUC Race Relations Committee and a final report to TUC Congress
- **A strategy for continuing and building** the programme of work in the form of Action Plans that TUC affiliates were asked to sign up to at the end of two-year period and the Implementation and Oversight Group for a post-Task Force 5-year period at least working with a Manifesto

On governance, a question remains about to what extent and how the ARTF ensured it had adequate input from Black officers, members and activists to ensure its relevance for those groups. One criticism voiced by a few Task Force participants was around perceptions of the role the TUC's Race Relations Committee had played in the ARTF. One participant described it as akin to a 'junior partner' and another said that while the Race Relations Committee had representation on the Task Force, it did not have much influence on the setting of the agenda. Some felt that this had been a missed opportunity to tap Black trade unionists' existing ideas and knowledge that could have been avoided with more careful thought and a greater appetite for listening. This issue is returned to later in the report.

While overall, ARTF was functional as a framework, in practical terms it appears that the Task Force operated with greater resource constraints compared to the earlier Stephen Lawrence Task Group which reportedly had relatively large financial investment. The Workstream Chairs felt these constraints particularly keenly including the very practical need for additional administrative support for the activities of workstreams in order

that agreed actions could be carried out in a timely and effective manner. Despite these constraints inevitably impacting upon outputs and delivery of actions, the range of information and evidence gathered to define and support future actions was impressive even if it left ARTF subject to criticism for spending too much time doing research. If this evidence base does not convince unions to prioritise action on racism, it would doubtless be a major blow to ARTF and the sustainability of the work that it has kick started (discussed later).

Relevance of the Anti-racism Task Force in the historical moment

The question of relevance concerns the extent to which the objectives of the Anti-racism Task Force (ARTF) were consistent with the needs of unions vis-à-vis their Black members at this point in time. This is an important question to consider in the evaluation of the Task Force.

As stated earlier, some 20 years after the TUC's previous major campaign on anti-racism in the guise of the Stephen Lawrence Task Group⁷ set up to tackle institutional racism in the name of the teenager murdered in a brutal racist street attack, there were once again several external factors that shone a light on racism and contributed to the birth of the ARTF in late 2020. These included the brutal police murder of George Floyd in the US that sent shock waves around the world; global protests organised by the Black Lives Matter movement; the Windrush debacle and the 'hostile environment' created for Black people born outside of the UK by the government; the disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Black workers. In addition to these high-profile events and issues, we continue to witness an avalanche of evidence of race inequalities in the labour market which the union movement continues to spotlight and fight against through media and workplace campaigns. One Black officer echoed others with the comment:

“When I heard about this [ARTF], I was filled with hope because I thought now at least we are talking about racism again and under the new language of anti-racism. And because of the way it was set up, the fact that it was everybody's problem and it started at the top with all general secretaries obliged to play a key role in the Task Force and that said to me, this is something that's not just going to be a two- or three-year programme, that there's going to be some longevity to it.”

Each general secretary participating in ARTF could illustrate the current and ongoing relevance of an anti-racism programme of work for the sectors, industries and

⁷ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/stephen-lawrence-ten-years-after>

occupations their unions represented from education, probation, the civil service, healthcare in the public sector to the retail industry, transport, and other areas in the private sector. Wherever their location, senior union leaders spoke about the unequal labour market conditions still facing Black workers such as greater likelihood of lower pay and fewer prospects; recruitment discrimination; bullying and harassment; lack of voice in the workplace and in their unions. In short, senior union leaders did not need to be convinced that the institutional racism first named in the Macpherson report still exists today in wider society and the labour market.⁸

“I think society has changed in the UK in some respects around race, but as we’ve seen in recent years racism hasn’t gone away and of course it’s fuelled by events elsewhere in the world.”

Contextualising the establishment of ARTF, one general secretary put it as follows:

“The Task Force was born at a time with the Covid pandemic when Black workers were dying on the job and the TUC’s own evidence was pointing to Black workers not being confident about coming to unions to seek support. Why? Because they didn’t believe they would get that support.”

Task Force participants agreed that this historical moment with its constellation of high-profile events spotlighting racism, compelled the union movement “to step up to the plate” and break with conventional priorities and routines to do something new and different that would speak to the realities and concerns of Black workers. One general secretary described it as a ‘once in a generation’ opportunity for the union movement to play its part “in building the momentum of the worldwide outrage against racism”. Some Task Force participants detected an upsurge in interest in ‘doing something’; one equality officer said she had been inundated with emails from branches and individual members wanting to find out what the union was planning; she said it was hugely inspiring, “when was last time you had people banging on your door asking, what can I do to fight racism?”

Equality officers were of the view that a Task Force focused on racism was absolutely needed to counter the politicised narrative that we now live in a post-racial society where we may observe socio-economic disparities but not social inequalities. This was essentially the narrative posited by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities in the report led by Dr Tony Sewell⁹, which was much criticised by the unions and other commentators for attempting to diminish the impact of structural and institutional

⁸https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/277111/4262.pdf

⁹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/974507/20210331 - CRED Report - FINAL - Web Accessible.pdf

discrimination on the everyday lives of Black people.¹⁰ To this extent, such reports threaten to undo the work initiated by the Macpherson Report and built by the TUC's Stephen Lawrence Task Group.

Although the general secretaries highlighted their own union's prior (to ARTF) and ongoing action and initiatives centred on anti-racism, there was consensus that the union movement needed to do better and that some of that work in individual unions had lapsed during the pandemic period when other imperatives had absorbed resources. Black union activists/members as well as some union officers described this moment as the union movement's 'last chance' to act on racism in the labour market; they did not want this to be a 'moment' when it seemed right to act because of high-profile events globally, but that one that later gets consigned to history or 'put back on the shelf' as some Task Force participants as well as equality officers put it.

One union officer said that while it is very easy for unions to repeatedly say that 'equality is at the heart of everything we do', a lot of (white) trade unionists simply do not understand the systemic and structural nature of racism and still see it more in terms of acts of abuse or harassment perpetrated by individuals against individuals. Therefore, the issues do not get collectivised into calls for wider and deeper action. Echoing others, this union officer among others also felt that unions were particularly reluctant to confront racism within their own ranks and organisations, which made for an uncomfortable, yet necessary conversation.

