In the UK, Where 95% of Ad Execs Are White, Protests Spark Pledge for More Diversity

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Amid global protests over the killing of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis, hundreds of U.K ad agency execs have signed an open letter committing to improving diversity by better supporting and championing Black colleagues.

U.K. agencies, along with other British businesses, have a diversity problem: according to the latest IPA (Institute of Practitioners in Advertising) snapshot of the industry, just 4.7% of execs surveyed in 2019 identified as Black, Asian and minority ethnic—a grouping commonly known as BAME in the U.K. That representation was down from 5.5% in 2018.

Creative Equals, a program in the U.K. that champions diversity and urges better representation of underrepresented people in the industry, has written an open letter calling for change that has been signed by more than 200 agency leaders.

The letter, signed and shared by industry body the IAB and its members, calls on agency leaders to commit to action.

A commitment to change

In signing the letter, agencies pledge to take action against racism, enable employees to understand their own white privilege, address racist incidents, ensure better Black

representation at every level, and examine their preferred suppliers list to ensure their advertising isn't funding white supremacy or racist content.

"We, the signatories of this letter, commit to taking deep, lasting action. Today, we say George Floyd's name and stand with all black talent in our industry," the letter reads.

Among the more than 200 signatories are executives from AMV BBDO, Engine Group, Leo Burnett London, Grey Europe, Group M, Havas, Karmarama, M&C Saatchi, MediaCom UK, Ogilvy, Publicis Groupe UK, S4 Capital and WPP.

Below is the full text of the letter:

> ***#SayHisName: George Floyd***
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> ***Advertising leaders commit to actions not words***
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> *Against a backdrop of uncertainty and struggle created by the pandemic, the past few months have seen a global explosion of hate crimes targeting black people. We have witnessed horrific images of African communities in China being subject to exclusion and violence; black key workers in the UK exposed to high-risk situations and even the physical assault of Belly Mujinga; in the US we have seen the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and the violent death of George Floyd. This comes in the same week as a white woman made a 'weaponised' call to the police falsely accusing Christian Cooper of threatening her life in Central Park after he asked her to leash her dog.*
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> *While the brutality has brought widespread shock, the direct effect of this injustice and violence on black people cannot be overestimated. The UK Home Office reports that hate crimes have been steadily increasing over the last seven years. In 2018/19, there were 103,379 hate crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales. The majority of these hate*

crimes were race hate crimes, accounting for around three-quarters of offences (76%; 78,991 offences). This marks an increase of 11 per cent from 2017/18. These were only the reported and recorded crimes: thousands more go unreported. As workers are increasingly expected to operate and have a presence online it is imperative that leaders of industry are aware of the dangers both online and offline.

As a creative sector, what we do and who we represent has a profound impact on culture, yet systemic inequality continues in our industry. UK IPA industry census data, published in April 2020, confirmed minimal gains have been made in diversifying the ethnic make-up of leadership. We have gone backwards at a leadership level, with 4.7% of executives being recorded as BAME in 2019, compared to 5.5% in 2018. It has never been more important to show up as an industry and face up to our own challenges as leaders. We need to drive equity in our organisations, the people we hire, the work we produce and how we engage with clients.

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