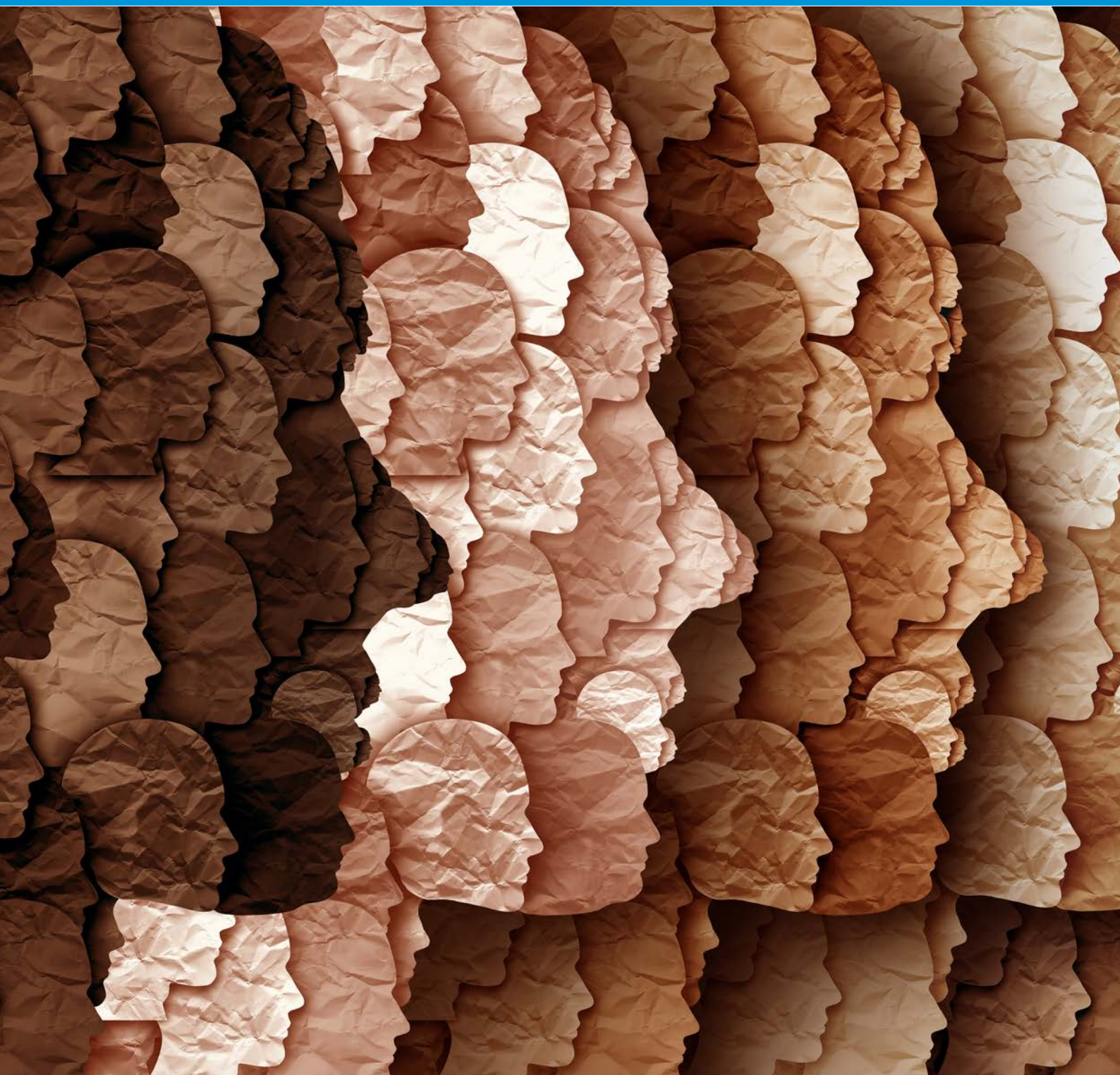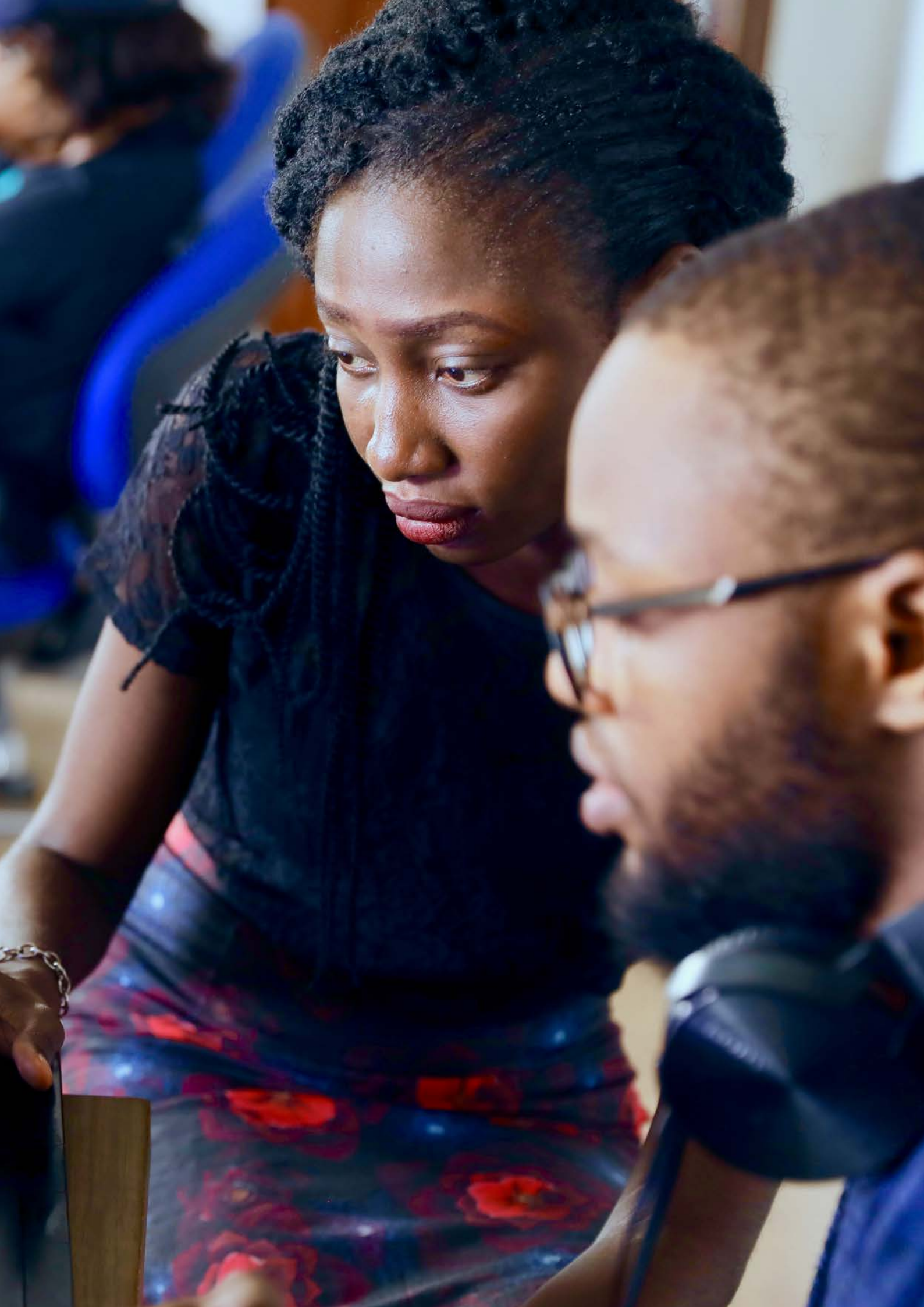# A challenging environment: Experiences of ethnic minority environmental professionals

Contents

Acknowledgements

The IES would like to acknowledge and thank all those who have contributed to the body of knowledge in this area, but especially our interviewees who delved into how their lives have been both directly and indirectly impacted by issues of equality.

About the IES: The IES is a visionary organisation leading debate, dissemination and promotion of environmental science and sustainability. We promote an evidence-based approach to decision and policy making.

We are devoted to championing the crucial role of environmental science in ensuring the well-being of humanity now and in the future.

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Sponsors

This project would not have been possible without the financial support of the following organisations.

Bureau Veritas UK are a world-leading testing, inspection and certification company, reducing risk, improving performance and assuring quality, health, protection and social responsibility.

"We're pleased to have supported this vital research project from the IES, which plays an important role in understanding low ethnic diversity across the environment sector. It's clear that more needs to be done improve diversity and inclusivity, but thanks to the work that has been undertaken, we can now recognise where we are and the journey that we're on.

Bureau Veritas, like other employers in the sector, must use this research to focus on our recruitment processes, organisational initiatives and culture in order to improve diversity and inclusion."

Bureau Veritas UK

Delta-Simons is an environmental and sustainability consultancy providing geo-environmental, EHS, environmental planning, ecology, sustainability and wellbeing services at a regional and national level within the UK and internationally.

"Delta-Simons is proud to support this initiative to increase diversity and inclusivity within the environmental industry sector. Whilst there is clearly a long way to go, this research report is a great starting point to build upon into the future in terms of making this sector a more attractive career path for everyone, particularly in conjunction with the opportunities and challenges we are all faced with in relation to climate change."

Delta-Simons

The **Environment Agency** is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by DEFRA, responsible for regulation and management of the UK's environment including fisheries, contaminated land, flooding, rivers and ecology.

"Even as one of the biggest employers in the environment sector, the Environment Agency values the opportunity of this sector-wide collaboration on the shared challenges of equality, diversity and inclusion. It helps us understand the interwoven and mutually reinforcing barriers that have made progress elusive. And it sets us on a path towards being more effective organisations, tapping the widest possible pool of talent and creating retentive workplaces and rewarding career pathways, in which people from diverse backgrounds can all succeed."

Environment Agency

Foreword

Chi Onwurah MP
Chair of the APPG on Diversity and Inclusion in STEM

Professional bodies should be leading the way in widening participation within their sectors, so I very much welcome this report by the IES.

The most recent report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Diversity and Inclusion in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) sought to determine where equity and inequity exists in the workforce. It provides recommendations for the UK Government and STEM organisations across the private, public and voluntary sectors to tackle the historic and systemic underrepresentation of minoritised groups at all levels within the sector. The evidence received demonstrated how barriers appear for every minoritised group along the career pathway.

There is a clear need for continued research, education and reform to identify and address the key barriers which result in low ethnic diversity within the STEM disciplines. Research undertaken by Policy Exchange, for example, suggests that this issue is particularly acute within the environment sector.