The wider picture of labour market inequalities for Black workers also now permeates the conversation about unions as employers. As regards internal equality, the landscape within unions is still subject to and deserving of criticism on grounds of under-representation and treatment of Black union officers/staff and leaders. Some participants referred to the "concrete ceiling" for Black staff in unions that reaches from the TUC – where there is only one Black officer in the senior management team – to individual unions where Black general secretaries are scarce and Black officials are lacking even though not entirely absent. Some participants also observed that the Black union officers/staff that do exist are most likely to have the equalities brief. While it was accepted that there will always be Black workers who choose to work in the equalities space, this area should not seem like the only viable union career option. This under-representation gap creates a lot of pressure for Black officers/senior staff (who can feel alone and sometimes literally be the lone Black person) in terms of trying to do their

10

https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/11450/joint_response_to_sewell_report/pdf/jointresponsetosewellreport

jobs in ways that feel authentic (e.g. speaking up as and for Black workers) and yet sustaining and progressing careers without coming up against the 'concrete ceiling'. For this reason, the 'Unions as Employers' Workstream was seen as a necessary element of ARTF by all those interviewed including the largely white group of general secretaries. Inclusion of this Workstream creates a structure for the conversation about racism and the needs for an anti-racism agenda within unions to take place.

Equally, Black activists who participated in the evaluation spoke about the racism they had encountered within union structures, particularly at branch level but also involving full-time regional/national officers. Black officers and activists stated things like, "I'm the first [Black person in this role]"; "there's no one who looks like me [around]". One Black activist told the story of how he had tried to get his union branch to acknowledge the rule book requirement for an equality rep, but his proposition had been rejected by the branch committee. There were accounts of bullying, of complaints or experiences related to workplace racism being dismissed or doubted by other lay or paid union officers, of feeling marginalised and isolated within the union that was meant to be there to defend and protect them.

The Black activists who participated in the evaluation were longstanding in their unions and although they felt to some extent let down and disillusioned, they were also resilient and determined to have their voices heard on behalf of Black workers/members. They were also optimistic; most had not yet given up on unions. One striking account was from a Black activist who had been a member of the same union for 40 years but had not felt supported or encouraged to get involved until a few years ago when a senior Black officer appeared in her region. Other activists had witnessed micro aggressions against Black people in union meetings and training events and heard Black people objectified with phrases like 'these people' prefacing gross generalisations about how Black people are, how they behave, etc. The demand was for the people who run meetings or tutor training events to have the confidence and awareness to call out such behaviours which would signal inclusivity to Black activists.

Other Task Force participants as well as equality officers echoed the view that an anti-racism agenda is most likely pursued where there are Black activists and officers championing the cause, but sometimes at some cost to themselves in terms of stress and wellbeing mentioned by several Task Force participants. It was a palpable source of disappointment that this conclusion is reached in 2023 when it has been talked about for so long:

“I’m not saying that it’s the role of Black people to be taking the issue of race equality forward. But I am saying that if we’re not in the room, it’s not even discussed. It’s what I’m saying my members are saying, we don’t see anyone who looks like us.” (Black activist)

Thinking about how the TUC, unions and the ARTF engaged with this context of relative scarcity of Black offers and activists, one fundamental question raised by several Task Force participants, including general secretaries, was the extent to which the ARTF programme was rooted among Black workers and activists including whether there were sufficient links to, consultation with and input from Black activists. Although the TUC Race Relations Committee was represented quite well in the Task Force, as several Task Force participants commented, being there and being listened to are not necessarily the same thing and there was certainly a degree of discontent among Black participants about the degree to which Black voices were heard. Similarly, workshops were held at the TUC Black Workers Conference to discuss ARTF and views were fed back into the Task Force, but again there was some scepticism around whether those views influenced the agenda. One message that some participants felt was not heard was the plea from Black members/activists for more action rather than research. Clearly there is more work to do in building not just links, but also trust between Black structures and the Task Force.

Summary

The purpose of this section has been to show through the insights and perspectives of those who took part in the evaluation that a renewed push on an anti-racism agenda for the union movement is something that is very much needed, desired and demanded. Distributing ownership of that agenda beyond Black activists and officers is also something that is both necessary and desired, but equally it must endure beyond this historical moment with its constellation of high-profile events spotlighting racism. While this context has compelled the union movement “to step up to the plate”, it is clear that there are high expectations that action will follow and be sustained.

Effectiveness and impact of the Anti-racism Task Force

This section first summarises the main work delivered under the Anti-racism Task Force (ARTF) and then assesses the extent to which the ARTF achieved its objectives and resulted in positive short- and long-term effects. The ARTF objectives are captured in the Terms of Reference (Appendix 1). The intention is not to present an assessment of each of these, but rather to represent from the perspective of the various groups of participants, their overall sense of the effectiveness and impact of ARTF as regards creating a framework for the union movement's anti-racism work and renewing the commitment to anti-racism.

Main work delivered by two-year Task Force

The main work delivered by ARTF is set out in a report *Building an anti-racist trade union movement*.¹¹ By summer 2022, the ARTF had launched an impressive range of resources/outputs (research reports, surveys, guides, toolkits) related to the themes of the four Workstreams and was pushing forward with dissemination and adoption of these within unions through different activities and initiatives including training events, focus groups, roundtables, videos.¹² A Black Talent Programme had also been developed and piloted in the South West region with the aim of developing a new generation of black activists and leaders across the union movement.¹³

Combined the resources produced deliver on the promise to create the foundations for renewing the union movement's work on anti-racism and race equality but as discussed later, it is widely acknowledged that those resources will not in themselves be enough to ensure sustained and consistent work across unions. This is where the role of the Implementation and Oversight Group is likely to prove critical (discussed in the next section).

¹¹ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/building-anti-racism-trade-union-movement>

¹² See resources available on the TUC ARTF website:
(<https://www.tuc.org.uk/reports?campaign=526074>);
(<https://www.tuc.org.uk/resource/discrimination-and-trade-unions-negotiators-guide>).

¹³ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/campaigns/black-talent#:~:text=The%20course%20will%20include%20various,power%2C%20leading%20projects%20and%20networking.>

Perspectives on overall effectiveness and impact

In her inaugural ARTF Main Task Force address, the TUC general secretary, Frances O'Grady, stated that the aims of the Task Force were to make a difference and to get some 'quick wins'. Participants in the evaluation exercise were asked to reflect on this statement and offer a view as to whether they thought these goals had been achieved. Few participants expected quick wins because they knew that developing initiatives takes time and seeing their effects even longer, therefore they were reluctant to judge the ARTF against quick wins, rather whether it seemed to have made a difference and had the potential for lasting impact. One quick win that participants did highlight was the visibility that ARTF had brought to racial justice and race equality within the union movement as well as conveying the important message that these are issues for everyone not just Black workers. Task Force participants spoke about how the existence of the Task Force had created the conditions for an extra impetus and in some cases extra resources, for work that some unions had already started on anti-racism or had been doing for many years.

As to whether overall ARTF was overall a success, one viewpoint (largely from general secretaries and union officers) was that the Task Force had shifted the discourse around anti-racism work in the union movement not least because senior union leaders had stepped up and shown a willingness to devote time and effort, therefore leading by example on the anti-racism agenda. This had been one of the reasons for getting senior leadership involvement in the first place and it seems to have landed well. One Black union officer explicitly stated that even though they had their criticisms of the detail of ARTF, they felt extremely proud of the TUC for establishing the Task Force, personally proud to be involved and felt that it had been a success, a standpoint widely shared.

