Day two: How to get race terminology right in the workplace

Terminology can be a stumbling block to talking about race in the workplace, and the fear of making a mistake or saying the 'wrong' thing. In fact, The Diversity & Confusion Report (2021) by The Unmistakables Diversity & Confusion | The Unmistakables revealed that one in six workers fear they could lose their job if they got terms around race and ethnicity wrong, and nearly 30% believe that it would result in formal disciplinary action.

Being uncomfortable and not talking about race in the workplace prevents the ability to have open conversations and to identify challenges, opportunities and create innovative and practical solutions. So what can you do?

First, it is important to acknowledge that the language and terminology used when discussing race is complicated. We have referenced a few articles/documents that might help.

Secondly, talk to your staff about how they feel about the terminology. It is important to remember that there isn't one term that everyone will prefer; some will not mind any of the terms and some will. Find agreed terms for your own organisation and keep this under review. Terminology and preferences can change.

Writing about ethnicity - GOV.UK (ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk)(ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk)

A guide to race and ethnicity terminology and language | The Law Society | The Law Society

Definitions - Institute of Race Relations (irr.org.uk) (irr.org.uk)

'An anti-racist's dictionary: 19 words on race, gender, and diversity you should know' (article, 2021, USA): https://www.businessinsider.com/words-on-race-gender-and-diversity-you-should-know-2020-7?r=US&IR=T

Aspen Institute structural racism glossary
(US): https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/files/content/docs/rcc/RCC-Structural-Racism-Glossary.pdf