I was pleased to be involved in the IES' work in this area, particularly as it intends to build a more inclusive environment sector through understanding the perceptions and lived experiences of professionals from ethnic minorities; such insights are essential in achieving this aim. We hope the recommendations help to address the ethnic diversity gap in a representative, informed and impactful way.

Aligning the IES' extensive research and analysis with the comprehensive work of the APPG on Diversity and Inclusion in STEM is just one way to further our progress towards a more representative workforce. This report proposes steps for organisations to take in promoting and enhancing inclusion of ethnic minorities within the environment sector.

Executive summary

Background

Against the backdrop of a lack of diversity in the environment sector, the IES, as a professional membership body, recognises its responsibility to promote programmes and initiatives that ensure greater diversity and inclusivity. Sponsored by Bureau Veritas, Delta-Simons and the Environment Agency, this report is the first strand of an IES initiative aimed at understanding the underlying causes of low ethnic diversity and making recommendations to increase access to the sector, improving the experiences of people from all ethnicities.

Methodology

The report seeks to understand the lack of ethnic diversity from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. We conducted in-depth interviews with ethnic minority professionals, individuals holding equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) job roles within organisations employing environmental professionals and heads of organisations within the sector. We gathered and analysed the experiences of ethnic minority professionals within the sector, interrogated the EDI initiatives that organisations are undertaking and sought senior manager's perspectives on the challenges and opportunities that confront organisations around ethnic diversity. The interviews were complemented by an organisational survey to establish the existing levels of ethnic diversity within organisations and an individual survey to compare the perceptions and experiences of ethnic minority professionals with those of ethnic majority professionals.

Findings

The study found that a lack of empathetic understanding of why diversity is important exists within the sector, leading to inefficient and ineffective initiatives. Where ethnic minorities are employed in the sector, they face adverse terms that encompass stereotyping and discrimination, exclusion from networks and mentorship and a lack of opportunities for growth. This leads to feelings of isolation, voicelessness and absence of belongingness. Gender seems to intersect critically with ethnicity to significantly disadvantage women of colour. Additionally, external perceptions of the environment sector as racially white, financially middle class and lacking in defined employment opportunities plays a crucial role in the lack of diversity within the sector.

Recommendations

Current employer EDI initiatives strongly focus on recruitment processes that aim to attract a more diverse pool of candidates. Most commonly, this involves reviewing job advert wording and monitoring diversity data for applicants. There is a need for more organisational initiatives that focus internally, for example, on educating the current workforce and improving organisational culture. Additionally, EDI roles are being created without appropriate human and financial resources. Positively, EDI knowledge sharing has moved up the agenda and multiple EDI networks have been created, offering a basis for the movement towards collectively improving diversity and inclusion.

The next steps to improve ethnic diversity within the sector should address systemic, institutional factors through:

- Improved visibility of employment opportunities within the sector through changes to the curriculum, and training and resources for careers advisors;

- Creating and investing in initiatives to increase the attractiveness and accessibility of the sector for individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds; for example, through scholarships, bursaries and internships aimed at ethnic minorities;

- Improved access to the natural environment for people from ethnic minority backgrounds;

- Open, honest and supportive organisational culture that allows for minority voices to be heard;

- Defined career opportunities and channels for growth and promotion;

- Participatory, conscious and dynamic organisational EDI initiatives with feedback mechanisms;

- Thoughtful creation of EDI roles, with trained staff and defined financial resources; and

- Practicing more empathy towards one another and constantly educating ourselves to keep up with a changing socio-political environment.

Though we have selected a few quotes from the research to appear in the body of the report, a fuller selection of quotes is available in the **Appendix**.

Research context

A more diverse workforce can provide an array of backgrounds and experiences to help generate the ideas, outputs and solutions that the environment sector needs to tackle the interlinking environmental crises we are facing. The motivations to pursue a meaningful career within the sector are evident across all ethnic groups, but is the environment sector doing enough to be inclusive? What are the challenges for organisations within the sector to be more diverse? And what practical steps can we, as a sector, take to increase access to our profession?

This report presents the findings of our research into ethnic diversity within the environment sector. This research involved an analysis of the opportunities and challenges related to ethnic diversity within the sector from the perspectives of professionals from ethnic minorities, those working in EDI job roles and heads of organisations.

Sectoral importance

In a 2017 Policy Exchange report, the environment sector was ranked as the second least ethnically diverse in the UK.[1] There were several shortcomings with the report's surveying methods, but it did serve as a wake-up call to the sector to begin acting on diversity and inclusion. Their sample group showed 3.1% of environmental professionals identified as non-White British ethnicities versus 19.9% across all occupations.[1] Prior to our research, this was the most up-to-date data available to assess ethnic diversity across the sector.

To improve ethnic diversity, it is critical to understand the current milieu of the sector, as well as the opportunities and challenges.

Policy relevance

There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that factors such as a lack of access to green spaces, negative environmental impacts and minimal environmental education opportunities correlate with culture, race and ethnicity.[2,3,4] If the 2017 Policy Exchange figures for ethnic diversity in the sector were representative and have remained consistent in the four years since the report's publication, it is likely that the communities most impacted by environmental issues are not fully represented within the environmental workforce engaged in research, solution and policy design.

Social justice

The research attempts to understand epistemic injustices experienced by people from ethnic minorities that have occurred when their experiences are overlooked, misheard and misunderstood. Diversity, ethnic as well as of other kinds, is important as it impacts workplace welfare.

IES action to improve diversity in the environment sector

The IES has been collecting and monitoring diversity data from our membership since 2017. We categorise ethnicity using UK Government guidance[5] for analysis purposes, but recognise that ethnicity is a multi-faceted, self-identification process, and this is reflected in the way we gather these data.

As of November 2021, 9.7% of our UK membership was comprised of individuals who self-identify as an ethnicity within the wider categories of Black, Asian, Mixed/Multiple or any other ethnicity other than White, compared with 12.97% of the UK workforce as a whole for the period July–September 2021.[6]

We believe that modern professional bodies should be leading on ensuring that their sectors are diverse. As a professional body within the environment sector, we are well placed to take action to address the

ethnic diversity gap that exists within the sector, and to do so in a truly informed and impactful way. To achieve this, we have developed and led a series of projects to address three key themes:

1. Building on our understanding of the underlying causes of the low ethnic diversity in the environment sector;

2. Inspiring more consideration for diversity and more opportunities for inclusion; and

3. Enabling more individuals from all ethnicities to access, progress and excel in environmental professions.

Over the past few years, our ambition has been to increase the diversity of our membership, governance and staff. In 2015, we signed the Science Council's Declaration on Diversity, Equality and Inclusion: a cross-organisational commitment designed to advocate the importance of representation within the scientific community and challenge prejudice and discrimination across our respective disciplines.

Our work in this area has been shaped by a collective benchmarking exercise – the Diversity and Inclusion Progression Framework,[7] developed by the Science Council and Royal Academy of Engineering. The overall aim of this framework is to determine a baseline for diversity, equality and inclusion across the sectors, identify barriers to participation and evaluate the efficacy of diversity policies upheld by membership organisations.

The framework provides professional bodies with the tools to comprehensively measure and track their progress across their membership, employment practices, governance and beyond. Each section requires data to be gathered on policies, practices and statistics, as well as deeper exploration of current challenges and ongoing priorities.

We use the framework to measure and monitor our progress on diversity and inclusion. In our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan[8] we set out our priorities for enhancing representation and promoting equality both internally and across the sector.

Research design and data collection

Defining ethnicity

The generally accepted definition of ethnicity, used throughout this report, is "the fact of belonging to a particular ethnic group with a shared culture, tradition, language, and history".[9] It is recognised that ethnicity is a multifaceted, complex and dynamic phenomenon that will be personal to individuals and definitions of ethnicity continue to evolve and change as society explores the topics of ethnicity, race, culture and identity.

It is additionally acknowledged that the use of categories to define ethnicity can remove an individual's ability to choose the ethnicity they identify as. To achieve a balance between the accurate representation of individuals' ethnicities and ensuring data gathered can be analysed and compared, the below groups were used to define ethnicity, as utilised by the Census (England and Wales) Order 2020.[1] Participants were able to select the specific ethnicity that they identify as within their chosen group. If they did not identify with any of the groups in the list, they were encouraged to write in their ethnicity using their own words.

The list of ethnic groups used is as follows:

1. **White** and whether English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British, Irish, Gypsy or Irish Traveller, Roma, or any other White background (stating which);
2. **Mixed/multiple ethnic group** and whether White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian, or any other Mixed/Multiple background (stating which);
3. **Asian/Asian British** and whether Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, or any other Asian background (stating which);
4. **Black/African/Caribbean/Black British** and whether Caribbean, African background (stating which), or any other Black/Black British/Caribbean background (stating which); or
5. **Other ethnic group** and whether Arab or any other ethnic group (stating which).

For the purposes of this research, the term "ethnic minority" is defined as any individual who identifies with the wider categories of points two, three, four and five, as listed above. Correspondingly, "ethnic majority" is defined as any individual who identifies with the broad category outlined in point one. We recognise that there are ethnic groups within this category that face issues of discrimination and can be classed as ethnic minorities in their own right; however, this falls outside the scope of this work.

Research methodology

To gain a comprehensive understanding of ethnic diversity within the sector, this research project was conducted as a mixed-methods exploratory study. Five methods of data collection were employed.

Quantitative methods:
1. An organisational survey to map the ethnic diversity make-up of organisations within the sector, which was completed by 27 organisations;
2. An individual survey – open to professionals from all ethnicities – to examine how the perceptions and experiences of ethnic minorities compare to those of ethnic majorities in the sector, which was completed by 251 professionals;

Qualitative methods:
3. Semi-structured interviews with 12 professionals from ethnic minorities to understand their perceptions of ethnic diversity and experiences within the sector;

4. Semi-structured interviews with four EDI professionals working in the environment sector to understand the purpose of employer diversity initiatives, as well as their design and impact; and

5. Semi-structured interviews with six heads of organisations to understand organisational vision and focus regarding ethnic diversity.

Research challenges

The research aimed to understand the current ethnic make-up of the sector using ethnicity data collected through the organisational survey. Unfortunately, only 16% of organisations surveyed were able to share data on ethnicity. This sample size was insufficient to be representative of the sector and to identify patterns.

The chosen methodology aimed to give a voice to the experiences of professionals from ethnic minorities within the sector. The methods employed involved intensive interactions, a method that may not be immune to the workings of factors such as gender, class and race of both the researcher and research participants.[10]

Though the research focuses on ethnic diversity exclusively, intersectionality of other protected characteristics such as gender was evident and, at times, hard to delineate. Further research is needed to better understand this intersectionality.

