



STATE OF THE NATION 2026
WHITE PAPER
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Black and ethnic minority leadership and enterprise **in the UK**

The evidence, nationally and in the West Midlands, and what BCON, Lloyds and the region's civic and business leaders can each do about it

Karl George MBE

Chair, BCON · Chair, Black Business Advisory Committee, Lloyds Banking Group

PREPARED BY



THE
GOVERNANCE
FORUM

For BCON · Black C-Suite, Owners & Non-Execs
State of the Nation, Birmingham, 21 October 2026

“Up, you mighty race, you can accomplish what you will!”

MARCUS GARVEY

ABOUT THIS PAPER

I've written this paper as a resource for BCON's State of the Nation 2026 and for the boards, executive teams and networks that support Black and ethnic minority leaders. I declare 2 interests: I developed the Race Equality Code in 2020, and I chair Lloyds Banking Group's Black Business Advisory Committee.

The paper draws on published sources available in October 2026, and every figure carries the year of the data behind it. Where the evidence describes ethnic minority people and businesses as a single group, the text says so, because the gap in Black-specific data is itself one of the findings.

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Summary

Black leaders in the West Midlands remain scarce at the top and isolated when they get there, the region has no regular measure of either, and BCON, as a safe space and strategic think tank, can help close that gap by connecting the people who can act and gathering evidence from its own network. This paper sets out the evidence behind that statement, nationally and in the region, and what BCON, Lloyds and the region's civic and business leaders can each do about it.

EXHIBIT 1

Six numbers that frame this paper

2.3%

of FTSE 100 board seats held by Black directors, against a 3.9% share of the population aged 30 to 69

1.3%

Black share of FTSE 100 senior management, and falling

£25k

median annual turnover of Black entrepreneurs, against £35,000 for white entrepreneurs

0.24%

of UK venture capital went to Black founders between 2009 and 2019

51%

of Birmingham residents are from Black, Asian or other minority ethnic groups

84%

trust among Lloyds' Black business clients in 2024, up from 40% in 2022

Source: Parker Review 2026; British Business Bank, *Alone, Together* (2020); Extend Ventures, *Diversity Beyond Gender* (2020); Census 2021, Birmingham City Observatory; Lloyds Banking Group, *Black Entrepreneurs Programme progress report* (2025).

UK boardrooms have become far more ethnically diverse over the last decade, yet Black leaders remain the group the progress has largely passed by, and the same pattern runs through enterprise, where ethnic minority businesses contribute around £25 billion a year to the economy while Black founders still struggle to reach finance on equal terms. The 2026 Parker Review finds 98% of FTSE 100 companies now have at least one ethnic minority director, but Black directors hold only 2.3% of FTSE 100 board seats against a 3.9% share of the working-age population, and Black representation in senior management has slipped to 1.3%.

The evidence points to a pipeline problem as much as a boardroom one. Appointing a single ethnic minority non-executive has proved achievable for most large companies, while building Black talent through executive committees and into chief executive and finance director roles has not,

and Green Park's data shows Black representation at the very top of the FTSE 350 has fallen since 2019.

On the enterprise side, the British Business Bank found the median Black entrepreneur turns over £25,000 a year against £35,000 for white entrepreneurs, and Black founders received just 0.24% of UK venture capital over a decade. Lloyds Banking Group's own data shows what deliberate effort can achieve, with trust among its Black business clients rising from 40% in 2022 to 84% in 2024.

The West Midlands sharpens all of this. Birmingham is now a majority-minority city, with 51% of residents from Black, Asian or other minority ethnic groups, and the region has a Leadership Commission, a Race Equalities Taskforce and a Board Diversity Challenge, yet it still has no regular published measure of Black representation in its senior leadership. That gap, and the State of the Nation themes of scale-up, reach beyond London and the South East, and AI, frame what BCON can do next.

Behind the business figures sits a wider pattern, with Black people 4.2 times as likely to be stopped and searched, 3.5 times as likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act, and Black African households owning their homes at around a third of the White British rate, and the paper connects that evidence to the remit of Lloyds' Black Business Advisory Committee, to Lloyds' role as a catalyst on regionalisation and AI, and to the trade opportunity opening up across Africa and the diaspora.

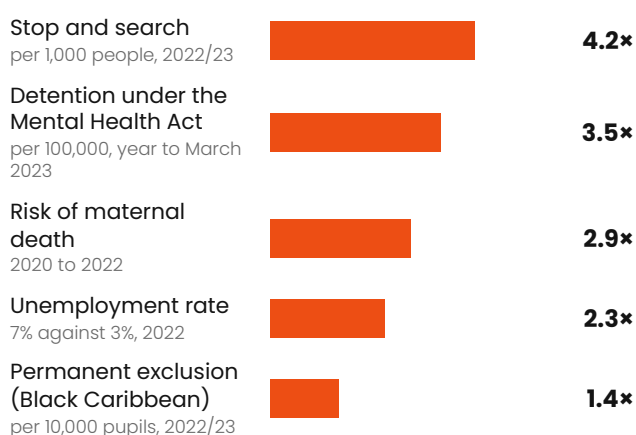
Where Black Britain stands

Business and leadership sit inside a wider pattern, and the government's own Ethnicity facts and figures and the main national datasets put Black people at or near the bottom across most areas of public life, from the classroom and the labour market to policing, health, housing and wealth. Lloyds, as a bank, touches several of these directly through mortgages, savings, business lending and employment.