General secretaries had found the Task Force inspiring and thought-provoking because the conversation on racism had been opened up more widely and ideas shared among different unions:

"I really got a buzz from it when we were exchanging views be it at the workstream level or in the Main Task Force, definitely. I think it re-established the profile of the race issue at a very timely moment. The test now is to what extent are we prepared to push on and build on these recommendations."

Some Task Force participants commented that it is not very often that union general secretaries gather to talk specifically about racism, but not just to talk, they also had to collectively identify how the movement should tackle it, therefore for most ARTF had to be a step in the right direction. Some Task Force participants spoke about former times when they had seen any talk of race or racism at various mainstream union meetings dismissed as 'not relevant here', 'not the place' for equalities issues, etc., or where it had

been knocked off the agenda supposedly due to lack of time and other more pressing items.

Most Task Force participants believed that ARTF symbolised a new way of working on race/racism that has the potential to achieve significant change across the union movement. One significant marker was that even though anti-racism was being talked about in the separate Task Force space (rather than mainstreamed), it was general secretaries who were leading it, thus making it clear that the problem of racism was not one merely for Black structures to tackle as a separate project but one that union leaders had to take up too.

The fear that some equality officers expressed was that now that the two-year Task Force has ended, and the implementation phase has started, that the work would be handed back to equality officers and structures which risks restarting the historical cycle of siloing (race) equality. The Implementation and Oversight Group needs to be cognisant of this risk and needs to identify mechanisms for mitigating it.

Reflecting the possibility of a shift in the significance of race for unions, the ARTF report to TUC Congress in October 2022 had been a key moment for some Task Force participants when they sensed a far greater interest from the audience in listening and hearing about workplace racism, and debating about the union movement's role in anti-racism than many had witnessed previously:

“I’d describe the debate as electric actually. People were transfixed by it and many people came up afterwards and said great. I don’t think I’ve seen a debate of that type for many, many years.”

“My perception has been that when issues around race at work or the perspectives of Black workers, for example motions from the TUC Black Workers Conference, have been debated in Congress, I wouldn’t say that the hall has emptied but you almost get the impression that for some this is somebody else’s debate and that didn’t feel the case time round. It felt as if there was a momentum; it felt as if there was a groundswell of support. The hall remained full.”

For many Task Force participants, this perception of a ‘groundswell of support’ gave cause for optimism that a shift in level of commitment to tackling racism had occurred and that what was started under the auspices of ARTF will continue and grow. There were examples of instances where racism had been discussed at unions’ executive committee meetings for the first time in recent or living memory for some. In other cases, the Task Force was being used to build ongoing work on anti-racism with the Main Task Force Chair and Workstream Chairs attending and addressing meetings in different unions to assist in that process of building the campaign.

While most general secretaries and other union officers could point to recent and current anti-racism initiatives within their own unions, they believed that ARTF played an important role in bringing all those disparate initiatives into view across unions to create an opportunity to co-create awareness and eventually benchmarks of good practice that potentially all unions could adopt. The latter was not entirely achieved by the end of the two-year period across the four areas of activity covered by the workstreams, but it was felt that it would be possible for this to be picked up and pursued by the Implementation and Oversight Group.

Some participants felt that ARTF produced some peer pressure among (participating) unions to act and to be seen to be acting on anti-racism even though there was some concern that a renewed commitment might be read by Black members/activists as purely rhetorical and performative. Running through the interviews and focus groups was the idea that Black activists were pleased to see ARTF up and running, but were saying, “we’ve been researched to death; we don’t want to be told what we already know”. Union officers in touch with Black members/activists reported that they had met some anger and scepticism and had to work hard to convince them that ARTF was a genuine attempt to stimulate progress on race equality and not just another short-term campaign or research project that was ‘of the moment’, but that would soon be forgotten about. One officer reported that the sentiment of Black activists she spoke to in a focus group were:

“We’re not fodder for the union movement to make them feel better about themselves so they can yet again prove they’re still relevant when we know they’re not [for us].”

This officer said that she went on to explain to the group that ‘we do want to listen to you’, but the conversation revealed the fragility of Black worker loyalty to the union movement in the face of experiences of exclusion and marginalisation or just simple neglect.

Union engagement

The question of whether the Task Force’s participating unions as well as those in the wider union movement had taken up the challenge laid down by ARTF to develop their anti-racism work was widely discussed in the evaluation exercise. A common viewpoint was that those unions that had not participated in the Task Force had engaged very little with its work even though there were regular reports to the TUC General Council. While some put this down to lack of interest, others thought it was more to do with resource constraints and specifically the time constraints of General Council meetings.

In contrast, most, if not all of the ARTF participating unions had begun to engage with at least some elements (i.e. some Workstream themes). However, this still leaves the question of how to expand engagement with the renewed anti-racism agenda beyond those unions that participated in the Task Force.

Some Task Force participants and other equality officers argued that the unions that responded most robustly to the demands of ARTF by way of kick-starting action or (re)establishing additional initiatives in their own unions were the ones with the most active Black networks and structures and where report-backs to those groups on the emerging work and conversations had been integral to the union's participation in ARTF. This speaks to the broader question of how Black structures and networks articulate with a broader, inclusive anti-racism project 'owned' by the whole union, rather than by its Black members, and where the objective is for Black members to have influence on mainstream thinking, that is, on executive committees and annual conferences. Some Task Force participants as well as Black activists felt that it was an achievement that ARTF had started or reignited that conversation.

The ARTF participants who were in dialogue with Black member structures in their unions detected a lot of positivity around ARTF, but some impatience in the context of the perception that action had been limited and progress on race equality extremely slow over many years. Equally some of the Main Task Force and Workstream Committee members were also frustrated with the length of time that was spent during the short life of ARTF on research and data collection when people in their unions were hungry for action. One Task Force participant said:

“The frustration I had at the very beginning was this idea that we needed to do more research. We’ve got enough flipping research. But on the other hand, we did need to open the spaces for the conversations so that communities could come into those spaces and understand why we’re doing it. Even at the Black Workers Conference, loads of people were saying ‘we’ve done all this before, we’ve been here, and nothing happened and yet we’re asking the same questions again.’ It almost felt like people were saying again, but this is the last time.”

Other participants stated that there was a lack of clarity in the first months of the Task Force about what it was unions were being asked to do. On the other hand, the same participants understood that evidence is ammunition when it comes to advocating for and justifying actions and achieving outcomes or gaining traction with employers in bargaining. Therefore, whether ARTF struck the right balance in the two-year period was a moot point, but certainly moving forward into the next five-year period the common expectation is that the work will shift into an action phase by individual unions who should now be clearer about what is expected of them (following publication of the Manifesto). Participants agreed in the main that unions need to be asked some very direct questions which they are compelled to answer, for example, “what do the ARTF

recommendations mean in your union? How are you going to implement them? When are you going to implement them? What is your 3-5-year plan, what does that look like? What is your budget?"