Researcher's positionality

The researcher's ethnicity (Indian) and gender (female) made her an insider to the research setting. This may have affected the identities projected during conversations, the nature of the questions and conversations that occurred and the analysis conducted. The sharing of sensitive personal data and experiences could also have been easier due to the shared experiences of the researcher and research participants.

As the researcher has not previously been involved with the environment sector, she was able to examine the dynamics at play without any preconceived notions about the sector.

Situating the research within other strands of research

Over the last few years, an array of research has been published related to diversity and inclusion, much of which focuses on STEM disciplines. However, there has been limited research in this area looking specifically at the environment sector. Within this body of work, researchers have explored various aspects of diversity and inclusion, including gender and ethnicity, and this research has initiated conversations about diversity within the environment sector.

This study aligns itself to these strands of research, but can be differentiated by its focus on achieving a holistic understanding of ethnic diversity within the environment sector, gained through conversations with a wide range of people: ethnic minority environmental professionals, EDI professionals, heads of organisations and ethnic majority individuals. The study's mixed research methodology of surveys and interviews contributes to its uniqueness.

Analysis and key findings

Our individual survey found that 74% of the 251 respondents (207 = ethnic majority, 44 = ethnic minority) believed that the sector was not ethnically diverse. Through our interviews, we also found that professionals from ethnic minorities and heads of organisations felt that a lack of diversity had been normalised within the sector. It was only when there was a trigger in the form of ethnic or gender diversity, for example, in a particular setting, that the lack of diversity in everyday life became noticeable. The following section discusses the research findings in detail.

Understanding of the "what" and the "why" of EDI concerns

The research found that, although the sector seems to be transitioning towards greater inclusivity, there is a lack of awareness regarding the importance of a diverse and inclusive environmental workforce, and understanding of the underlying causes of low ethnic diversity in the sector is limited. This understanding is needed before more concrete steps can be taken to address the issue. The research found that numerous initiatives have been launched by organisations within the sector to improve ethnic diversity, in part due to the Black Lives Matter movement, but organisations must take care to ensure that these initiatives do not superficially address the problem.

Initiatives were perceived by research participants to be undertaken without sufficient understanding of existing challenges, leading to a lack of deep-rooted action. Some research participants felt that there is insufficient understanding of the "what" and the "why" of EDI concerns, with the focus placed instead on how to attract more ethnic minority candidates in the short-term. At worst, some of these initiatives were perceived as knee-jerk reactions undertaken due to external pressure, with organisations unable to afford looking primarily white, middle-aged and male in the changing socio-political climate.

This lack of empathetic understanding of why diversity is important is also evidenced in the argument of meritocracy, which poses a substantial challenge to a move towards greater inclusivity and diversity. A few survey respondents mentioned the belief that meritocracy should be paramount regardless of ethnicity and implied that being more diverse required lowering standards. This understanding ignores the fact that standards as they exist tend to predispose certain groups to perform better than others, with merit itself being inherently biased. This argument of meritocracy is yet to be combatted within the sector — at a macro level, micro level, across population groups and at all seniority levels.

> "If there was a situation to happen at my organisation, where race was the issue, and I thought I was being discriminated against or somebody was even making racist comments, then I don't feel like that may be dealt with by anyone in the organisation."

> "A major challenge has been, and still is, getting the leadership of the organisation to understand that what we're doing isn't enough."

> "The British cultural focus on meritocracy leads to the diversity-detriment, which is that if we want to get more diverse, we have to lower the standards. That's not true, but it's the inevitable outcome of believing everything is a meritocracy. But then certain groups do better over and over and over and over again. Therefore, diversity in line with standards, whereas if you unpick the meritocracy and say actually no the reason why an individual can progress through the sector is because of these (inherently biased) factors, that is when things change."

Many research participants also felt that organisations were scared to admit the mistakes they had made or were making, fearful of backlash that would follow. However, openness to admit mistakes is crucial to understanding the issues that face people with protected characteristics. Such acceptance and openness from organisations can only come when public opinion is empathetic, so that organisations do not feel constantly judged or badgered. Issues of EDI are difficult and challenging and can only be addressed if everyone takes collective responsibility for the lack of diversity in the sector. EDI is an urgent issue and needs to be treated and addressed as such, with collective consciousness but without selective empathy.

Challenges faced by ethnic minorities in the environment sector

Despite seeing an increase in the representation of individuals from ethnic minorities in the sector, their inclusion remains on adverse terms and professionals from ethnic minorities do, at times, face discrimination within the sector. Though the discrimination is not always overt, instances of abuse are not uncommon. Such instances, and exclusion based on ethnicity and race, was normalised and internalised by a substantial number of professionals from ethnic minorities. There are seven kinds of challenges that individuals from ethnic minorities reported facing within the sector, discussed below.

"I think a lot more people could contribute to the world if they weren't side-lined just because of one little aspect of their lives."

1. Stereotyping

Professionals from ethnic minorities expressed experiences of being stereotyped due to how they look. Even the more positive stereotypes became harmful when they were constantly applied and determined expectations at the workplace. For example, an ethnically Indian woman discussed how the stereotype of hard-working Indians led to discriminatory work practices and an unfair workload. This led her to prioritise work over everything else, including her health. It was not until there was a medical emergency that she realised how harmful this was.

"The company cultures aren't inclusive. So, the main point is that still many, many companies don't understand how to make that cultural shift - that it is a process of change. You need to invest in that change. It's not an immediate short-term change. But there is a wider sector need and there's a wider sector benefit for doing some of them."

2. Networks and mentorship leading to lack of a feeling of belonging, isolation and exclusion

Individuals from ethnic minorities reported facing significant challenges in becoming part of existing networks at workplaces. This entailed factors as trivial as different music tastes, to more profound factors such as extremely different lived experiences from colleagues at work. Over 31% of survey respondents from ethnic minorities believed that it was difficult for them to integrate into social settings at the workplace, compared to 9% of ethnic majority respondents. 55% of individuals from ethnic minorities believed that their ethnicity had an impact on their ability to integrate themselves into such settings, with nearly 14% neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

"I think a lot of people are working thrice actually than their capacity. And all of them are from multicultural backgrounds."

Socio-cultural differences also led to gaps in communication and understanding at the workplace. Some professionals described an overlap of formal and informal networks at work that led to them being excluded from email chains, including those that were important for career advancement.

"People never say anything to my face ever because people are far too polite for that, but I would hear it second hand through white friends, you pick up the vibe, you still kind of learn to ignore it. You must not tolerate that. The only reason people say things like that is because they think they can get away with things as acceptable. You must let them know that you find it offensive."

Such exclusion reduced the feeling of belongingness, worsened by an absence of role models who looked like them. At times, not having role models made people from ethnic minorities aware of their social responsibility to other people from their communities who they could act as role models for. This was both empowering, as well as physically, mentally and emotionally draining.

> "You've got management level and executive level people all looking the same and not being diverse at all. I think that has a huge impact. If you want to keep people in an organisation and what you want to create an environment that if you're ambitious and you look up and you see people at that level, don't look like you. And then you start to think "well, is this achievable at this particular organisation?", it might make you think twice, then you might start looking elsewhere to see if there is somewhere that has that diversity."

At an organisational level (see **Figure 1**), over 78% of ethnic majority respondents believed that they could easily find role models who looked like them (in a sample of roughly equal numbers of male and female respondents), whereas only 2% of ethnic minorities, which translates to only one participant, felt the same.
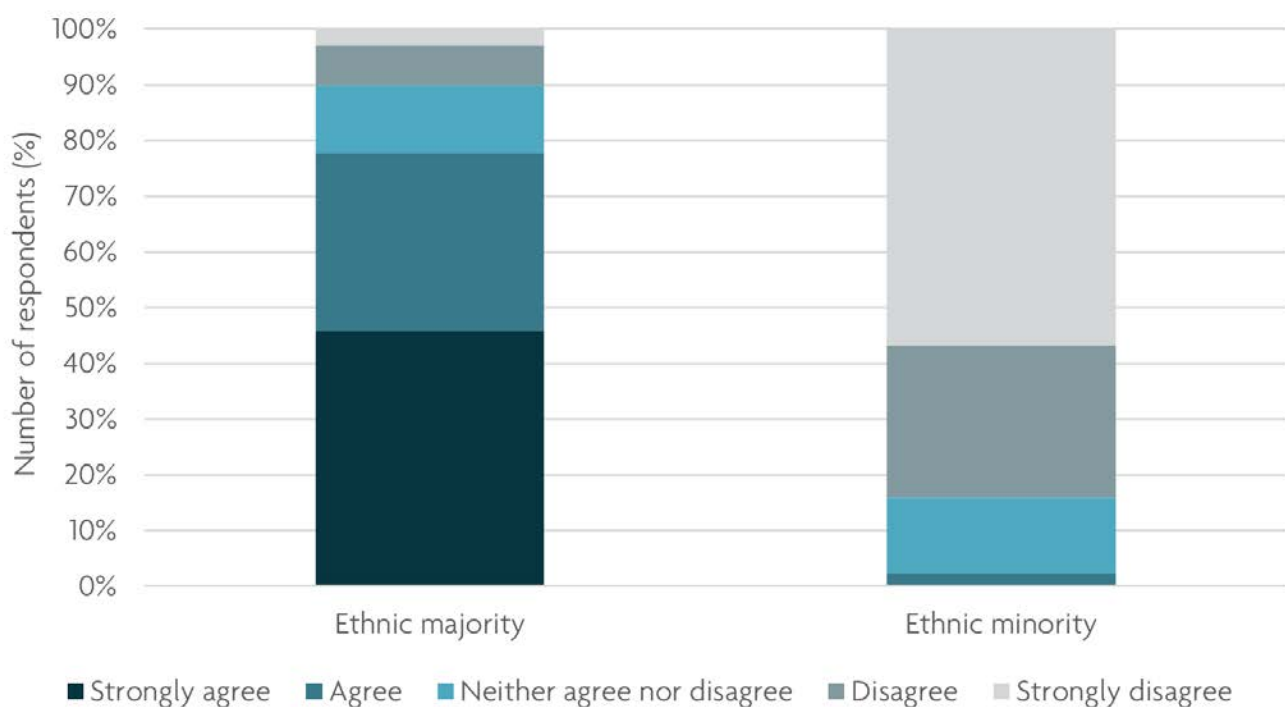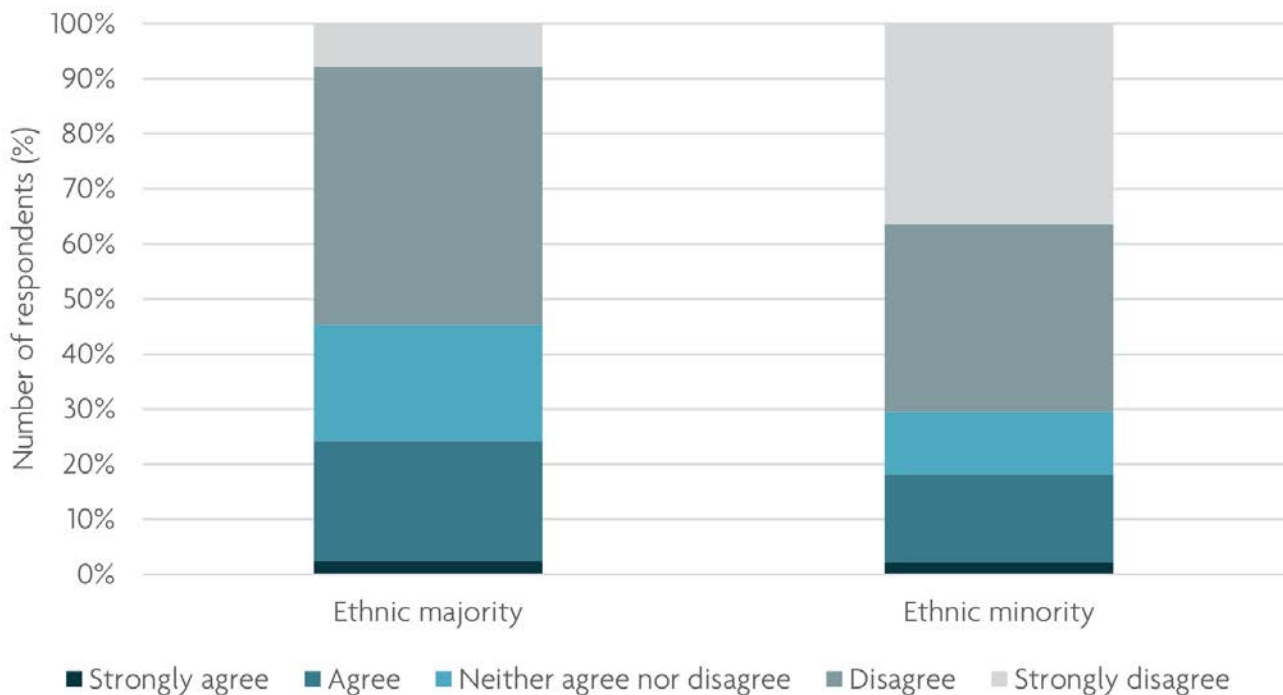