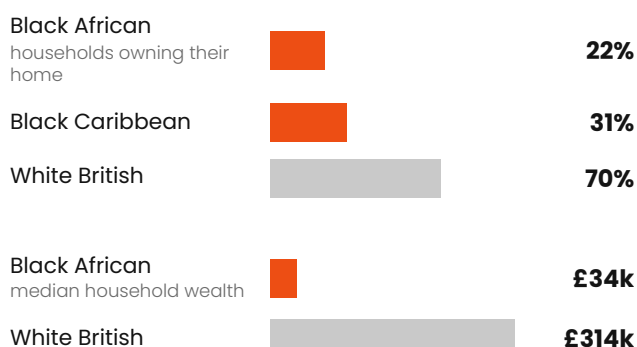
EXHIBIT 2

Black people sit at or near the bottom across most areas of public life

How many times the White rate, where higher is worse



Ownership and wealth, Black households against White British



Source: Ethnicity facts and figures (DfE, Annual Population Survey, Home Office, NHS England, English Housing Survey); MBRRACE-UK; ONS household wealth by ethnicity, 2016 to 2018.

EXHIBIT 3

The full picture, measure by measure

AREA	MEASURE	BLACK PEOPLE	COMPARISON	SOURCE
Education	Permanent exclusions per 10,000 pupils, 2022/23	18 (Black Caribbean); 24 (Mixed White and Black Caribbean)	13 (White British); 11 (all pupils)	DfE via Ethnicity facts and figures
Employment	Unemployment rate, 2022	7%	3% (White); 4% (all)	Annual Population Survey
Criminal justice	Stop and search per 1,000 people, 2022/23	24.5	5.9 (White), a ratio of 4.2	Home Office via Ethnicity facts and figures

AREA	MEASURE	BLACK PEOPLE	COMPARISON	SOURCE
Mental health	Detentions under the Mental Health Act per 100,000, year to March 2023	228	64 (White), a ratio of 3.5	NHS England via Ethnicity facts and figures
Maternity	Risk of maternal death, 2020 to 2022	Almost 3 times higher (rate ratio 2.87)	White women	MBRRACE-UK
Housing	Households owning their home, 2021 to 2023	22% (Black African); 31% (Black Caribbean)	70% (White British); 65% (all)	English Housing Survey via Ethnicity facts and figures
Wealth	Median household wealth, 2016 to 2018	£34,000 (Black African)	£314,000 (White British)	ONS
Business	Median annual turnover of business owners, 2020	£25,000	£35,000 (White)	British Business Bank
Leadership	Share of FTSE 100 senior management, 2026	1.3%	3.9% share of the population aged 30 to 69	Parker Review
Social housing	Households renting social housing, 2021 to 2023	48% (Black Caribbean); 40% (Black African)	16% (White British); 17% (all)	English Housing Survey via Ethnicity facts and figures
Housing leadership	Share of housing association executives, 2023	3%	10% of the housing workforce and 8% of residents are Black	National Housing Federation via Inside Housing
NHS leadership	Black and minority ethnic share of very senior managers, 2024 (no Black-only figure published)	12.7%, and in 80% of trusts white applicants were significantly more likely to be appointed from shortlisting	28.6% of the NHS workforce	NHS England WRES 2024

“I’d argue it shows the disadvantage is structural and cumulative, building from school exclusion through to wealth that has not been passed down.”

The averages hide real variation, and the sources themselves say so: poverty, special educational needs and absence explain part of the exclusion gap, and second-generation labour market outcomes for some groups improve on their parents’. That nuance strengthens the case, because I’d argue it shows the disadvantage is structural and cumulative, building from school exclusion through to wealth that has not been passed down, and a bank that wants to grow Black-owned businesses is working against every one of these figures at once.

A note on the data: ethnic minority or Black?

A reader should know at the outset that much of the strongest UK evidence describes ethnic minority people and businesses as a single group, and that Black-specific data, particularly on business, is hard to find. The £25 billion contribution and the £100 billion prize are ethnic-minority-wide figures, the NHS reports leadership for Black and minority ethnic staff combined, the Parker Review's headline target counts any ethnic minority director, McGregor-Smith's £24 billion covers all ethnic minority workers, and the WMCA Taskforce's strategy publishes no leadership figures at all. Aggregation matters because the groups inside it diverge, and a figure that blends Black, Asian and other communities can mask how far behind Black people are in a particular measure.

The Black-specific figures that do exist are the ones this paper leans on hardest: the Parker Review's 2.3% of FTSE 100 board seats and 1.3% of senior management, the British Business Bank's turnover comparison, Extend Ventures' venture capital analysis, Lloyds' own research with Black business owners, the National Housing Federation's 3% of housing executives, and the group-level breakdowns on the government's Ethnicity facts and figures service. I treat this gap as a finding in its own right, and it is the fourth of the barriers set out below.

03

The barriers to Black business growth

My evidence paper for the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce Black Business Collective, *The Barriers to Black Business Growth: the evidence, and what to do about it* (version 2.1, June 2026), sets out 12 documented barriers that stand between Black-owned businesses and the growth they are capable of. They are connected and reinforce each other, and they are ordered by leverage, so the first few unlock the most.