Effectiveness and impact of Workstreams

Workstream chairs were all aware of the finite time-period of ARTF and were conscious of the need to deliver tangible outputs and actions, which they all did to different extents. As a caveat to the discussion about the effectiveness and impact of the four workstreams, general secretaries, as well as other Task Force participants, acknowledged that it was hardly surprising that there was an unevenness among the four workstreams, as one explained:

"A public policy workstream is all very and good in us defining what we want to see in terms of the future of public policy but some things are more within our gift than others. So a workstream, for example on trade unions as employers, it's down to us as to whether we change our policies, procedures, systems to create more inclusive workplaces. So I do think that in one sense the scope for success, relative success, may have been different across the different workstreams from the outset. But I think that each of the workstreams undertook some very compelling work."

Most Task Force participants agreed that the Workstreams that had had the most impact were *Organising* and *Unions as Employers*. This was in terms of tangible outputs that progressed the anti-racism project and the believed gained most traction and engagement by unions. When it came to the *Collective Bargaining* and *Public Policy* workstreams, most Task Force participants acknowledged these areas as 'harder to crack' but believed that important work had begun.

From the perspective of Task Force participants, the two most significant outcomes from the *Organising* Workstream were the piloting of leadership training for black activists and the proposal for Black networks for members/activists which some unions had taken up. These initiatives were also well received by Black activists. Task Force participants were of the view that these initiatives would not have occurred without a push from the ARTF and certainly not at a co-ordinated movement level. One union officer stated that previous proposals for a similar Black leadership programme had been knocked back in their union. The empowering potential of those initiatives was seen as huge as well as their potential for bringing greater pressure for current and future action to bear on the unions, but also in terms of supporting the growth of a new generation of Black activists who ultimately will contribute to transforming the unions. A testimony by a pilot Black Talent Programme tutor is provided in the ARTF

General Council Report where she summarises feedback from participants as well as the benefits she has witnessed.¹⁴

The Black Talent programme managed to recruit participants who had previously either not been active in their unions or if they had, they had met obstacles and felt isolated often because of the absence of other Black activists and in some cases specifically other Black women. In general, participants had not had much union training and certainly not leadership training. The programme has reportedly given participants a better understanding of union processes and structures and how to navigate them. While these comments focus on equipping Black activists with the skills and knowledge needed for union office, Black officers and activists felt that this was only one element of what was needed to work towards plugging the under-representation gap.

Additionally, some Task Force participants felt that the Black Talent programme had developed a new narrative around why there are so few Black leaders, a narrative focused less on the supposed deficits of Black workers/members (e.g. lacking confidence to step up or lacking knowledge of union structures) and more on the structural barriers facing Black (would-be) activists:

“Whilst Black workers may suffer from a lack of confidence, we’ve been able to really blow that narrative apart and show that if there is a lack of confidence it’s probably a lack of confidence that members will vote for a Black person, it’s not a lack of confidence that somehow is inherent to being a Black person.” (Equality officer)

Despite the perceived success of the development programme, there remained concern that unless there is ongoing post-course support (e.g. by way of mentoring or a network), that some participants at least would drop out of activism or fail to get properly started on their personal union journey. The question of how the union movement (whether via the TUC or individual unions) plans to support those who complete the Black Talent programme was raised by several officers and activists. One of the issues around identifying sources of the much needed and desired peer support (e.g. local, regional Black leaders) is the lack of ethnic monitoring within unions, in this case of officers and reps, which makes it difficult to track down people willing to provide that support to emerging Black activists and leaders. Participants in the leadership programme also reportedly wanted some resource and support for maintaining a network of those who had completed the programme in their region which they would see growing over time and acting as a source of ongoing peer support. One Task Force participant observed that unions have a vested interest in the

¹⁴ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-09/ARTFReport2022.pdf>

provision of such support because it would reduce the likelihood of losing would-be future Black leaders after having invested in their development.

The *Unions as Employers* Workstream was also widely seen to have made a significant difference to the conversation and evidence base about Black workers' experiences as employees of trade unions, which had previously been missing from the union anti-racism conversation. It was described as the Workstream that 'really grew legs' with what it achieved around creating spaces where Black workers within the trade union movement could articulate their experiences of working for trade unions. It was seen as important for having created a space for some honesty about unions' record as employers confronting that racism is not just a problem that is 'out there' in the wider labour market, but one that is found inside trade unions too:

"It felt like we were finally able to have that conversation in a way that was open and honest and not defensive. And I did find that it created a space for optimism that things were going to change."

Referring to a survey of Black union staff carried out by the Workstream, a union officer said,

"It's the first time in the union movement where Black staff have been given a voice or a platform to talk about their experience of working in a trade union. The [ARTF] Manifesto and Action Plan provide a really strong roadmap for the movement to take on."

Like the above quotation, some Task Force participants acknowledged that at times the conversation (based on evidence gathered directly from Black union employees) had been uncomfortable and challenging, but nevertheless it was widely accepted that it was time to have that conversation and to develop practical measures to address the issues raised.

Stimulated by ARTF, some unions have closely scrutinised their internal leadership and management structures carefully considering how to achieve greater Black representation. Some report new succession planning policies and development opportunities for Black union officers/staff, which should ensure a pipeline of potential and future Black leaders.

When it came to the *Collective Bargaining* Workstream, participants were clear that achieving gains on collective bargaining for race equality and anti-racism would be challenging (note that successive TUC Equality Audits indicate employer reluctance to engage with equality bargaining with an unevenness in receptiveness across sectors

and industries¹⁵). Nevertheless, the importance of reigniting that struggle was seen as extremely important in the face of the evidence of ongoing labour market race inequalities and discrimination. One Task Force participant said that this is what black workers want and expect, therefore the stakes are high here:

“People wanted collective bargaining to be a major focus in terms of putting race back on the agenda. That’s where all the discrimination takes place that in the main when black workers go to work. That’s where a lot of the disciplinary action takes place.”
(Equality officer)

Some Task Force participants were quite explicit that unions needed to apply more pressure to secure the commitment of at least major employers to the central tenets of ARTF, but also that negotiators needed to do more to incorporate the issues into bargaining agendas. With this in mind, one of the outputs from ARTF was a new digital guide for trade union reps covering collective bargaining issues for Black workers. While this was seen as an important step, some union leaders and officers felt it remained challenging because it relied on local negotiators engaging with the tools provided by the TUC as well as their own unions, which in practice did not always happen particularly in contexts where Black reps and officers are few and far between. This criticism was also voiced by Black activists.

