

“Diversity isn’t just a good business value, it’s good business.”

## WHO’S ON BOARD?

Evaluating diversity  
in sports leadership

Summary Report by Sporting Equals

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## Introduction – why diverse leadership in sport matters

Current economic challenges mean NGBs face considerable challenges in ensuring their sports remain sustainable and are able to adjust to changing times. In addition, delivering on the London 2012 mass participation legacy plans will require effective leadership that is capable of striking a chord with an increasingly diverse community. This will be pivotal if we are to inspire a new generation to play sport and bring to life the “Places People Play” initiative. In a time of economic contraction, the diversity of sports organisations – particularly in leadership positions – can provide one significant avenue for growth. To better understand the benefits and opportunities that can arise from having a more diverse pool of leaders in sport, Sporting Equals has produced the Who’s on Board? – Evaluating diversity in Sports Leadership Report. This report provides an empirical examination of sports leadership, and reveals an astonishing absence of black & minority ethnic (BME) individuals. The report aims to shift attitudes among key figures in sport, from being sceptical about an ethnically diverse leadership to embracing and eventually championing the real

contribution that diversity can make in producing the long-term sustainable development of sport in the UK.

This summary report provides a snapshot of the key points made in the final report. It begins with an overview of the case for an ethnically diverse leadership in sport, before using headline research findings to illustrate the current lack of diversity in sports leadership. The summary concludes with a description of the types of leadership programmes that might best encourage diversity at the highest level of decision making in our sports by highlighting the key recommendations of our Who’s on Board? – Evaluating diversity in Sports Leadership Report.

## 1. Diversity and the challenges ahead – Making the case for ethnic diversity in sport

Britain's population is changing. Long-term population demographic trends point to an ever-increasing black & minority ethnic (BME) population in the UK. The BME populations of our big conurbations (such as Birmingham and London) are growing faster than their white British counterparts. Dorling (2004) suggests that Birmingham's non-white British population is likely to increase from 23% to 53% in the near future, while Greater London already has a non-white British population of 33%, which is likely to rise to 40% by 2026 (Dorling, 2004).

The general increase in the proportion of BME communities in the overall population is generally not reflected in BME involvement in sport. BME communities remain under-represented across most sports and in most different positions in sport (Carnegie et al 2009). Research conducted by Sporting Equals has identified four key barriers that can prevent BME communities from getting involved in sport. These are:

- Poverty and deprivation
- Bureaucratic sporting establishments
- Lack of awareness by the BME communities regarding sport
- Lack of awareness of the BME communities among sport providers

It is much easier for BME individuals to identify with sports bodies that can be seen as being ethnically diverse to the highest levels of the organisation. The organisations themselves are then more likely to attract higher levels of active participation, volunteering, spectating and sales of merchandise, as well as commanding greater interest from commercial sponsors, advertisers and policymakers.

In an increasingly complex, heterogeneous and cosmopolitan marketplace, organisations which more closely mirror, in their thinking and planning, the social and ethnic make-up of their customers will be better equipped to respond flexibly and sensitively to their

needs than ones which appear more narrowly focused and stuck in the past. Sports organisations can benefit from being alert to established debates in the wider business environment. As the then Department of Trade and Industry argued, 'businesses that are positive towards diversity are generally more successful and also more innovative and competitive' (DTI, 2004). Sporting Equals could not agree more. The business case for a properly diverse administrative and management workforce is even more powerful given the highly visible and symbolically important successes of BME communities on the track, in the arena and on the pitch.

Sport, especially, is important for very large numbers of people in this country and its significance is likely to continue to grow. It will need more flexible, creative thinking and new approaches to problem-solving compared to those pursued in the past. This means seeking out solutions informed by a range of different experiences, traditions and backgrounds, a thoroughly modern approach to management and recruitment which will tie in much more productively with the Sport England 'grow and sustain' agenda and the London 2012 mass participation legacy plans.