Figure 1. The percentage of survey respondents who have always found it easy to have role models who looked like them within their organisations, as per level of agreement

## 3. Lack of opportunities for growth within the sector

Despite some surveyed organisations doing better than others when it came to recruiting a more diverse workforce, the changes are more prominent at the more junior levels. Professionals from ethnic minorities shared experiences of being passed up for promotions. However, few EDI initiatives within the sector focused on this.

A lack of opportunities earlier in their careers may lead to ethnic minority professionals not developing the skills required to progress in the sector. One of the research participants, a recruiting manager with EDI responsibilities, believed professionals from ethnic minorities are harder to find to fill more senior roles as skills take precedence, and implied a lack of skills in the pool of ethnic minority candidates.

About 55% of ethnic majority professionals and 70% of professionals from ethnic minorities who completed the individual survey believed that equal opportunities did not exist in the sector for people from ethnic majorities and ethnic minorities (see **Figure 2**). Additionally, 50% of ethnic majority professionals and 64% of professionals from ethnic minorities believed that ethnicity played a substantial role in determining access to opportunities in the sector (see **Figure 3**).
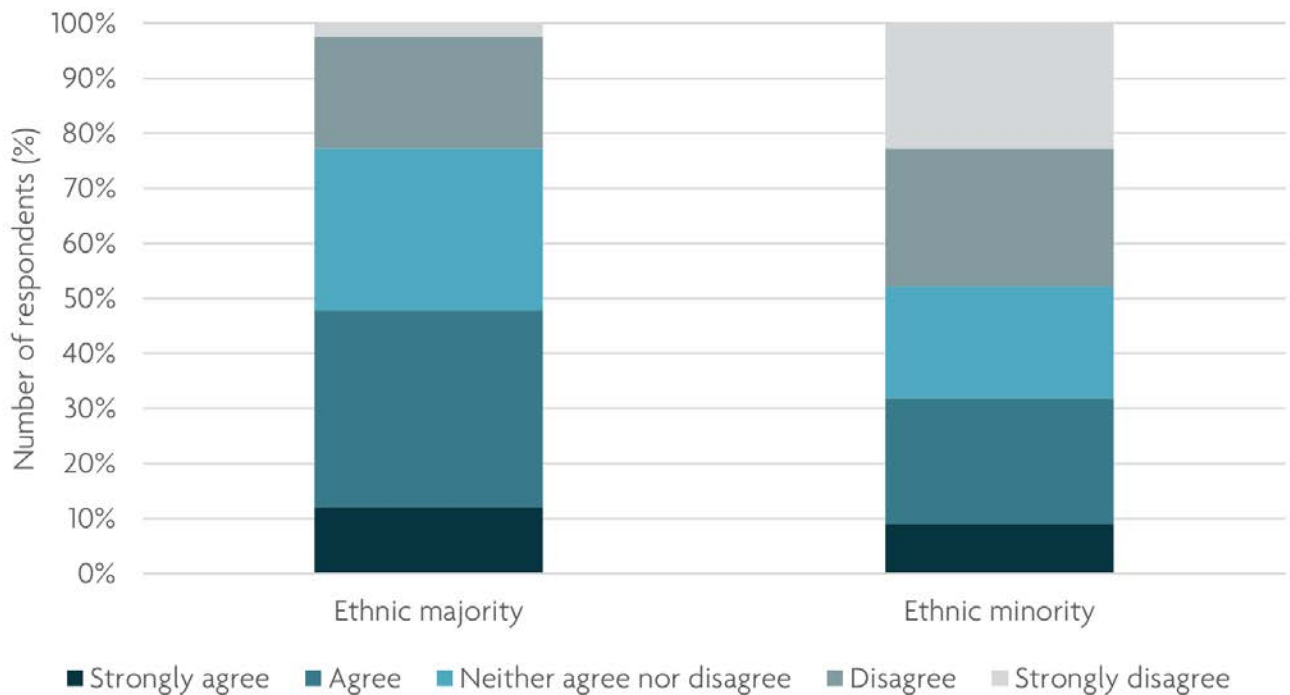
Figure 2. The percentage of survey respondents who thought equal opportunities exist for ethnic majorities and minorities, as per level of agreement
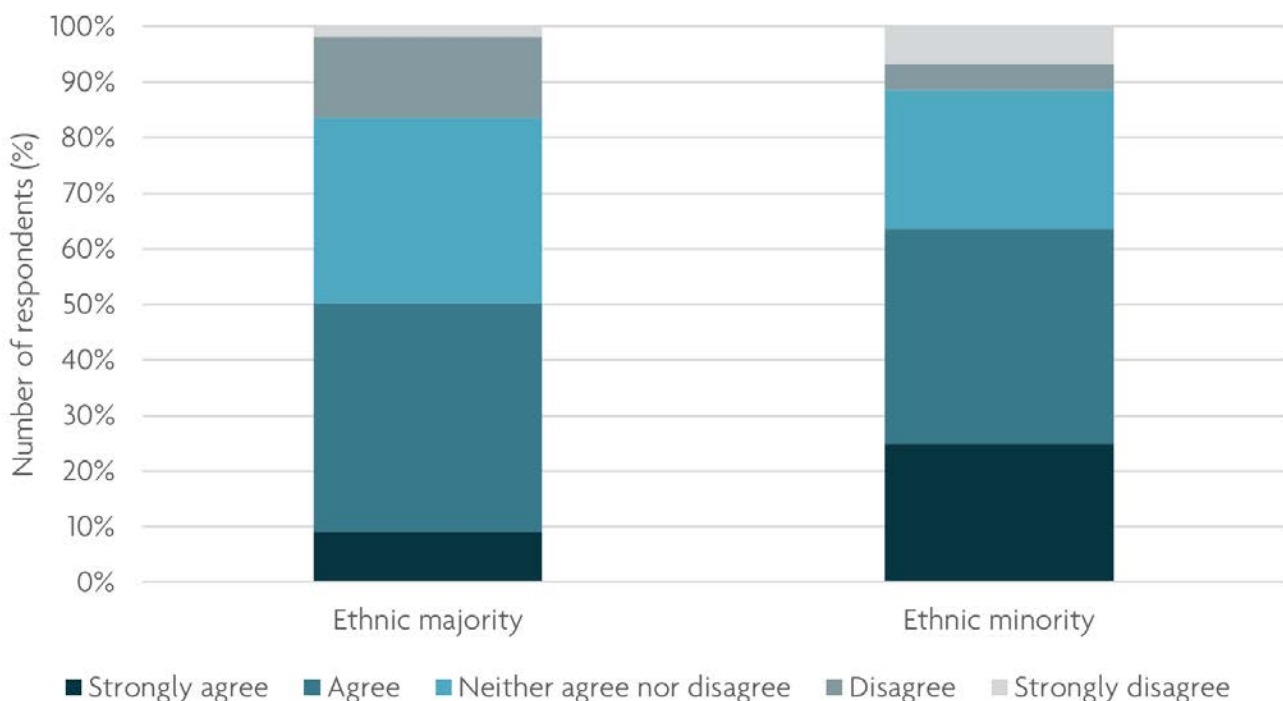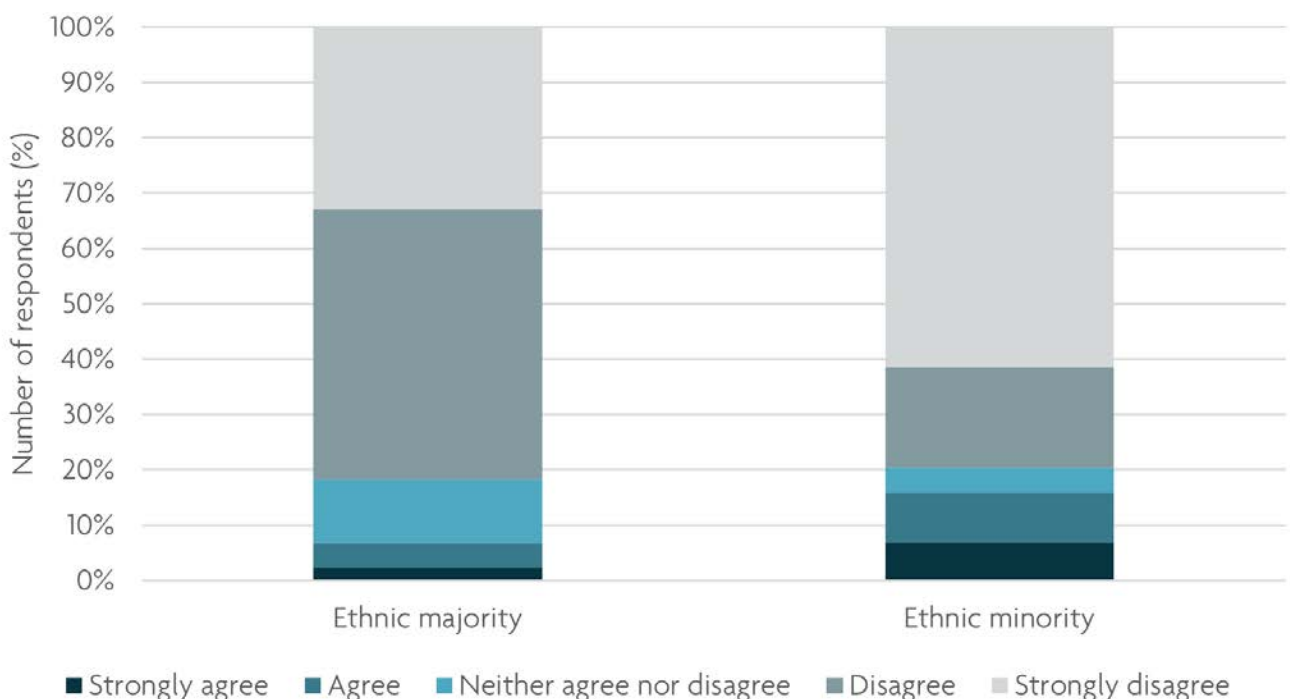
Figure 3. The percentage of survey respondents who thought that ethnicity plays an important role in determining access to opportunities across the sector, as per level of agreement