One area where some Task Force participants considered that the Collective Bargaining Workstream had made most progress was around promoting the concept of strategic litigation. Strategic litigation means handling race discrimination cases in such a way that the issues contained in individual cases are collectivised such that a win delivers benefits beyond the individual case. Part of this approach necessarily involves giving Black members improved access to legal support from unions which in practice would mean selectively waiving the normal ‘50% prospect of success’ rule which most, if not all unions work with when deciding whether to provide legal support to individuals for mounting an Employment Tribunal case.

¹⁵ One of these was the issue around access to Black workers to legal support from unions which ARTF advocated should be broadened. In practice this would mean selectively waiving the normal ‘50% prospect of success’ rule which most, if not all unions work with, and potentially setting the qualifying bar lower for cases of racism and race discrimination. This was discussed at a Strategic Litigation Roundtable which involved barristers and solicitors providing a view on how unions could use strategic litigation as a tool to approach legal race-related cases. Some participating unions have considered this and introduced a policy change while others are continuing to discuss how such a (potentially costly) change might be resourced particularly by smaller unions.

This issue was discussed at an ARTF activity, a Strategic Litigation Roundtable¹⁶, which involved barristers and solicitors providing a view on how unions could use strategic litigation as a tool to approach legal race-related cases. Some Task Force participants spoke about working on this but only one union had thus far introduced a policy change while others are continuing to discuss how such a (potentially costly) change might be resourced particularly by smaller unions. Taking a strategic approach to race cases has great potential to gain traction within the collective bargaining arena as it would represent a significant shift from the current individualised approach which unintentionally helps employers to stay out of the spotlight and avoid reputational damage for structural workplace racism. However, the risk is that the eligibility bar for support for individuals is lowered leading to higher case numbers (at considerable cost to unions), but that those cases are not used in a strategic way to improve collective bargaining outcomes. Mitigating this risk would likely involve new ways of working between union legal departments and collective bargaining structures.

One of the problematics related to collective bargaining highlighted by several participants concerns how best to approach embedding race equality aims in the agenda. On the one hand, if terms and conditions are improved in any given industry through collective bargaining (one example given was banning of zero hours contracts), that outcome represents a benefit for all workers including Black workers who are disproportionately likely to be in jobs with poor terms and conditions. This speaks to the benefits of trade unionism for all workers whatever their race and to some extent plays to the traditional and preferred narrative of trade unions. On the other hand, the evidence gathered by ARTF (and extant research) reveals specific issues affecting and related to Black workers that might be missed in collective bargaining agendas where there is no explicit focus on race and racism. Still, the union movement has not resolved this existential conundrum:

“In a way, we haven’t carved out that story to tell ourselves and how it’s also about trade unionism doing what it does best which in my view is avoiding Black and white workers being pitted against each other and bringing them together in a union, that’s our basic thing, our bread and butter. We’ve failed to claim some of our organising victories as victories in the campaign for equality and tackling racism. We could have told that story better.” (General Secretary)

The other challenge related to making a difference through collective bargaining is the extent to which employers are willing to engage and as TUC Equality Audits over the last two decades reveal, this is at best uneven across sectors and industries and at times overtly hostile.

¹⁶ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-07/FINAL%20document%20strategic%20litigation%20RS.pdf>

The *Public Policy Workstream* was another area where it would almost inevitably be challenging to gain traction with a Conservative government intent on denying institutional racism even within its own structures including the Home Office and its involvement in the Windrush scandal.¹⁷ As one general secretary put it, “truth is, under the Tories what are we going to get? Sweet F.A.!” In this context, the Workstream found it difficult to pin down and agree where to focus and to identify where there were opportunities for TUC/union influence. There was criticism from some ARTF participants around the research-oriented focus of this Workstream, “how much of that is changing lives?”

That said, highlighted outcomes of this workstream included the TUC application for core participant status in the Covid-19 public inquiry with the TUC wanting to ensure that the voices of those disproportionately impacted by the pandemic are centred in the work of the inquiry. The TUC also mounted a media campaign around zero-hours contracts calling for stronger regulation, an issue highly relevant for Black workers due to their disproportionate representation in zero-hours work arrangements. As part of its forward-looking work, the Workstream organised an anti-racism network bringing together for two roundtables key actors working in the race policy arena to explore current challenges and to discuss how to build a stronger anti-racism presence in the public policy arena. Senior leaders expect to gain more traction in this arena when/if there is (as expected) a near-future Labour government. The question for the ongoing work that one general secretary posed was, “how do we get ourselves ready to make sure that full advantage is taken? How do we make it happen in the first 100 days [of a Labour government]”. Thus, when it comes to this Workstream, it is still very much work-in-progress but a very necessary stream of work.

Summary

There was a general belief that the ARTF had been a successful and worthwhile programme despite criticisms and some scepticism. It has renewed the focus on anti-racism within the union movement in a co-ordinated effort and defined a shared vision of what the union movement should be seeking to achieve as regards representing Black workers. It has expanded the evidence base on racism in the labour market which provides unions not only with ‘ammunition’ vis-à-vis negotiations with employers, but also helps to make the case internally within the unions themselves for a stronger focus on anti-racism. It is clear that none of the ARTF participants expected a two-year programme to end racism at work, but what they did hope was that it would be the start of both a permanent mindset change and a practical agenda for action:

¹⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jan/22/new-hostile-environment-policies-immigration-home-office>

"I think the manifesto is a really important statement from the Task Force. I think it's helped to unite members across our movement around the issue of anti-racism to put that front and centre in the consciousness of unions. That in itself is an achievement. Has it ended racism at work? No, it hasn't. Has it ended racism within our unions? No, it hasn't." (General secretary)

Sustainability of the Anti-racism Task Force and its work

This section considers whether it seems likely that there will be a continuation of the progress made in the two-year period of the Anti-racism Task Force (ARTF) and how that will be achieved. All the general secretaries and union officers who participated in ARTF were acutely aware that the intention was for the anti-racism work kick-started to endure beyond the end of the two-year period. As one general secretary put it,

"Was it a success? Yes. Have we reached the destination? No. Racism is alive and kicking out there. It hasn't gone away. We know that there's more to do in the labour market, in the workplace, but also there's more to do within our unions to tackle racial disparities."

The ARTF Chair made it clear at the end of the first year (December 2021) that sustaining the momentum of the Task Force would be a challenge but one that it was vital for the unions to confront so that ARTF would not end up being merely a two-year programme but one that would go on to be at the core of the union movement's work. Here, reference was made to the Stephen Lawrence Task Group. While all agreed that it had been a landmark moment for the union movement, it was also widely felt that the legacy had not endured as far as concrete agendas and actions went partly because there had been insufficient sustained action within individual unions overall:

"It's 20 years since the first TUC Task Force was set up – the Stephen Lawrence Task Group – and at that time for the TUC it was quite ground-breaking. But I think one of the failing of that group is that there was no implementation review or follow-up; the obligations on unions were not as strong as they are with this Task Force."