Everyone should have the right to contribute to policies and activities and to develop their skills and talents to the maximum. We believe that a modern, culturally diverse professional environment is most appropriate in this regard.

It is also likely to provide for the sorts of values and experiences which demonstrate a caring, inclusive and respectful institution.

The organisations participating in this year's benchmarking exercise will need to demonstrate the kind of ambitious and free-thinking vision and determination which puts ethnicity very firmly on their new business agenda. It is precisely this level of vision and ambition which will result in a clear and focused journey. The future challenge for sports leaders is to ensure that they not only claim to know their market but that this assertion is also clearly reflected in their recruitment strategies, branding and image.

## 2. Who's on Board? – National Governing Bodies and ethnic diversity in sport

Sporting Equals sent a questionnaire to all governing bodies (NGBs) in May 2010. When combined with follow up contacts to fill data gaps, this resulted in 39 useable responses.

According to this latest audit, only 9% of staff from the NGBs audited are from BME backgrounds. 7% (3 out of 39) of Chief Executives are now from BME backgrounds (from the 3 sports Boccia, England Basketball and British Triathlon). Added to this, only Great Britain Wheelchair Basketball Association and Pentathlon have Performance Directors from BME backgrounds. However, when compared with the growing proportions of the UK population from BME individuals, representation remains low, and it should be noted that the

numbers from BME groups are inflated by recruitment of white expertise from overseas.

Elsewhere, BME NGB representation is more sparse. All Development Directors audited are from white British backgrounds. Only 1 NGB has a Chair from a BME background (British Judo) and out of a collective total of 375 board members only 7 (2%) are from BME groups. Even the extended notion of 'executive decision makers' (paid staff or volunteers who are not on the Board, but are involved in organisational decision making) only results in 11 out of 365 being identified as being from a BME background (3%).

People from Black and Minority Ethnic Groups in National Governing Bodies of Sport		
Role	BME <sup>1</sup> Numbers	Percentage
Chair	1	2%
Board	7	2%
Chief Executive	3	7%
Development Director	0	0%
Performance Director	2	6%
Executive Decision Makers <sup>2</sup>	11	3%