At an organisational level, only 32% of survey respondents from ethnic minorities believed that their organisations had conducive environments for candidates from ethnic minorities to progress in their careers (see **Figure 4**). The results were even starker when seniority was considered, as only 8% of respondents believed that ethnic minorities were represented at all levels of management in their organisations (see **Figure 5**).
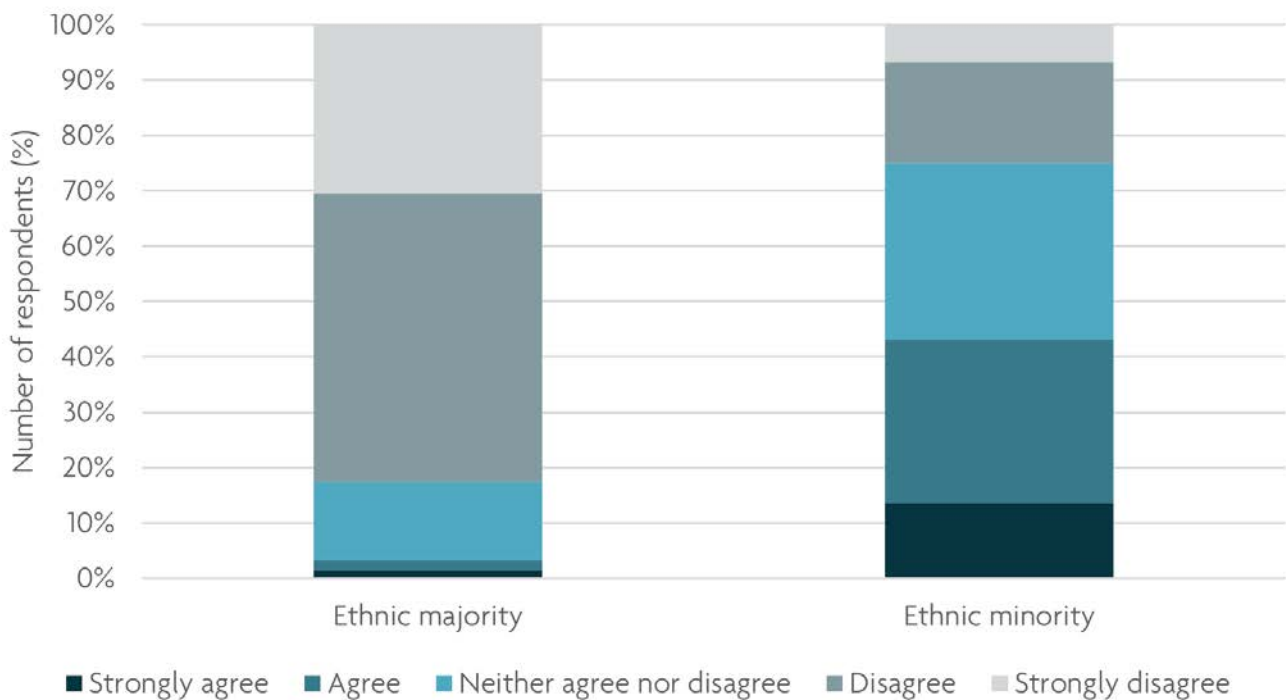

Figure 4. The percentage of survey respondents who thought that their organisation had a conducive environment for candidates from ethnic minorities to progress in their career, as per level of agreement

Figure 5. The percentage of survey respondents who thought that ethnic minorities were represented in all levels of management in their organisation, as per level of agreement

At a personal level (see **Figure 6**), 27% of ethnic majority professionals believed that their ethnicity had played no role in determining their access to opportunities in the sector, and only 13% believed that it had not had a positive impact. Conversely, over 44% of respondents from ethnic minorities believed that their ethnicity had played a negative role.

Figure 6. The percentage of survey respondents who thought that their ethnicity had played a detrimental/negative role in the opportunities available to them in the environment sector, as per level of agreement

4.   Discrimination at sites

Research participants reported facing substantial discrimination and racial abuse at sites. Even when they felt included within their organisations, while at client sites they often felt aware of how they were different from others within the environment sector. This entailed verbal abuse, insensitive jokes and, at times, concerns were expressed about their capabilities. Such doubt, however, was the least visible in niche, technical jobs.

Only 12% of survey respondents thought of associated groups such as clients and construction sites as inclusive. Since our survey sample contained an equal number of males and females, this could also be related strongly to gender.

> "Yeah, I think there's always sort of sexist jokes, racist jokes - there was, you know, some construction workers telling a racist joke when I was just right next to them doing my work at one site. You know just that sort of banter which you are kind of expected just to put up with."

5.   Feeling like a token

Several professionals from ethnic minorities reported that their inclusion in the workplace felt tokenistic, with many feeling that they had been hired to fulfil a diversity requirement within their organisation. Ethnic minority

research participants also reported struggling with impostor syndrome and feelings of inadequacy in the workplace, particularly where these settings were dominated by ethnic majority individuals. This typically led to individuals doubting their own capabilities and, at times, overworking to continually prove their worth.

> "I'm not sure what I'm doing here. I sort of get that feeling of impostor syndrome. I'm not quite sure if I'm worthy of being here or if I should be here."

> "You know I might have got in through the back door because of your uneven prejudices, but I shall over justify your choice."

> "I felt like at the time I was hired for the two diversity checks, ethnicity and being female."

6. Undue pressure to champion diversity

Some research participants felt they were the face of everything EDI-related and felt undue pressure to represent their community, as well as their organisation. A few even expressed uncertainty about wanting to champion diversity issues due to a fear of being seen as problematic or undeserving if they constantly discussed diversity; they did not want championing diversity to come at the cost of their careers.

7. Voicelessness

Most research participants from ethnic minorities in the interviews mentioned feeling voiceless at their workplaces. This ranged from the feeling that their opinions were not taken seriously to being outright ignored in meetings, especially with clients. Several research participants reported that, at times, clients even asked for white professionals.

Only 2% of ethnic majority respondents felt that they did not have a voice at their workplace, compared to 19% of respondents from ethnic minorities. Over 43% of ethnic minority respondents felt that their ethnicity impacted their voice at the workplace. Additionally, only 5% of ethnic majority respondents believed that their voice was not heard at the workplace, compared to 23% of those from ethnic minorities (see **Figure 7**). 25% of ethnic minority respondents felt that ethnicity made it difficult for their voice to be heard at the workplace, compared to 1% of ethnic majority respondents (see **Figure 8**).

Diversity washing

Research participants reported that many EDI initiatives felt like "diversity washing" – a play on the term whitewashing to describe the process of conveying a false impression about the diversity and inclusivity of an organisation or group. Employer EDI initiatives were often perceived as externally focused, seeking to change how the organisation is viewed by an external audience, and aimed to attract a more diverse pool of candidates through evolving recruitment practices. Internally focused initiatives were believed by some participants to pay lip-service to the cause, with professionals from ethnic minorities either being unaware of such initiatives or unaffected.

> "There's a variety, a bit like with greenwashing, it's the same with all kinds of ethnicities and underrepresented groups. There are people and organisations who realise they can't maintain what they're doing because it looks bad, and they have to change the kind of dressing. And there are other organisations who go this is fundamentally wrong and we're doing something, we're going to address it properly."