EXHIBIT 4

Twelve barriers to Black business growth, ordered by leverage

■ Priority: the three that unlock the most together ■ Where BBAC holds the levers ■ Where BCON speaks most directly

01 BBAC PRIORITY Access to finance Black-led firms raise less capital on worse terms, and many never apply, expecting refusal	02 BBAC The wealth and collateral gap Lower household wealth means less founder capital and less to borrow against	03 PRIORITY Access to markets and public procurement Under-representation in public and corporate supply chains, worsened by slow payment
04 BCON PRIORITY Data invisibility Black-specific business data barely exists, so the gap cannot be targeted or measured	05 BCON Blocked progression into senior roles Under-representation in senior corporate roles thins the founder pipeline	06 BBAC Discrimination and bias Disparities that persist once the measurable business factors are accounted for
07 Sector concentration and survival Clustering in lower-margin sectors and weaker survival to maturity	08 BCON Limited networks Thinner access to the informal networks where capital, contracts and referrals move	09 Trusted professional support Fewer relatable mentors and advisers, so founders fall back on informal advice
10 Access to information Gaps on funding, procurement and regulation, carried through channels founders do not trust	11 BBAC The trust deficit in formal support Low trust keeps creditworthy founders away from mainstream support	12 Market access and demand Structural barriers to customers and supply chains, set against higher than average entrepreneurial appetite

Source: Karl George MBE, *The Barriers to Black Business Growth: the evidence, and what to do about it*, GBCC Black Business Collective, version 2.1, June 2026.

Three of the twelve unlock the most when tackled together: access to finance, access to markets and procurement, and data, which makes the

other two measurable. The paper adds evidence this white paper draws on, including Aston CREME's finding that 67% of White-owned firms reach the established stage of 42 months or more against 43% of Black-owned firms, and Runnymede Trust analysis showing Black African households hold around 10p of wealth for every £1 held by White British households, which is consistent in scale with the ONS figures above.

The barriers also show where BCON and BBAC each fit. BBAC's remit sits squarely on barriers 1, 2, 6 and 11, the finance, wealth, bias and trust barriers where a bank holds the levers. BCON speaks most directly to barriers 5 and 8, progression and networks, because a safe space for senior Black leaders is itself a network, and to barrier 4, because its members are the larger businesses and senior leaders the national data misses.

04

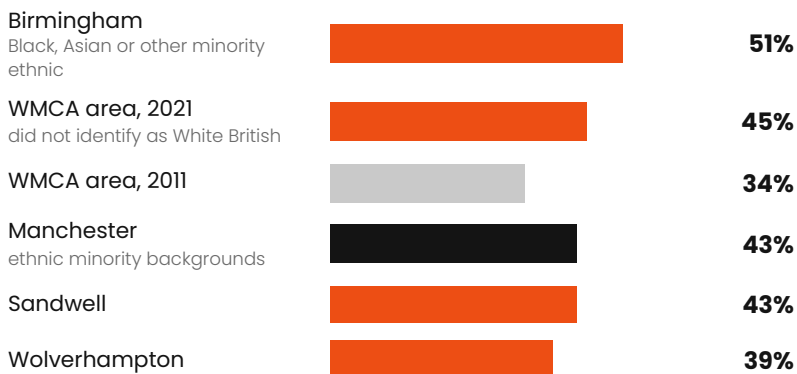
The West Midlands and Birmingham

The national figures understate what is at stake in this region, because the West Midlands is the most ethnically diverse part of the UK outside London and Birmingham is now a majority-minority city. The 2021 Census shows 51% of Birmingham's residents come from Black, Asian or other minority ethnic groups, with Sandwell at 43% and Wolverhampton at 39%, and around 45% of the 2.9 million people in the West Midlands Combined Authority area did not identify as White British, up from 34% a decade earlier. Birmingham alone is home to 45,064 Black Caribbean residents, 4% of the city.

EXHIBIT 5

The West Midlands is the most diverse region outside London, and it is changing fast

Share of residents from minority ethnic backgrounds, Census 2021



10.9%

of Birmingham is Black, some 125,760 people, up from 8.9% in 2011

12%

of Manchester is Black, a larger share than Birmingham

0

regular published measures of Black representation in West Midlands senior leadership

Source: Census 2021 via Birmingham City Observatory, WMCA, Manchester City Council; WMCA Race Equalities Taskforce strategy, 2023. Measures differ slightly by source, as labelled.

The region has been honest about the leadership gap for some time. The West Midlands Leadership Commission, chaired by Anita Bhalla, published Leaders Like You in June 2018 and found ethnic minority people were markedly under-represented in leadership against the working-age population, citing too few role models, poor cultural understanding and systemic prejudice. Its recommendations asked existing leaders to identify and mentor future talent, asked organisations to share what works, and asked leaders across sectors to form peer networks to spread good practice.

The WMCA's Race Equalities Taskforce took that further. Its independent strategy, Race Forward, was endorsed by the WMCA Board in March 2023 under its first chair, Yetunde Dania, and sets out 5 thematic priorities (jobs, skills and education; health; housing; transport; criminal justice) with leadership diversity and better data running across all of them. The Taskforce's 2024 progress report records 98 partners in its work groups, more than 200 organisations at its events, £1.85 million of new funding into communities and a £270,000 pilot funding 5 community-led organisations to deliver business support.

For boards, the most direct ask is the **Birmingham Board Diversity Challenge**, which the Taskforce's chair, Sharonjit Clare, promoted during Race Equality Week 2024. It asks boards to publish their photographs, set race equality targets, commit to the 12 standards of the Race Equality Code (which I developed) and measure their workforce race equality data. On enterprise, the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce launched its Black Business Collective in 2024 and, in August 2025, an Investment Readiness Accelerator for Black-owned SMEs funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

"Despite good activity and a growing appetite for change, the makeup of leadership across the West Midlands has not significantly changed."