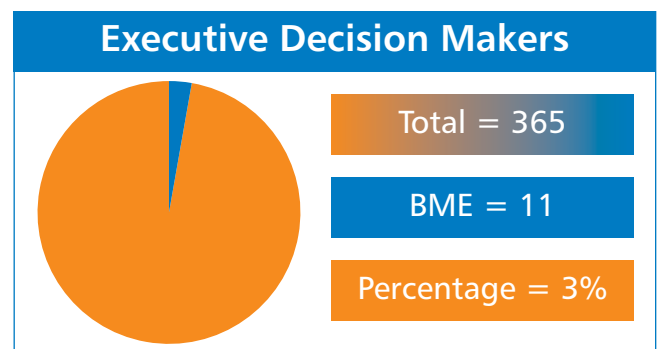
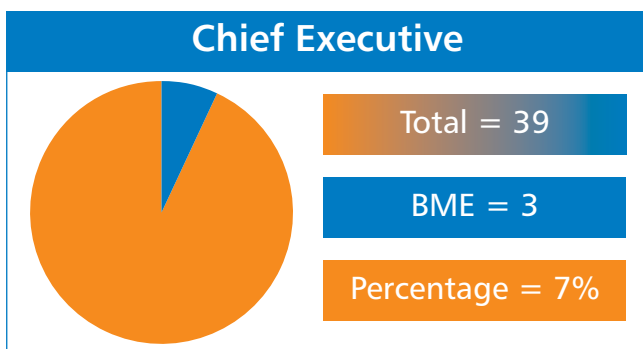
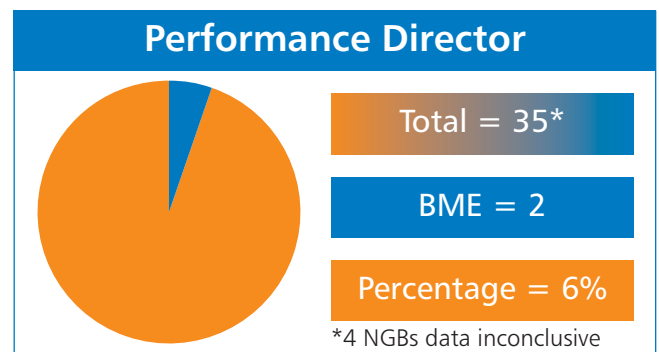
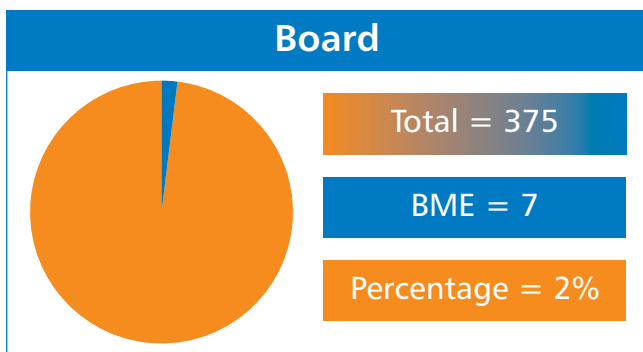
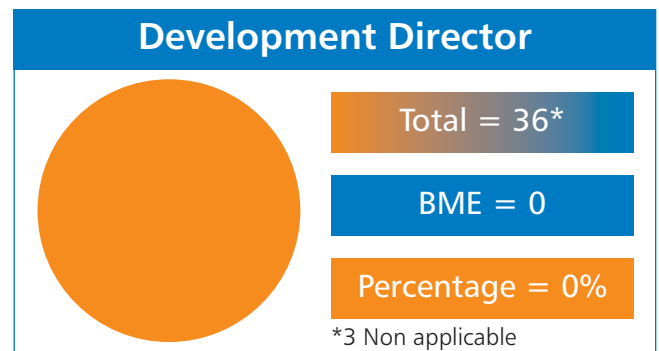
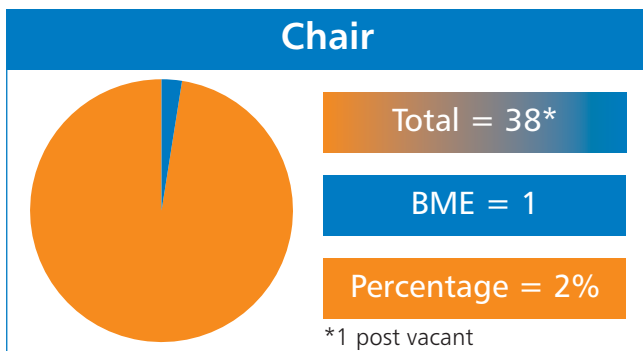
<sup>1</sup>The term BME includes everyone other than those of 'White British' backgrounds.

<sup>2</sup>Paid staff or volunteers who are not on the board, but are involved in organisational decision making.

## Who's on Board? – continued

These findings broadly confirm that the positions that hold key decision making responsibilities are overwhelmingly white British. It is encouraging to see that 7% of NGBs have a BME Chief Executive, but when compared to general BME participation rates for sport, this proportion remains relatively low. At the highest level only 3 Chief Executives are BME of which 1 is from a 'white other' background. Elsewhere, the relatively high score for staffing (9%) suggests that non-leadership positions in sport appear to be disproportionately populated by non-white British people. This raises questions about the recruitment process for senior management positions. It suggests that promotion from more junior roles may be harder

for those from BME backgrounds. Interestingly, the scores for positions that could be described as voluntary – such as Board Members and Chair Persons – contain among the lowest BME representation. This indicates that the recruitment procedures for these non-paid (but often very powerful) roles may need further investigation. Clearly, the figures indicate that BME representation in positions of leadership are of concern and do not reflect wider participation trends in sport, particularly in those that carry no real decision making responsibility at governance level.