> "It's not just a tick box of 'oh, we've done that in 2021, we can forget about it'."
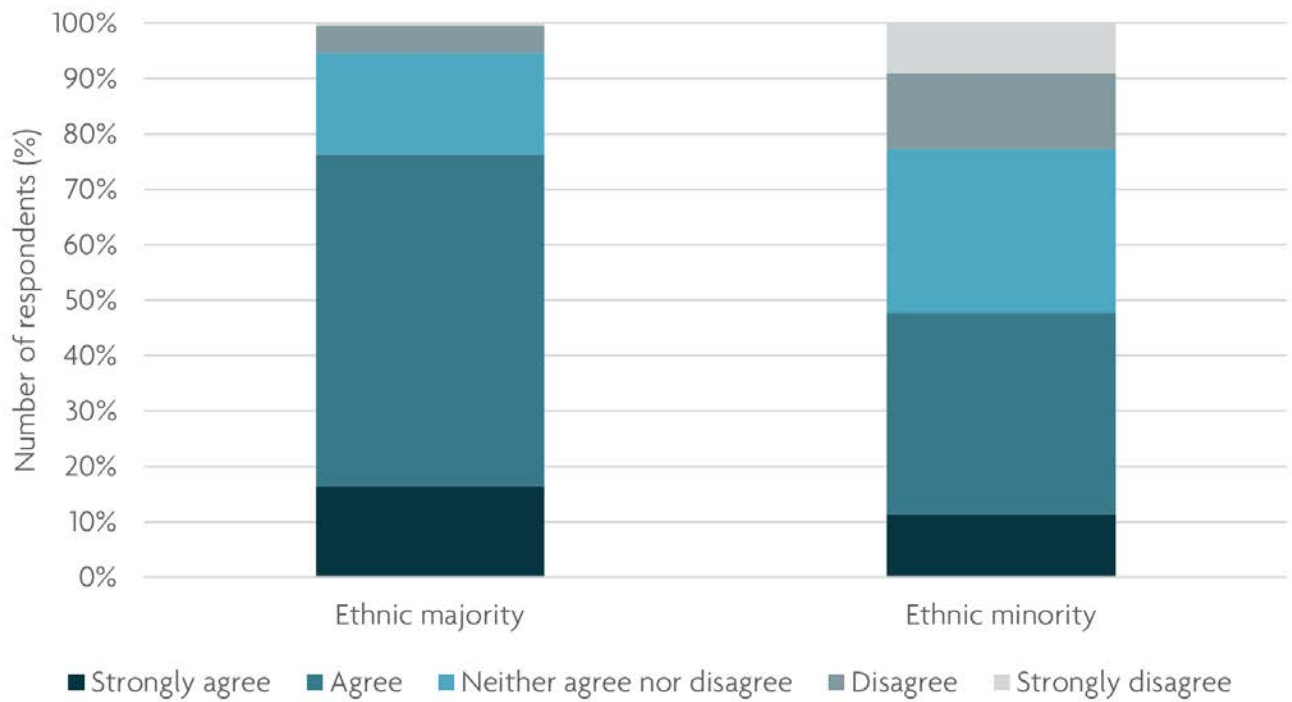
Figure 7. The percentage of survey respondents who thought that their voice was heard at the workplace, as per level of agreement
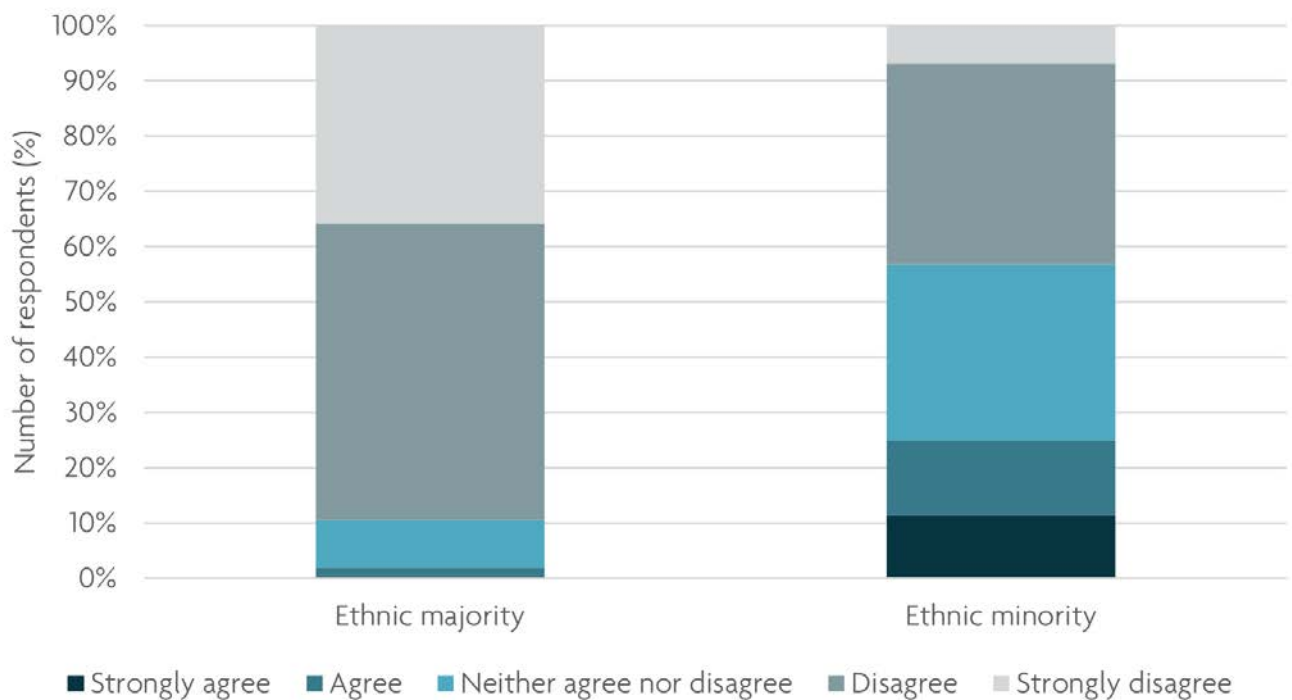
Figure 8. The percentage of survey respondents who thought that their ethnicity made it difficult for their voice to be heard at the workplace, as per level of agreement

Intersectionality of gender and ethnicity

Throughout the research, women tended to be more responsive about the impact that a lack of diversity within the sector had on them. Despite repeated attempts to reach out to men and using access channels that had as many, if not more, men as women, only 25% of the research sample was male. This may be because a woman from an ethnic minority is subject to discrimination more than a man from an ethnic minority, because of the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity. At times, it was difficult for women to delineate issues of one from the other. Though this research study focuses on ethnic diversity, the study brings to the fore the need to change mindsets and address issues of inclusion and diversity as a whole.

> "Gender is an equal influence alongside ethnicity on the diversity or lack of it within the environmental sector."

> "I was put in a position where I was the only woman and the only ethnic minority person, I felt a bit, I think, overwhelmed and I just didn't perform as well as a result."

> "Buying site gear for women like boots that fit and high vis jackets and we've got quite a few female engineers and we still struggle to buy appropriate gear up, small gloves and things like that, but it's just not geared up for women at all. Being Indian as well is like another layer of sort of added, uhm, what do you call? Sort of being more of an outsider."

Sectoral issues

Though a lot of the issues raised in this study could also be present in other sectors and workplaces, the environment sector faces its own specific challenges when it comes to diversity and the experiences of ethnic minority professionals.

Despite 89% of individual survey respondents believing that ethnic diversity is important in the environment sector, only 10% (25 individuals; 20 = ethnic majority, 5 = ethnic minority) of the total respondents believed that the sector had a strong focus on ethnic diversity. Relatedly, 73% of ethnic majority respondents and 80% of ethnic minority respondents believed that the sector was not ethnically diverse (see **Figure 9**).

The dominant understanding is that because of the racially white, financially middle-class and, in the case of the construction and engineering sectors, also male roots of the sector, the sector looks the way that it currently does. However, the sector is at a transitional point and things are changing slowly, with most organisations presenting a more gender balanced picture, at least at the junior levels. Ethnically and socio-economically the changes are considerably far behind. Organisations have been facing significant pressure internally and externally to change. Internal pressure is driven by mostly younger employees, who have grown up in world where diversity debates are given greater prominence. Growing numbers of employees who are female and from ethnic minorities leads to a stronger voice. External pressure is mostly driven by the changing socio-political and cultural climate in the United Kingdom.

Of the 27 organisations within the sector that completed our organisational survey, 18 reported collecting and monitoring data on ethnicity. However, only five shared their data on ethnicity with us, despite the survey being anonymous and confidential. This may be because the data was not to hand, they were not comfortable sharing data due to privacy or GDPR concerns or because of a fear of judgement.

Additionally, research participants felt that there was low awareness of employment opportunities in the environment sector. In instances where the sector's existence is known and understood, it is not seen as a stable career choice, often deterring those without the cushioning of racial and/or socio-economic privilege. Asian/Asian British research participants shared that within their communities there is a focus on more well-

known career choices, such as medicine and law, that are seen to provide individuals with a focused career path and defined growth opportunities. In participants' narratives, the widespread image of the sector as white and middle-class does not help in this regard. This image is not restricted to organisations within the sector, or to the sector's attractiveness for employment, and extends to activities related to the sector that contribute to the general image perceived by the public, encompassing pursuits such as hiking, for example.

Research participants from ethnic minorities expressed that the natural environment itself seems inaccessible, and some shared experiences of implicit racism encountered whilst on hikes. The tendency for environmental documentaries to be voiced by white, male voices was given as an example of how the environment and the sector can feel inaccessible to people from ethnic minorities, as this message reinforces the image of the sector as white and exclusive.

Geographical reasons have also contributed to the current state of the sector. A lot of organisations shared that being based in the countryside has played a part in the lack of diversity, as remote areas within the UK tend to be, traditionally, predominantly white.[11] Conversely, organisations with offices in areas like London were slightly more diverse. The move to remote working imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic provided organisations within the sector with opportunities to consciously improve diversity.