Some Task Force participants as well as other equality officers felt that not enough was *required* of unions by the TUC. One general secretary likened the TUC to a club, observing that clubs tend to have rules that members are required (not just asked) to abide by:

“We should be clear that if our unions are not living up to the values, the objectives and the ambitions that our movement espouses, then they are challenged about that, possibly to the point of saying is this really the place you need to be because actually we expect more or better of our unions.”

This would send a very clear signal to unions that signing up to the ARTF Manifesto was more than a rhetorical commitment but one that requires action; that the ARTF was not simply a ‘talking shop’ as one Black officer said and which was a sentiment echoed by Black activists. Thus, the challenge is for the TUC to expect and demand more of its affiliates vis-à-vis anti-racism work. This is something that Black activists very clearly expect and demand. On the other hand, as pointed out by several Task Force participants, the TUC is not a regulatory body, it is not an enforcer of a set of standards, rather it is a membership body pulling the work of the union movement together and attempting some co-ordination or at a minimum a common sense of purpose. The ARTF Manifesto essentially seeks to establish this common sense of purpose as regards anti-racism.

However, the reality is that getting affiliated unions to sign up to undertake certain pieces of work or change policies etc. is always going to be a challenge requiring continual effort by way of advocacy, exhortation, and relationship management at various layers of leadership across the unions. As the union movement co-ordinating body, this task lies with the TUC. Many Task Force participants argued that unions needed to be regularly reporting on their Anti-racism Action Plans to the TUC General Council meetings as a means of pinning down unions’ declarations of commitment. One union officer said that there might have to be an element of ‘naming and shaming’ to push some unions into ‘backing words with action’ and others talked about the need to prevent any future accountability mechanism from slipping into an opportunity for ‘grandstanding’ on the part of unions or for ‘showcasing’ and ‘window dressing’ with examples of good work but without critical analysis about gaps and voids and how to address them.

It was felt that unless the challenges are confronted and at least partially surmounted with concrete actions, general secretaries and other people in unions interested in the anti-racism project would ‘move on to other things’ or ‘walk away’, and ARTF’s legacy would similarly (as per Stephen Lawrence Task Group) not endure in any practical way in the longer term. This, it was felt would leave a gap as far as Black workers, the labour market and workplaces go. Speaking to the need for ongoing anti-racism work on the part of the union movement, one general secretary said,

“What do we add [to the anti-racism movement]? We add the ability to unite Black and white workers. Nobody else can do that in quite the same way we can. That’s our contribution and we should be more confident about that.”

Thus, while it was widely recognised that there are now various groups beyond the union movement – formal and informal – working in the anti-racism space, the specific focus on work, workplaces and working lives is the unique contribution of the unions to that space. It is important that this message is repeatedly communicated to affiliated unions, hence race needs to be on the agenda of the highest TUC/union structures. The ARTF lays down the gauntlet for those structures.

It is evident from ARTF documents that a significant concern for the TUC and ARTF leadership from the outset had been how to sustain the momentum of the Task Force in the longer term beyond the two-year programme of work so that it does not turn into “another report that gathers dust on the shelf” as expressed by several Task Force participants including general secretaries. The general secretaries expressed their ongoing personal commitment to making sure the work started by the ARTF continues and builds. Some were very clear that while the TUC might steer and co-ordinate the effort moving forward, it was the individual unions’ responsibility to progress the agenda by way of developing and implementing Action Plans so that the whole becomes the sum of its parts. In short, it was widely thought that it was time to switch the attention away from what the TUC is doing within the Task Force and turn the focus onto individual unions pressing them to develop their own Action Plans.

On the other hand, some general secretaries and union officers identified an ongoing need for support from the TUC as a co-ordinating body for this work. Support might be in the form of training toolkits but also individualised advice for equality officers and others with the equalities portfolio on campaigns, mentoring schemes, etc. Some Task Force participants also thought that the TUC should continue to play a role in maintaining the public profile of the union movement’s work on challenging racism through press releases, briefings, social media, etc.

The Implementation and Oversight Group (IOG) also needs to play a critical role in the accountability process; one union officer said that it needs to be ‘obsessive’ about pushing implementation of actions and monitoring them for outcomes thereafter. Some Task Force participants called for the IOG to report to TUC General Council every six months with that report being fed into the TUC Race Relations Committee as well. It was noted several times by Task Force participants that the Stephen Lawrence Task Group had not established a similar mechanism for oversight apart from the reporting of individual unions via the biennial TUC Equality Audit. While many Task Force participants saw the TUC Equality Audits as useful, over the years the exercise that become one whereby unions showcase achievements rather than subject themselves to

critical self-examination. Many participants believed that this lesson had been learnt, but the challenge would be to design and implement an accountability process avoiding the 'showcasing' pitfall.

Maintaining the pressure on and involvement of senior union leaders was also widely seen as vital to sustain the pressure on unions to deliver action, to allocate resources to anti-racism work and fulfil the promises of their Action Plans. Some general secretaries stated that if that pressure was there (coming from the TUC as a co-ordinating body), then no matter how busy they were they would keep on top of it. For unions led by older white men (the majority!), it was considered important that (Black) members see that their leader buys into the anti-racism agenda in a meaningful way, but part of the role needs to be one of supporting and enabling bottom-up initiatives rather than merely top-down. That support needs to be more than just rhetorical but backed with financial and staffing resources.

The importance of the ongoing commitment and involvement of senior leadership notwithstanding, the concern raised earlier about links to the grassroots is also apposite here as developing better links would be one essential mechanism for spreading the material value of ARTF for members as well as sustaining the momentum. The following from a general secretary who was highly appreciative of ARTF, but who expressed healthy scepticism around the prospects for lasting change:

“It would have been even more powerful if we managed to find a way of having some rank-and-file Black workers who were also able to do more than just speak in the Congress debate. The danger I see is the disconnect between a well-meaning report and seeing real change. The real inspiration would come from seeing future reports to the Congress being delivered by some Black workers who felt their lives had begun to be transformed or their challenges really being taken up by the trade union movement and that to me is the thing that we’ve got to focus on next.”

For some, ensuring that unions are held accountable was important, but unions should see it in terms of accountable to the membership not merely to the TUC in a bureaucratic exercise:

“It almost feels like the project is over, we’ve got the general secretaries signing up to it, but actually we need to keep that accountability and I’m not 100% sure the accountability has been passed down to the members of the unions to say this is how you hold them accountable. This is what they promised they will do and you as the members we’ve gifted that to you to make sure it happens.” (Union officer)

Many Task Force participants as well as Black activists felt strongly that anti-racism work post-ARTF should not be handed over or back to Black structures entirely; the whole union movement must take responsibility. One general secretary remarked:

“I think it would be a mistake to say to the Black workers conference or Race Relations Committee, there you go, we’ve done this, it’s over to you, let us know if there’s a problem. On the other hand, I don’t think you can do it to them either. So I do think the two-way process is key.”