WMCA Race Equalities Taskforce, 2023

What the region still lacks is a regular, published measure of Black representation in its senior leadership, a West Midlands equivalent of the Parker Review. The Taskforce said as much in its own 2023 strategy: five years after Leaders Like You, and "despite good activity and a growing appetite for change, the makeup of leadership across the West Midlands has not significantly changed". Neither the strategy nor its covering report publishes leadership figures for any ethnic group, and that absence is where a network of senior Black leaders can add evidence of its own.

Birmingham as a case study

Birmingham is the best test bed in the country for what this paper argues, because it holds every part of the problem and every part of the opportunity in one place. Its Black population grew from 8.9% to 10.9% of the city between 2011 and 2021, some 125,760 people, inside a city where 51% of residents are from ethnic minority backgrounds. It is also where Lloyds Bank was founded in 1765, where the Chamber's Black Business Collective and the WMCA Taskforce are already active, and where BCON convenes. If a joined-up approach between a bank, a combined authority, a chamber and a senior leaders' network can shift the figures anywhere, it should be able to shift them here first, and Birmingham then becomes the proof that other cities can borrow.

Beyond Birmingham: the North

Regionalisation has to mean more than the Midlands, and the evidence points just as firmly north. Manchester's 2021 Census shows 12% of its 551,938 residents are Black and 43% are from ethnic minority backgrounds, a larger Black share than Birmingham's. Leeds is home to 45,376 Black residents, 5.6% of the city, and Lloyds has around 4,200

colleagues based there, alongside the Halifax brand's Yorkshire roots. One of the State of the Nation panellists, Tayo Adebisi, has built an exporting group from Leeds, which is the reminder that Black enterprise outside London is already happening and needs finance and support to follow it. BCON can help by bringing leaders from Leeds and Manchester into the same conversation as those in Birmingham, so that what works in one city is heard in the others.

BCON and the State of the Nation 2026

BCON was set up to give senior Black leaders a safe space, a room where people who are usually the only one at the table can speak plainly to peers, and this year's State of the Nation evening at Lloyds Banking Group's Birmingham office on 21 October brings that purpose back to the centre. The evidence in this paper explains why it matters: when Black representation in FTSE 100 senior management sits at 1.3%, the people who do reach the top are very often alone there, and I think the pressure of scrutiny falls on individuals who have few peers to turn to. A network of senior Black leaders is a practical response to that isolation, and it is also the peer network the West Midlands Leadership Commission asked for in 2018.

“A network of senior Black leaders is a practical response to that isolation.”

BCON is deliberately modest in what it sets out to be. It is a safe space where senior Black leaders meet, a connector between the people in the room and the people who can act, and a strategic think tank that turns members' experience into ideas others can take forward. Lloyds through BBAC, the WMCA Taskforce, the Chamber and employers run the programmes and make the decisions, and BCON's value lies in the quality of the conversation and the connections it makes for them.

The evening's 3 themes map directly onto the gaps the reports identify, and in each one BCON's contribution is thinking and connection.

EXHIBIT 6

The State of the Nation themes, and where BCON adds value

Scale-up and senior leaders

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SAYS

Black entrepreneurs' median turnover is £25,000 against £35,000 for white entrepreneurs; Black founders received 0.24% of UK venture capital from 2009 to 2019; Black representation in FTSE 100 senior management has fallen to 1.3%

BCON AS CONNECTOR AND THINK TANK

Connect members running larger businesses with the buyers, funders and chairs in the room, and test why growth stalls at the point where support stops

WHO ACTS ON IT

Lloyds and BBAC, corporate partners, the Chamber

Reach beyond London and the South East

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SAYS

Birmingham is 51% ethnic minority and Manchester 12% Black, yet the Taskforce says the region's leadership makeup has barely changed since 2018

BCON AS CONNECTOR AND THINK TANK

Bring leaders from Birmingham, Leeds and beyond into one conversation and share what is working between regions

WHO ACTS ON IT

Lloyds, the WMCA Taskforce, regional chambers

AI

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SAYS

16% of UK businesses use AI, 36% of large firms and 14% of micro firms, and no UK study I can find breaks adoption down by owner ethnicity

BCON AS CONNECTOR AND THINK TANK

Gather first-hand evidence from members on where larger Black-owned businesses actually are on AI

WHO ACTS ON IT

Lloyds and BBAC, government

Safe space

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SAYS

Few Black leaders reach the top, and the progression evidence shows how isolated they are once there

BCON AS CONNECTOR AND THINK TANK

Hold the closed peer conversation BCON was founded for

WHO ACTS ON IT

Members themselves, and the employers in the room

Source: Analysis in this paper. Evidence sources as cited in the text.

The data only BCON can gather

Most of the research in this paper describes ethnic minority businesses as one group, and where it is Black-specific it is dominated by start-ups and micro businesses, because that is where survey samples fall. Two groups are almost invisible in the national data: larger Black-owned businesses, the ones that have scaled past the point where most support stops, and senior Black leaders across the corporate, public and voluntary sectors. BCON's network is made of exactly those people.

The one practical thing BCON can add to the evidence base, without becoming more than it is, is to gather that data from its own network: a short, voluntary annual return from members covering turnover band, employees, sector, region, finance sought and secured, and AI use for business owners, and role, sector and board positions for senior leaders. Shared in anonymised form with Lloyds through BBAC and with the WMCA Taskforce, it would give both something no national survey currently offers. Because ethnicity is special category data under UK GDPR, it needs a privacy notice, explicit consent and a clear purpose, and the

registration process on 21 October should collect only what that notice covers.