> "I can only speak in my experience, and it was just generally not knowing about the environmental sectors, not knowing what job options they were, I kind of feel like it's more getting people when they're studying then yeah that it moves from there."
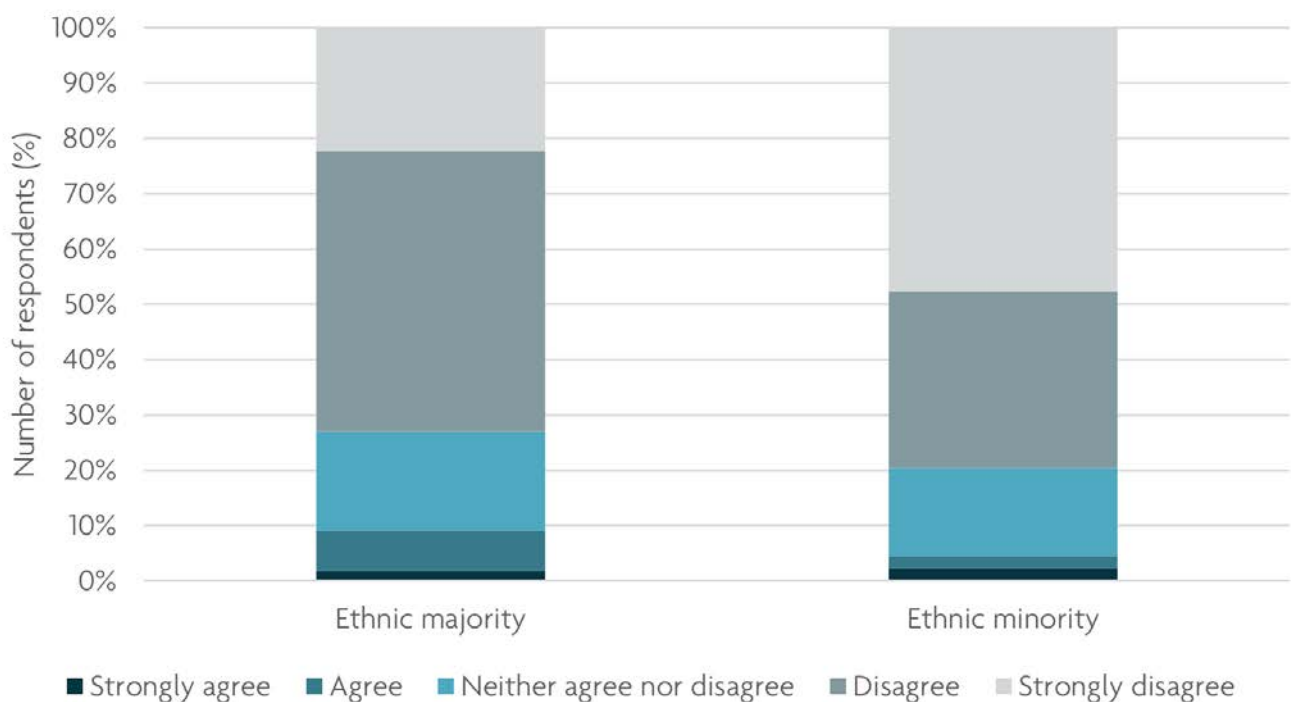
Figure 9. The percentage of survey respondents who thought that the environment sector is ethnically diverse, as per level of agreement

Recruitment issues

Most organisations are aware of recruitment issues related to diversity and are undertaking initiatives to improve access for professionals from ethnic minorities.

There is increased focus on the language of job adverts and the need to diversify the channels to which adverts are posted. Additionally, organisations are also looking at the types of skills that are required for certain job roles in order to increase the diversity of the candidates received. Other measures to better understand the barriers to ethnic minority individuals include monitoring ethnicity data for candidates to see where those from ethnic minorities are unsuccessful in the recruitment process.

> "I think that's a systemic issue because even the CVs and everything that we're getting through, there isn't that diversity even in the pool of people we're looking at."

> "My organisation has quite a few STEM ambassadors and they go into all sorts of schools where the offices are based around the country. So, I think things like that are what help expose children to careers in the environmental sector, scientific sector."

> "The recruitment system is itself inherently flawed because the kind of qualities or skills that we ask for are almost predispose certain groups to apply, and certain groups do not apply."

Staff retention

Measures reported to address poor retention of ethnic minority staff included one-off training sessions for existing staff members on EDI. However, many participants felt that the focus on recruitment issues overshadowed the need for impactful, internally focused measures to address retention, in particular those that go beyond standalone workshops. Despite organisations having BAME networks, these were viewed as only slightly effective in changing the experiences of people from ethnic minorities and, therefore, influencing retention.

Lack of trained professionals and training within the EDI space

EDI issues are sensitive and require people to be adequately trained, rather than expected to learn on the job. This would allow employees with protected characteristics to be able to seek the help needed to address EDI issues. In most organisations, EDI concerns are a relatively new focus, with new roles being created or new responsibilities added to existing roles. However, these roles are not necessarily taken on by trained EDI professionals and are often internally filled by people who have an interest in EDI issues. In the rare cases when these positions were filled by trained professionals, these research participants still felt constrained by either budgetary limitations or excessive workload. This led to inefficient redressal of EDI concerns, as well as unfair pressure on those conducting these roles. Participants implied that, in some ways, the creation of such roles and their consequent take-up seems to be a placeholder to manage perceptions, as opposed to genuine intent to increase inclusivity and diversity.

Ethnic minority professionals reported being unaware of who to talk to about challenges they faced within the organisations because of their ethnicity. In the few cases that they were aware, they were not sure of the job role(s) of the designated person.

Additionally, separation of EDI into solely human resources stops it from being a collective responsibility. Research participants in EDI roles felt that this meant that everyone starts to then treat EDI as something that is someone else's responsibility.

In the individual surveys, 73% of the total respondents believed that their organisation had a strong focus on being ethnically diverse (see **Figure 10** for breakdown of responses as per ethnicity), but only 26% of respondents believed that their organisation had been able to translate this intent into action (see **Figure 11** for breakdown of this number as per ethnicity).
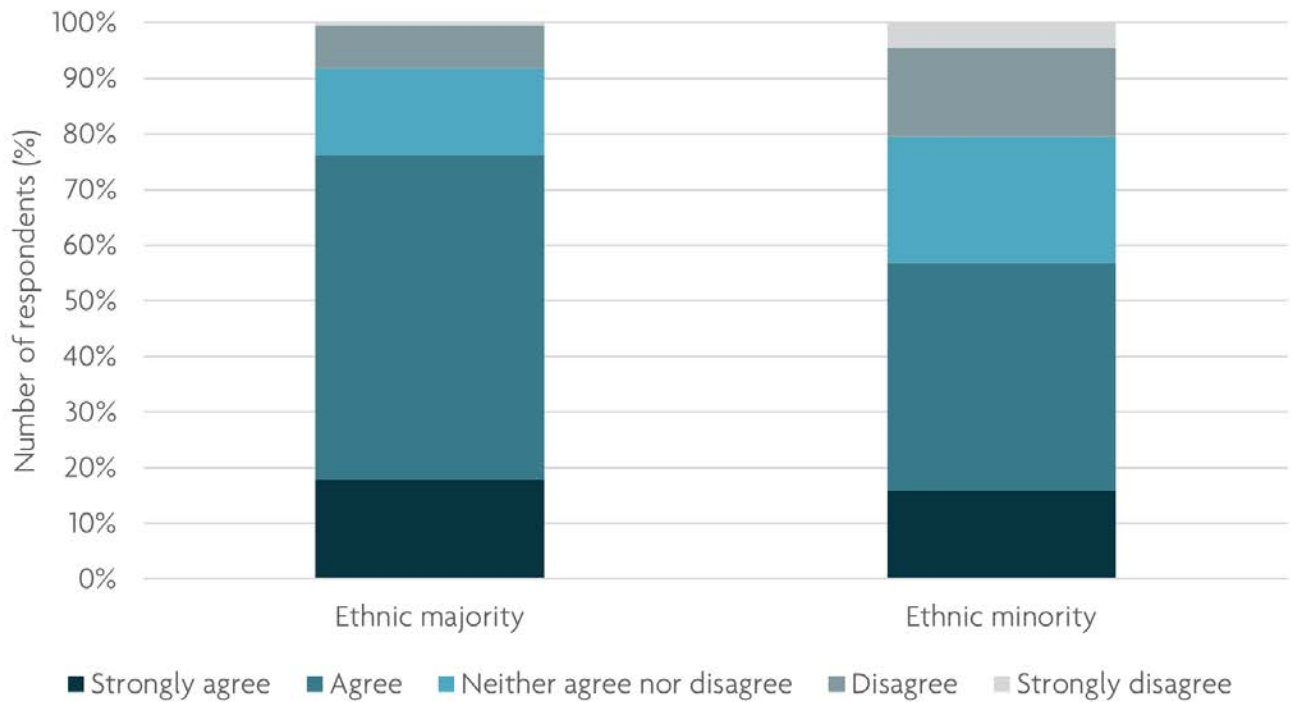
Figure 10. The percentage of survey respondents who thought that their organisation had a strong focus on being ethnically diverse (intent), as per level of agreement
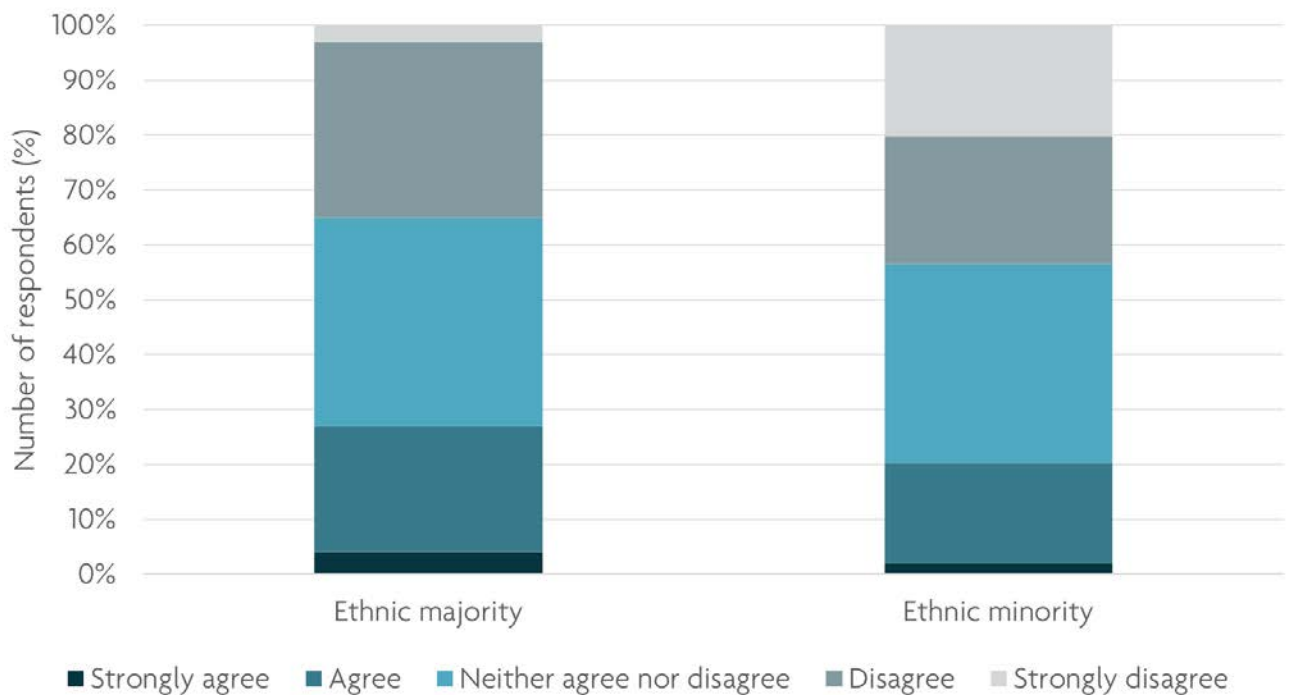
Figure 11. The percentage of survey respondents who thought that their organisation had been able to translate the intent to be ethnically diverse into action, as per level of agreement

"I wasn't provided with an induction at all by the organisation for the role and or given any resources or anything. I was just kind of asked to get on with it."