To this extent, the fact that general secretaries (mostly white) had declared themselves allies, standing with Black workers in the anti-racism space was deemed a significant step forward by many, but still the hard work was seen to be around changing ingrained cultures and practices.

“As a TUC we needed to give more permission, especially to the white leadership of unions to say you are allowed to talk about this, you are allowed to make change and it starts with a conversation with your Black members. You’ve all got Black members. It’s not just to benefit them who are currently voiceless within your union but it’s about everybody helping to create a culture where they aren’t voiceless.”

One significant challenge identified by the Main Task Force Committee was how to engage affiliates (unions) to act with a need to set out the central tasks and pledges that the Task Force wanted to be taken forward. These tasks and pledges were set out in the ARTF Action Plan. General secretaries were acutely aware of the need to sustain the momentum via Action Plans and acknowledged that one mechanism for doing that would be to ensure channels of communication between Black structures/networks, general equalities structures and executive committees not least to facilitate decisions around resource allocation for anti-racism work and ensure an accountability mechanism. This point was fed back to the Task Force from discussions held at the TUC Black Workers Conference.

The question of links to members/activists was also raised by Task Force participants as well as at the TUC Black Workers Conference in respect of how the Implementation and Oversight Group (IOG) planned to ensure that Black members/activists on the ground got to feel the benefits of the ARTF, how could the sense of ownership of the agenda spread through the union movement? TUC leadership was acutely aware that discussing something within ruling bodies (whether TUC General Council or union Executive Committees) does not necessarily mean that it is happening on the ground or indeed that it is what is needed on the ground. As one general secretary observed, it is important for unions to win the confidence of Black workers and members “at a time when actually, it seems increasingly that Black workers are not seeing unions as the place for them. We’ve got to make sure our unions are relevant”.

Task Force participants were clear that long-term sustainability will also involve accountability and monitoring mechanisms against Action Plans and unions will need to sign up to subjecting themselves to real scrutiny rather than just enter a 'window dressing' competition to show which union is doing the most and the best. One general secretary stated that the questions asked in any monitoring exercise would need to be sufficiently incisive to avoid it merely being an opportunity for unions to showcase their best examples of anti-racism work but to take a more critical approach, which it was said would be 'revolutionary' and would 'unlock a real assessment of how we're doing'.

One area requiring scrutiny mentioned by some participants was strategic litigation (a recommendation from the Collective Bargaining Workstream) which will require close monitoring to determine whether an increase in race/racism cases being supported by unions occurs and what the wider outcomes are as regards taking issues forward into the bargaining agenda/arena.

Long-term sustainability will also involve permanent allocation of resources to anti-racism work within individual unions as well as the TUC. This is of course problematic during an era of resource constraints but seemingly ever-increasing demands, as one general secretary highlighted:

"If you don't allocate resources, I think we've fallen at the first hurdle because we would be very open to the charge politically of 'you felt you had to be seen to do something, you've done it and now you're pulling back'. The legal work will cost money ... there has to be an ongoing resource and not just money, but staff too and general secretaries prioritising it in their time."

On the other hand, several Task Force participants were of the view that it was thinking and framing (of issues) that needed to change so that race equality dimensions would surface in all areas of union activity, as one general secretary observed:

"It's less about devoting lots of new resource and more about ensuring the resources you have are working effectively and that the right people are involved in the right meetings."

Others also spoke about needing to ensure that racism was put at the heart of all union work around campaigning, industrial policy and so on, moving away from framing it as a separate piece of work to be carried out in a separate space. However, there is no evading the risk that a 'mainstreaming' approach usually results in neglect of race dimensions, particularly in the absence of concrete mechanisms for mitigating that risk. One example given in relation to the above comment was one union now having its

equality officer attend all bargaining meetings or having a representative from a Black member structure attend organising meetings. This involves a willingness to change routines and practices as a practical step towards mainstreaming, which can be easily achieved with senior level backing. On the other hand, one Task Force participant (a Black officer) made the point that she had the feeling that unless she was in the room race/racism did not get addressed. She would be asked to speak to race issues even if she felt that that was not why she was there. While this points to a need for white trade unionists to engage more with equalities, it also highlights the need to improve Black representation in all areas and at all levels of union activity not least so that Black activists feel supported.

It was clear from the general secretaries' and other union officers' accounts of the anti-racism work currently going on that unions are in very different places, some having several initiatives that span the areas of activity reflected in the four ARTF Workstreams, while others have fewer and perhaps addressing just one or two areas. One of the core aims of ARTF was to stimulate greater attention to anti-racism across the union movement and that will likely remain a challenge over the next five years in a resource constrained environment. However, as several Task Force participants commented, there are always choices for organisations to make around how to use the resources they do have and what they prioritise.

Summary

A lesson from the TUC Stephen Lawrence Task Group is firmly in the minds of Task Force participants, that is, it is very easy for the TUC (and the union movement) to mount a time limited campaign, but sustaining that work is much, much harder. There are many factors that can potentially weaken the prospects of sustaining the momentum of ARTF including changes in key actors (especially general secretaries); the relative lack of Black union leaders and officers; external contingencies diverting financial and staff resources elsewhere. The Implementation and Oversight Group needs to confront these challenges and develop strategies for mitigating the associated risks.

Recommendations for sustainability

The following recommendations are developed from the insights and perspectives of different groups of Task Force participants including general secretaries, union officers/staff, and Black members/activists. The recommendations are forward looking and seek to build on the hope and optimism that all participants expressed, but particularly Black leaders, officers and activists.

TUC leadership and co-ordination of the union movement's anti-racism work

- Provide strong leadership and an ongoing commitment from the TUC to continue to steer and co-ordinate anti-racism work across the union movement.
- Identify mechanisms for mitigating the risk of anti-racism work returning to an equalities silo, e.g. maintaining general secretary responsibility for oversight of Action Plans and for championing anti-racism within their unions.
- Strengthen links between the ARTF's Implementation and Oversight Group and the TUC Race Relations Committee and Black Workers Conference and commit to listening to challenging views from those structures.
- Seek to engage the unions who did not participate in the ARTF Main Task Force or Workstreams and identify mechanisms to support them to develop their Action Plans.
 - Look at doing this via equalities officers and/or via Black member or equalities structures and networks.
- Consider how the TUC can support smaller unions which do not have dedicated equalities staff to develop and implement Action Plans.
 - Consider how the resource stretched smaller unions can be assisted to pursue a strategic litigation strategy.