### 3. What's needed? – the potential of professional leadership programmes

Sporting Equals is committed to increasing BME participation in sport, and in particular to improve sports governance in relation to BME involvement. In our view, the key method of effecting institutional change is to increase BME representation at the highest levels in sport. We have already stated the benefits to sports organisations of a more diverse leadership. From our perspective, an increase in BME representation on senior boards and in positions of key decision making is likely to speed up the pace of change in increasing BME participation across all sports. There is a widely held *laissez-faire* view that as BME involvement in sport matures, so we will see more BME representation at the highest levels. If this were the case, in 2010 we would surely expect to see more encouraging figures than our survey of NGBs has provided. Clearly, pro-active intervention is required to kick-start the opportunities available for BME individuals in positions of power in sport. Having a number of diversity 'champions' in positions of influence is more likely to ensure a sustained, long-term interest in race equality and avoid the often transient and piecemeal nature of many initiatives in sport that are aimed at improving opportunities for BME communities.

**Leaderboard** is a Sporting Equals initiative designed to generate wider senior BME involvement in sports governing bodies and authorities. At our first Leaderboard Symposium, we brought the Chief Executives of NGBs together with policy makers and expert witnesses from outside of sport, as well as outstanding BME leaders. The Symposium aims to generate practical working ideas for a leadership development programme aimed specifically at talented BME individuals. The resulting Leaderboard Programme, to be developed in partnership with NGBs, Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation and English Federation of Disability Sport, will offer support for NGBs and other sports providers to help them overcome barriers, identify talent, investigate career progression and measure success.

Our **Leaderboard Programme** is a vital first step in communicating the language and need for diversity to our core partners in sport. It is a crucial vehicle to convince those in sport of the core business benefits of diversity and de-mystify some of the pre-conceived scepticism or fear that the language of diversity can provoke, particularly among the smaller, voluntarily run governing bodies. We are convinced that diversifying the sector will offer improved creativity, innovation and problem-solving approaches that will significantly help sports organisations adapt to our changing external environment. The Leaderboard Programme will also offer sport a pool of untapped executive talent. This is particularly pertinent in voluntary roles such as Board or Council Members, who are increasingly sparse in numbers and tend to be dominated by people who have been involved at the front line of their sport, often for many years, and who are often regarded by their sport as out of touch with the current needs of their members. The Leaderboard Programme will help align the wealth of untapped talent from the BME communities that has previously been, or felt, excluded from the core governance structures of the sports they love. We believe that programmes like this one will provide the opportunity for a long-term solution to increasing diversity in sport that can only be achieved quickly by prompting the recruitment of suitable BME individuals into future decision-making vacancies.

## 4. Moving forward - Key recommendations from the Who's on Board? – Evaluating diversity in Sports Leadership Report 2010

The Sporting Equals Leaderboard Programme is just the start of what we hope will be a fruitful and long-lasting dialogue with sports organisations on the issue of diversity in leadership roles. However, the fact remains that sports organisations will need to take full responsibility and ownership of any attempt to increase

BME involvement in their organisations at senior level. The Who's on Board? – Evaluating diversity in Sports Leadership Report has identified the following recommendations for any programme that attempts to meet the goals of increasing ethnic diversity:

- Making the business case for diversity is often the best entry-route for sports to begin to consider promoting diversity at the highest level
- Diversity should be linked closely with the overall business strategy of the organisation rather than just seen as a Human Resources function, or tick box strategy to comply with legislation
- Schemes like these must have the full and very obvious support at the very highest levels of the organisation
- Diversity initiatives must be acknowledged as a long-term process with no immediate quick fixes
- Strategies should be sustainable and developmental; seen as a continual work-in-progress for an organisation
- Diversity should not be seen as an add-on but, as both a goal and process and permeate through all aspects of business

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Diversity isn't just a good business value, it's good business." From the keynote speech by **Robert E Diamond Junior, President of Barclays plc.**

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**Sporting Equals**

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