Bringing the round table's expertise to the table

The 12 people at the round table on 21 October cover almost every area this paper touches, and the discussion will be strongest if each leads on the ground they know best.

EXHIBIT 7

The round table on 21 October, and where each member can lead

Karl George MBE

Chair, Governance, chair of Lloyds' BBAC, author of the Race Equality Code

Pulling the three discussions into what Lloyds, communities and policymakers need to hear

Amanda Murphy

Chief Executive, Business and Commercial Banking, Lloyds Banking Group; 30 years in commercial banking

What Lloyds can do on growth finance and on retaining and promoting Black talent

Rebekah Taitt

Lloyds divisional Executive Office; former Midlands Regional Development Director; Vice Chair of the BBAC Shadow Committee

Regional banking in the Midlands, and the bridge between Lloyds and the Chamber

Professor Robert Beckford

The UK's first Professor of Black Theology; broadcaster on empire, slavery and the Black Church

Community, faith and culture, the historical and pan-African frame, and the safe space conversation

Carmen Watson DL

Chair, Pertemps Network Group (around £1.2bn turnover); Business in the Community's Race for Opportunity

Scaling a business, the senior talent pipeline, and four decades of being the only one in the room

Yetunde Dania

Head of Trowers & Hamlin's Birmingham office; housing law; first chair of the WMCA Race Equalities Taskforce

The regional agenda and Race Forward, and social housing

Kevin Davis DL

Group Chief Executive, The Vine Trust Group; chair of a 12-school trust educating 10,000 students

Education and exclusions, skills and apprenticeships, and social enterprise at scale

Tevin Tobun

Founder and CEO, ROUTD Technology; serial founder with exits and acquisitions; BBAC member

Growing past the point where support stops, and technology and AI in practice

Tayo Adebisi

Founder and CEO, Tilz Prosperitas, Leeds; exporter with UK Export Finance backing

Reach beyond London from the North, and export and global trade, including Africa

Riki Bleau

Co-founder of Since '93 at Sony Music UK, home to artists including Tems and Tyla

The creative industries, building a Black-owned business inside a global corporate, and Africa's cultural exports

Danielle Oum

Chair, NHS Birmingham, Black Country and Solihull ICB cluster; chair of emh group and Tuntum Housing Association; co-chair of the NHS Confederation's BME Leadership Network

NHS and social housing leadership, and what public sector boards can learn

Zephaniah Chukwudum

Director of Local and Devolved Government and Transport, Microsoft UK; chair of Microsoft UK's Embrace community

AI adoption, and how combined authorities can carry it into the regions

Source: BCON State of the Nation 2026 round table. Orange rule marks where each member can lead the discussion.

The audience on 21 October, roughly 100 senior Black leaders and business owners alongside Lloyds leadership, Chambers patrons, local authority chief executives, NHS and education leaders, puts the people who commission, procure, regulate and fund in the same room as the people this paper describes. The State of the Nation discussion asks what Lloyds and other financial institutions, our communities, and policymakers and corporate partners each need to hear, and the final section of this paper answers each of those questions from the evidence.

06

BBAC and Lloyds: from advice to action

Lloyds Banking Group set up its Black Business Advisory Committee in December 2020 to investigate the barriers to growth facing Black business owners and to give the Group tangible recommendations it could implement and share across the industry. The evidence in this paper maps directly onto that remit, and it gives the committee a firmer basis for advice than anecdote or goodwill.

EXHIBIT 8

From the evidence to BBAC's advice

BBAC OBJECTIVE	WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS	WHAT BBAC CAN ADVISE LLOYDS TO DO
Understand the barriers to growth	Median turnover of £25,000 against £35,000; 0.24% of venture capital; trust in banks was low until Lloyds acted	Extend support beyond start-up into growth finance, and publish lending approval rates and facility sizes for Black-owned businesses
Recommendations Lloyds can implement	Only 22% of Black African and 31% of Black Caribbean households own their home, against 70% of White British households, and median Black African household wealth is £34,000	Use the Group's mortgage and savings reach, through Halifax and Lloyds, to build financial confidence and first-time buyer routes in Black communities, since property is often the security behind a first business loan
Share learning across the industry	Parker-style transparency drove board change, and NatWest's Time to Change shows peers are moving	Publish Lloyds' progress openly and convene other lenders, so the Black Entrepreneurs Programme becomes an industry standard
Black talent inside Lloyds	Black representation in FTSE 100 senior management is 1.3% and falling	Set out how the Group retains and promotes Black colleagues, the theme Amanda Murphy brings to the State of the Nation

Lloyds as a catalyst on regionalisation and AI

The two areas where Lloyds can move furthest, fastest, are the two BCON is already focused on. On regionalisation, the Group was founded in Birmingham and employs thousands in Leeds, which gives it a natural pilot in each region: BBAC can advise Lloyds to work with the WMCA Race Equalities Taskforce and the Chamber's Investment Readiness Accelerator in the Midlands, and with equivalent partners in Yorkshire, so that support reaches Black businesses in the regions where they already trade.

On AI, Lloyds is a serious adopter: its generative AI work delivered around £50 million of value in 2025 across more than 50 solutions, and the Group expects more than £100 million in 2026. Small firms are being left behind, with government research showing 14% of micro businesses using AI against 36% of large ones. BBAC can advise Lloyds to add an AI readiness strand to the Black Entrepreneurs Programme, using what BCON gathers from its members to target it, so that the bank's own capability becomes an advantage for the businesses it serves.