Union accountability for anti-racism Action Plans

- TUC to set up an annual monitoring and accountability mechanism where unions report on their Action Plans – challenges as well as successes – whether through the TUC Equality Audit process or another process requiring critical self-reflection on gaps as well as proposed solutions to problems/obstacles identified.
- TUC to do more to encourage (push) unions to undertake ethnic monitoring of members, lay reps and officers/staff. This will not only

provide useful benchmarks across the union movement around change/progress, but would also set a minimum expectation for reporting.

- Allocate time at TUC Annual Congress to an ARTF IOG report at least for the next five years.

Black member/activist engagement and involvement

- Unions to focus a mini project on developing links between unions' Black structures and networks and 'mainstream' structures to get direct input into ARTF Action Plans as they unfold across the union movement and to achieve better integration between structures and their work.
- TUC to provide a framework for oversight and reporting of anti-racism work within individual unions which would place centre stage guidance on engagement with and involvement of Black member structures/networks.

Developing and spreading good practice towards race equality

- Individual unions to be encouraged to set up their own mini-Task Forces to kick start or reinvigorate the anti-racism project, in particular around the collective bargaining agenda. ARTF can be a framework for union mini-Task Forces.
- Strategic litigation: TUC to ensure that a clear set of recommendations to unions are developed and disseminated to union leaders and officers about how to approach race discrimination cases strategically.
 - Implementation and Oversight Group to monitor which unions adopt the recommendations and to identify which might require additional support.
 - The emphasis must be on the strategic purpose of litigation. The TUC recommendations must include guidance on how to collectivise issues brought forward as individual legal cases to mitigate the risk of failing to use cases for strategic purposes.
 - Mechanisms need to be established for monitoring legal casework related to race/racism across unions and sharing that information and the knowledge gleaned vis-à-vis strategic litigation. This could be done via a standing agenda item for a TUC coordinated equality officers forum.
- TUC to develop and disseminate a good practice guide that identifies benchmarks for unions to aim for across the four areas of activity covered

by the workstreams – organising, collective bargaining, public policy, unions as employers.

- Review and if necessary, overhaul mainstream TUC training for union reps to highlight the importance of identifying and prioritising race equality in bargaining as well as practical ways that that can be achieved, avoiding reliance on separate equalities training. To achieve this, some 'train the trainer' work is likely to be necessary.
- Set the agenda for increasing Black representation among union officers, tutors, staff and lay reps.

Appendix 1: ARTF Terms of Reference

- Oversee a rapid review of progress on race equality across the trade union movement since the previous TUC Stephen Lawrence Task Force, including synthesis of findings from the TUC's Equality Audit, evidence from Black officers and reps (including representatives of the TUC Race Relations Committee) and new evidence from unions.
- Agree on actions unions will take to increase the representation of Black trade union members at all levels of trade union democratic structures.
- Agree on actions unions and the TUC will take to increase recruitment, retention and progression of Black staff and address ethnicity pay gaps within their organisations.
- Agree on actions to ensure union organising, education and training combat racism and deliver race equality on a sustained basis.
- Examine the effectiveness of union representation in dealing with race discrimination in the workplace and agree actions on how this can be improved.
- Agree actions on developing and advancing a collective bargaining agenda on race equality
- Oversee a comprehensive programme of research and evidence gathering from Black workers and Black-led organisations, evidencing the scale and impact of institutional and systemic race inequalities across the UK labour market and society more widely.
- Lead a new coalition of unions, employers and civil society organisations pushing for meaningful legislative change to support race equality at work.
- Oversee a comprehensive programme of public-facing communications, leading the public debate on race equality at work and making the case for change
- Report to Congress in 2022, including making recommendations for ongoing work to promote race equality and combat racism within workplaces and across the trade union movement.

Appendix 2: ARTF Membership

Chair of the ARTF

Dr Patrick Roach, General Secretary, NASUWT

Patron

Dr Neville Lawrence OBE

Membership

Gloria Mills, chair, TUC Race Relations Committee, UNISON

Roger McKenzie, assistant general secretary, UNISON (Year 1)

Steve Turner, assistant general secretary, Unite

Rehana Azam, national secretary, GMB

Mary Bousted, general secretary, NEU

Paddy Lillis, general secretary, Usdaw

Dave Ward, general secretary, CWU

Mark Serwotka, general secretary, PCS

Mike Clancy, general secretary, Prospect

Ian Lawrence, general secretary, Napo

Debbie Weekes-Bernard, deputy mayor, London Assembly

Gary Younge, journalist (Year 1)

Halima Begum, director, Runnymede Trust (Year 1)

Yvette Williams, Justice4Grenfell

Zubaida Haque, Independent SAGE, (Year 1)

Davena Rankin, TUC Race Relations Committee (Year 1)

Michelle Codrington-Rogers, TUC Race Relations Committee

Susan Matthews; TUC Race Relations Committee (Year 1)

Frances O'Grady, general secretary,

TUC Paul Nowak, deputy general secretary, TUC

Workstreams membership

Collective bargaining

Chair: Steve Turner, Unite

Mike Clancy, Prospect

Christine Danniell, TUC Race Relations Committee

Gloria Mills, TUC Race Relations Committee

Michelle Codrington-Rogers, TUC Race Relations Committee

Zita Holbourne, TUC Race Relations Committee

Yvette Williams, Justice4Grenfell

Organising

Chair: Dave Ward, CWU

Paddy Lillis, Usdaw

Ruth Cross, Usdaw (Year 2)

Cecile Wright, University of Nottingham

Glen Hart, TUC Race Relations Committee (Year 1)

Taranjit Chana, TUC Race Relations Committee

Shavana Taj, Wales TUC

Public policy

Chair: Rehana Azam, GMB (Year 1), Ian Lawrence, Napo (Year 2)

Jennifer Moses, NASUWT

Ian Lawrence, Napo

Anthony Bastiani, TUC Race Relations Committee

Ali Moosa, TUC Race Relations Committee

Debbie Weekes-Bernard, London Assembly

Unions as employers

Chair: Mary Bousted, NEU

Karen Chouhan, NEU (Year 2)

Mark Serwotka, PCS

Natalie Arnett, NAHT

Carol Sewell, TUC Race Relations Committee

Maureen Loxley, TUC Race Relations Committee

Michelle Codrington-Rogers, TUC Race Relations Committee

Jenny Dixon, TUC

Appendix 3: Implementation and Oversight Group Terms of Reference

- Work with the Race Relations Committee and General Council to implement the recommendations from the ARTF Manifesto and report to Congress
- Use the TUC Equality Audit and other methods to monitor, assess and review the changes implemented by affiliates in response to the Manifesto
- Identify ways in which the TUC and trade unions can support and promote good practices on anti-racism across the trade union movement
- Regularly report to the General Council, Race Relations Committee and Congress on the progress the trade union movement has made in achieving the racial justice actions identified by the ARTF