EXHIBIT 9

Small firms are falling behind on AI, and nobody is measuring Black-owned businesses

Share of businesses using AI, by size



£50m

value from generative AI at Lloyds in 2025, across more than 50 solutions

£100m+

expected by the Group in 2026

Source: Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, AI Adoption Research, January 2026; Banking Exchange, 2026.

07

Africa, the diaspora and global trade

The growth story for Black British business is global as well as regional, and Africa is where it is most underplayed. Africa's share of UK goods trade has stalled at around 2.7% for a decade, its share of UK services trade fell from 3.1% to 2.9% between 2016 and 2025, and although the UK's investment stock in Africa grew to £49.6 billion in 2023, Africa's share of all UK overseas investment fell from 4% to 2.6% over the decade. Meanwhile the continent is moving: the IMF expects African growth of 4.3% in 2026, intra-African trade reached a record US\$220.3 billion in 2024, and by 2050 one in four of the world's consumers will live in Africa.

EXHIBIT 10

The UK is underweight in the fastest-moving market in the world

2.7% Africa's share of UK goods trade, stalled for a decade	2.6% Africa's share of UK overseas investment, down from 4%	4.3% IMF forecast for African growth in 2026	\$220bn intra-African trade in 2024, a record
1.3bn people across 55 countries in the AfCFTA single market	\$3.4tn combined GDP of the free trade area	1 in 4 of the world's consumers will live in Africa by 2050	30m people the World Bank estimates AfCFTA could lift out of extreme poverty

Source: ODI, 2025; IMF; World Bank, The African Continental Free Trade Area, summarised by Afrika-Verein.

The African Continental Free Trade Area brings 1.3 billion people across 55 countries, with a combined GDP of US\$3.4 trillion, into a single market, and the World Bank estimates it could lift 30 million people out of extreme poverty. For the UK, the opening sits with businesses that already understand these markets, and Black British entrepreneurs of African and Caribbean heritage carry relationships, languages and cultural knowledge that no trade mission can buy. Tayo Adebisi's growth from Leeds into Europe and North America with UK Export Finance backing shows Black-owned exporters can scale; the next step is to point that capability at African markets as deliberately as at Europe.

There is a long tradition behind this. Marcus Garvey founded the Black Star Line in 1919 to carry trade between Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas under Black ownership, and although the venture failed within

a few years, the ambition behind it, global commerce owned and led by people of African descent, is the same ambition this paper is about. His movement's motto still fits a network built on shared purpose across many nations of origin:

"One God! One Aim! One Destiny!"

BBAC can advise Lloyds to connect its trade finance, international payments and UK Export Finance relationships to Black-owned businesses with African and Caribbean trade ambitions, and BCON can bring those businesses together with the diaspora networks, chambers and investors who can open doors. Birmingham, with its large African and Caribbean communities and its Commonwealth ties, is a natural place to start.

The boardroom picture

The Parker Review began in 2017 with a simple target of at least one director from an ethnic minority background on every FTSE 100 board by 2021, and on that measure it has largely done its job. The 2026 report shows 98 of the FTSE 100 and 205 of the FTSE 250 now meet the target, although only 21 of the 50 largest private companies do, which tells you how much the listed-company spotlight has driven the change.

EXHIBIT 11

The headline target is met; the Black picture sits inside the average

Ethnic minority representation, all groups combined

MEASURE	FTSE 100	FTSE 250	LARGE PRIVATE
Companies meeting the one-director target	98%	82%	42%
Ethnic minority share of senior management	11%	10%	10%
Self-set 2027 senior management target	15%	13%	15%

Black representation in the FTSE 100, against the population benchmark

Population aged 30 to 69		3.9%
Board seats		2.3%
Senior management		1.3%

Source: Parker Review, March 2026.

The problem for Black leaders sits inside those averages. Black directors hold 2.3% of FTSE 100 board seats, and Black executives in chair, chief executive and finance director roles remain rare. Green Park's 2021 index found no Black chair, chief executive or chief financial officer anywhere in the FTSE 100, and I think that finding still frames how Black professionals read the headline statistics.

The Financial Reporting Council's 2021 study of FTSE 350 boards gives the governance case its regulatory weight, linking diverse boards to better culture and decision making, and McKinsey's Diversity Matters Even More reports that companies in the top quartile for ethnic diversity on their executive teams are 39% more likely to outperform. The McKinsey methodology has its academic critics, so I'd use it as supporting evidence and lean on the FRC for the governance argument.

The pipeline beneath the board

The gap that matters most for the next decade sits below the boardroom, in executive committees and senior management, because that is where future chief executives and finance directors come from.

Green Park's Business Leaders Index 2024, which covers more than 16,000 FTSE 350 roles over 10 years, finds Black representation at the top level has fallen since 2019, and the Parker Review's own figure of 1.3% Black representation in FTSE 100 senior management confirms the pipeline is thin.

The McGregor-Smith Review put a price on this in 2017, estimating that full representation and progression of ethnic minority people across the labour market would be worth £24 billion a year to the UK economy. Its 26 recommendations to employers, covering data, targets, accountable leadership and sponsorship, remain the most practical checklist government has produced, and the one-year-on review showed how slowly employers acted on them.

The problem is about how organisations develop and promote people, which a board can govern, as much as who applies.

Business in the Community's Race at Work: Black Voices report explains why the pipeline leaks. Black employees describe being overlooked for sponsorship, carrying the weight of everyday racism, and watching less experienced colleagues progress past them, and those accounts matter because they show the problem is about how organisations develop and promote people, which a board can govern, as much as who applies.

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Ethnic minority and Black enterprise

Ethnic minority businesses are a significant part of the UK economy, and the Federation of Small Businesses' Unlocking Opportunity report, produced with Aston University's Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship and the Enterprise Research Centre, puts the figure at around 250,000 firms generating £25 billion a year in gross value added, roughly the output of Birmingham or Manchester. Black-led businesses make up 16% of that group and have shown the fastest growth in self-employment of any ethnic group since 2011, yet they remain under-represented against their share of the working population.

The finance gap is well documented and has been for more than a decade. The government's 2013 study of ethnic minority businesses and access to finance found Black African and Black Caribbean-owned firms faced higher loan rejection rates, and the British Business Bank's Alone, Together research in 2020 found the median Black entrepreneur turns over £25,000 a year against £35,000 for a white entrepreneur, more than a third less. At the growth end, Extend Ventures' Diversity Beyond Gender found Black founders received just 0.24% of UK venture capital between 2009 and 2019, and Black women 0.02%.

EXHIBIT 12

Black-owned businesses are smaller, survive less often and are almost absent from venture capital

Median annual turnover of business owners, 2020



Firms reaching the established stage of 42 months or more



Of every £100 of UK venture capital, 2009 to 2019

24p
went to Black founders

2p
went to Black women founders

The prize. Aston and NatWest set a goal of growing the ethnic minority business contribution from £25 billion to £100 billion a year.

Source: British Business Bank, Alone, Together (2020); Aston CREME via The Barriers to Black Business Growth (2026); Extend Ventures, Diversity Beyond Gender (2020); Aston CREME and NatWest, Time to Change (2022). The £25bn and £100bn figures cover all ethnic minority businesses.

The opportunity case is just as strong. Aston and NatWest's Time to Change blueprint sets a goal of growing the ethnic minority business contribution from £25 billion to £100 billion a year through 10

recommendations on finance, markets and business support, and Backlight's Black Pound Report shows the spending power of Black and multi-ethnic consumers that many brands still overlook. For any bank or investor, these figures describe an under-served market as clearly as they describe an equity problem.

11

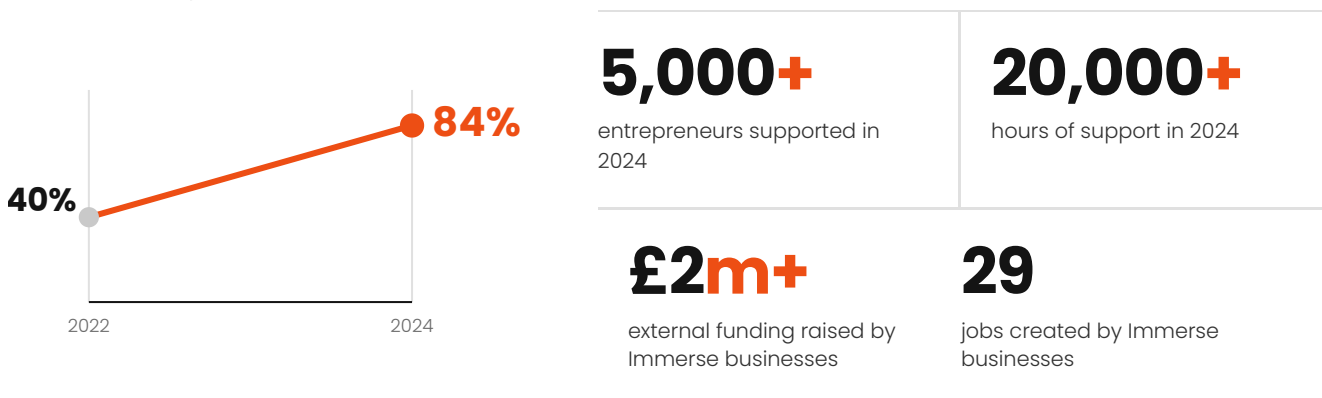
Trust and what has moved the dial

Trust is the thread that runs through the enterprise evidence, because a business owner who doesn't believe the bank will treat them fairly often doesn't apply at all. Lloyds Banking Group's Black. British. In Business. And Proud. research in 2021 found low levels of trust in banks among Black business owners, and the 2022 follow-up mapped the barriers to finance, networks and support in detail.

The Group's 2025 progress report sets out one bank's account of a sustained programme, and I declare that I chair its Black Business Advisory Committee. Trust among Lloyds' Black business clients rose from 40% in 2022 to 84% in 2024, more than 5,000 entrepreneurs received over 20,000 hours of support in 2024, and businesses on its Immerse accelerator raised more than £2 million in external funding and created 29 jobs. The trust figure comes from Lloyds' own client research, so it needs independent testing, but the direction of travel is clear. Those results came from sustained, visible commitment over 5 years, with an advisory committee holding the bank to account, and I think that model of external challenge is the lesson other institutions should take.

EXHIBIT 13

Trust among Lloyds' Black business clients more than doubled in two years



Source: Lloyds Banking Group, Black Entrepreneurs Programme progress report, 2025. The trust figure comes from Lloyds' own client research and has not been independently tested. The author chairs the Group's Black Business Advisory Committee.

NatWest's response to Time to Change and the British Business Bank's Finding what works review of venture capital interventions add to the picture, and both point to the same conclusion: progress follows when an institution publishes its data, sets targets and puts named people in charge of hitting them.

The policy direction

Government policy on race has moved in two directions over the last 5 years. The Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (the Sewell Report) in 2021 questioned the weight usually given to structural racism and drew sharp criticism from many Black organisations and academics, and the government's Inclusive Britain response in 2022 set out more than 70 actions, including work on ethnicity pay reporting and enterprise support. Anyone using this evidence base needs to know both documents, because they will be quoted back at you.

“Anyone using this evidence base needs to know both documents, because they will be quoted back at you.”

The more consequential shift is on data. Ethnicity pay gap reporting has been voluntary since the 2023 employer guidance, but the draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill will make it mandatory for employers with 250 or more staff. Once that duty lands, every large employer's Black and ethnic minority pay and progression gaps will be public, and boards that haven't already looked at their own numbers will be doing so under scrutiny.

Beyond the FTSE

Most of the organisations Black leaders actually govern sit outside the listed sector, in charities, housing associations, the NHS and local public bodies, and the evidence there is weaker and, in places, older. The Charity Commission's Taken on Trust research in 2017 found 92% of charity trustees were white, and Inclusive Boards' Charities Inclusive Governance Report 2022 shows how many of the largest charities still have all-white boards and senior teams.

92%

of charity trustees were white in 2017, according to the Charity Commission.

ACEVO and Voice4Change England's Home Truths report, drawing on more than 500 people of colour working in the sector, named racism as a significant and unresolved issue in charities and asked members to publish ethnicity pay data. The NHS is the outlier on measurement, because the Workforce Race Equality Standard has required every trust to report board and senior manager ethnicity annually since 2015, and that dataset shows what mandatory measurement makes visible.

The Black British Voices Project, led by the University of Cambridge with I-Cubed and The Voice, adds the community perspective through a survey of more than 10,000 Black British people across 16 areas of life, including work and economic opportunity, and it is the best single source for grounding board conversations in lived experience.

What each audience needs to hear

The State of the Nation asks what 3 audiences need to hear. The evidence gives a direct answer to each, and I've kept every ask to something the audience can act on within a year.

EXHIBIT 14

Nine actions, three audiences, each achievable within a year

Lloyds and other financial institutions

need to hear that the finance gap is measurable and long-standing, and that closing it is commercial as well as fair.

1. Publish lending approval rates and average facility sizes for Black-owned businesses, so progress can be tested independently of client surveys.
2. Carry the Black Entrepreneurs Programme approach, and its accountability to an external committee, into growth-stage finance where support currently stops.
3. Commit a share of regional SME and investment-readiness funding to firms outside London and the South East, and report on it.

Our communities

need to hear that the evidence backs their experience, and that there are routes through.

1. Use the support that exists, including the Chamber's Investment Readiness Accelerator and Lloyds' programme, and tell BCON where it falls short.
2. Put names forward for boards, because the Birmingham Board Diversity Challenge and Parker targets create demand that has to be met.
3. Share your own data with BCON, by consent, so the regional picture is built from members' real experience.

Policymakers and corporate partners

need to hear that representation that can't be measured won't improve.

1. Back a regular West Midlands measure of Black representation in senior leadership, published with the Race Equalities Taskforce.
2. Take the Birmingham Board Diversity Challenge and prepare now for mandatory ethnicity pay gap reporting.
3. Include Black-owned businesses in procurement pipelines and report the spend.

Source: Recommendations of this paper.

For boards in any sector

For boards, I'd frame the response through the 6 drivers I use in governance reviews: 3 compliance drivers that determine whether a board can do the job, and 3 performance drivers that determine whether it does it well.

EXHIBIT 15

What the evidence asks of a board, through the six TGF drivers

COMPLIANCE DRIVERS: CAN THE BOARD DO THE JOB?

Resources	Fund sponsorship, development and supplier diversity programmes properly, and treat them as long-term investment with a 5-year horizon, as Lloyds did.
Board competence	Make sure the board itself understands the data, can challenge management on progression, and draws on Black and ethnic minority perspectives in its own composition.
Execution	Set targets for senior management and the executive pipeline, name the executives who own them, and review progress at least annually.

PERFORMANCE DRIVERS: DOES IT DO IT WELL?

Transparency	Publish ethnicity pay and progression data now, voluntarily, and report Black representation separately from the ethnic minority total.
Impact	Measure outcomes for Black employees, customers and suppliers, including access to finance where the organisation lends or invests.
Behaviour	Listen to what Black colleagues report about sponsorship and everyday racism, and hold leaders accountable for the culture they create.

Source: The Governance Forum governance review framework.

TWO QUESTIONS FOR ANY BOARD THIS YEAR

1. Can the board say, today, how many Black colleagues sit in its top 3 layers of management, and how that number has moved since 2019?
2. Does an external voice, a committee, network or advisory group, have the standing to challenge it on the answer?

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ABOUT BCON

BCON, Black C-Suite, Owners & Non-Execs, is a community of Black chief executives, senior executives, business owners and non-executive directors of medium-sized and larger organisations, started in the Midlands. It is a safe space where senior Black leaders meet, a connector between the people in the room and the people who can act, and a strategic think tank that turns members' experience into ideas others can take forward.

1. Highlight senior Black leaders in each sector.
2. Identify the extent of under-representation in each sector.
3. Develop a platform for engagement with senior Black leaders.

In BCON's definition, Black means African, African Caribbean and mixed race.

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THE
GOVERNANCE
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TRANSFORMING GOVERNANCE FROM COMPLIANCE TO A STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE

The Governance Forum works with boards and senior leaders across the private, public and voluntary sectors in the UK, the Middle East, Africa and the Caribbean, through governance reviews, board evaluations, the accredited Effective Board Member programme and AI governance. Its founder, Karl George MBE, developed the Race Equality Code in 2020.

tgf.global
admin@tgf.global

The data only BCON can gather.