"I think they've chosen a very specific approach, which I'm assuming is based on their funding position of what is the minimum we can get away with doing."

"Knowing that you have this (EDI) issue, but then knowing that you can't really voice it because it may not be dealt with at all."

EDI knowledge sharing is increasing within the environment sector, and many organisations have either established, or are in the process of establishing, EDI networks to help the sector to move towards collectively addressing such issues.

Conclusion

Implicit or explicit biases which disadvantage professionals from ethnic minorities are not only seen in individuals, but can exist in the systems and processes of an organisation. These systems may be inherently biased or they may allow for biases to manifest and multiply; however, those who develop and maintain these systems have a part to play in addressing these biases. Within the environment sector, systemic issues can disadvantage ethnic minorities, and it is the responsibility of organisations and individuals to address and prevent discriminatory practices.

At a sector-wide level, an end-to-end overhaul is needed to enable the sector to attract a more diverse pool of candidates. It is particularly important to make the natural environment in general more accessible to ethnic minorities – this might include initiatives that encourage activities such as hiking, improved access to natural parks or ensuring environmental documentaries are presented by people of diverse ethnicities and genders. Once the perception of the natural environment itself changes, this could potentially attract more people from different backgrounds to consider and take up education and employment opportunities within the sector. Work is additionally needed to embed educational opportunities in nature at primary school level and to ensure comprehensive information is provided to secondary school age pupils about career opportunities available in the environment sector.

Employers need to recognise that diversity is much more than just numbers and is equally about the external image of organisations and the internal experiences of their employees. EDI initiatives should be understood as being critical to organisational culture, employee welfare and business success, and not be seen as an optional extra.

Organisations need to divert significant attention and resources to making career opportunities more defined, career growth clearer and benchmarks for performance evaluation more transparent. This would result in two positives for diversity. Firstly, this would help people without social and/or financial cushioning to understand what careers in the environment sector entail for them, thus attracting a more diverse pool of candidates, and secondly, specific career growth trajectories will improve the experiences of ethnic minority professionals, as clear benchmarks and processes would leave less scope for personal biases and preferences.

For ethnic minority individuals who are keen to get involved in BAME or EDI initiatives, or where organisations see a role for them in such initiatives, there should be a clearly defined responsibility structure in their job description, goal setting and appraisal process that does not inhibit their career growth. In doing this, those individuals should not have to juggle the demands of their day job and contributing to EDI initiatives, as these should be explicitly incorporated into their job role.

Organisations should also be mindful of the partner and client organisations they engage with and take on board. In particular, it may be appropriate to put in place checks to ensure employee welfare at client sites, as most participants have reported being racially abused in this setting. Another measure to address this may be to provide training and workshops for both staff and clients ahead of a project commencing.

Some funding bodies within the sector have started tying funding to diversity make-up or applying conditions to funding related to diversity. Though this has the potential to create superficial change and a focus on numbers, this could be the start of an overhaul. Organisations can also consider including diversity clauses, for example, related to training, safety or number of individuals, in contracts.

At an individual level, we need to be more empathetic towards those who are the same as us and those who are different to us. Though it is difficult for anybody to think of themselves as ethnically insensitive or racist, we all need to reflect on this and face our biases. Our biases are not necessarily only our own, they can be a result of our social conditioning. We need to continue to educate ourselves and keep up with an ever-changing socio-political climate.

Finally, positive change for diversity is not necessarily about stark overhaul at a particular point in time and then not sustaining this. Ensuring diversity and inclusion in the workplace is a continual process throughout the lifetime of an organisation and should underline the basis of everything that the organisation does.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the sector:

- Support programmes that specifically cater to increasing the engagement of ethnic minorities with the natural environment; for example, Black2Nature and Black Girls Hike UK CIC;

- Increase the visibility of employment opportunities within the sector through changes to the curriculum, and training and resources for careers advisors;

- Create and invest in scholarships, bursaries and internships aimed at ethnic minorities;

- Ensure that external engagement materials, activities and events are diverse and inclusive, enhancing visibility of ethnic minority professionals but avoiding tokenistic inclusion; and

- Explore the impact of intersectionality of people's experiences in the workplace through further research.

Recommendations for employers:

- Follow best practice in recruitment and ensure candidates are accepted from a wide range of educational backgrounds;

- Ensure that ethnic minority individuals have access to internal training that enhances their skills, as well as clear avenues for growth and promotion;

- Design and implement schemes to ensure that ethnic minority individuals feel comfortable to use their voice, and that this input is reflected in subsequent policies and activities;

- Investigate methods to improve staff experience whilst working outside of the office; for example, through client training prior to project commencement and the inclusion of diversity clauses within contracts. Adopt a zero tolerance attitude to racism and sexism on site and back staff who make complaints;

- EDI roles and responsblities should be thoughtfully designed and backed with adequate human and financial resources. Experienced EDI professionals should be recruited or existing staff given appropriate training;

- EDI training should be designed to be dynamic and continuous and should extend to all employees, irrespective of seniority, and all levels of management, promoting collective responsibility;

- Construct mechanisms for participation of ethnic minority individuals in the design of EDI initiatives and creation of feedback loops; and

- EDI initiatives need to be monitored and evaluated regularly to understand if they are having the intended impact, with transparency in determining what success looks like based on collectively determined metrics.

Recommendations for individuals:

- Individuals should practice empathy, especially towards those who have different lived experiences;

- Continuous effort should be directed towards educating oneself to keep up with an ever-changing socio-political milieu; and

- Introspection and self-reflection as practices can ensure that daily behaviour is more thoughtful.

Next steps for the IES

Systems change is difficult, and we don't pretend to have all the answers.

There is a need for further research, education and reform to identify and address the key barriers which result in low ethnic diversity across the sector and inspire those from ethnic minority backgrounds to pursue a career as an environmental profession.

We want to continue researching the issue within the environment sector, but we also believe that now is the time for action. It is time for educators, employers and professional bodies to take proactive steps to create an environmental profession that is accessible for any individual, irrespective of their background or circumstances. We believe it is important to promote a culture of inclusivity, where barriers are identified and solutions sought to dismantle them.

In continuation of our work to improve ethnic diversity in the sector and to advocate the importance of a diverse and inclusive environmental workforce, to complement our internal EDI plan,[7] we will be taking the following steps:

- Publishing resources on our members' career pathways, highlighting the diversity of routes into the sector and opportunities for career progression;

- Utilising our links with higher education institutions to publish best practice guidance on institutional and programme-specific EDI policies, with the aim of establishing EDI criteria for IES-accredited degree programmes;

- Providing training and workshops on EDI for IES members and employers; for example, training STEM Ambassadors and sign-posting to best practice guidance in this area;

- Examining our mentoring scheme to determine how we can best support individuals from ethnic minority communities to gain employment and flourish in the sector;

- Exploring the development of a placement scheme for individuals from ethnic minority communities;

- Investigating opportunities to provide greater access to IES events and CPD opportunities; for example, by offering sponsored event places;

- Striving to ensure external engagement activities, including all IES events, include a diverse panel of speakers and contributors; and

- Working to ensure continued investment in awareness-raising around EDI issues.

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Appendix. Quotes from research participants

This appendix presents quotes from the 22 interviews and 251 survey responses received to provide readers with a snapshot of our research, whilst substantiating our analysis. It puts forward various perceptions prevalent in and about ethnic diversity in the environment sector, as well as existing schemes and the way forward for diversity initiatives.

1.   Lack of diversity

"I noticed right away that there's not very good diversity ethnically, but I actually don't know if that's well understood within the organisation. There's like the executive levels of this organisation are 95% white, so there's absolutely a conversation to be had about us as staff as well. And I don't think the awareness of that is there at all."
"When I joined, I was the only person who wasn't white, and I think in the company's history I was like the first person to join who wasn't white."
"At a senior level, there is no ethnic representation and nor at the two grades below that which are more often roles that report to the senior team."
"At the moment we don't look like all parts of society and that's one of the big issues."
"I'm sort of used to being differentiated and it doesn't really bother me very much. Maybe there were instances that maybe someone more sensitive might have picked up and gone "oh hang on a second I did not like that at all". In fact, in my first interview, I had a question come up where basically, the MD kind of went "okay good you're not an asylum seeker."
"We are meant to serve the whole of England, so it should be important that we represent the society we serve. But we don't. We don't look, we don't represent, you know we don't look representational."
"People do recognise that we, the organisation, is very much made up with the same kind of type of person really."
"For such a long time, and even I mean, I had my family come visit like last week and I booked, we have a children's card and I booked for my little nieces and nephews to go into children garden and my niece, she's five, she asked, "why am I the only brown person here?", but you know, she shouldn't be able to see that at the age of four. Like why like she's so used to operating in a multicultural space, why am I still in London and this space is entirely white. Like you can pick up on it as soon as you get there."
"I feel outnumbered - there's just no diversity in my office at all, anymore."

2.   Impact of lack of diversity

"When I see only one group of people in a board meeting or a client meeting, and there's no diversity in there, you know for different backgrounds, sometimes I do feel intimidated thinking, what would they think if I say something? And would that go right over there? Misunderstand?"
"If I were a junior person coming in and this was my first job, it would probably have changed my perception, changed my whole experience and I might not have hung around. I think lack of diversity probably would have had a big impact."
"In terms of some of the feedback I've had anecdotally, people are having the worst experiences, in terms of how this organisation feels for ethnic minority staff. Like there are really bad experiences people are having."

"You do feel like a bit of an outsider."

"I have had to make more effort to fit in with the traditional white English culture and almost downplay the half of me that is not white. So while it has not meant I have no opportunities, it does feel lonely and uncomfortable. I also know that I am in a privileged position of being able to choose to downplay my difference as I'm mixed race, (though it's horrible to do so)."

"I do know for a fact that some clients will prefer to speak to somebody with a name that they can pronounce, for instance. It's not, anything else is just convenience, and so you know, yes, so there is a definite role that my ethnicity has played there,"

"Is the culture changing? Current management has inherited a diverse workforce but are unfortunately not treating them equally. Grievances have been initiated. Management is old, male, and white."

3. Diversity washing

"There's a variety, a bit like with greenwashing, it's the same with all kinds of ethnicities. There are people and organisations who realise they can't maintain what they're doing because it looks bad, and they must change the kind of dressing. And there are other organisations who go this is fundamentally wrong and we're doing something, we're going to address it properly."

"It's just emails to be honest. Emails about diversity. There's nothing, nothing, that I've actually seen that I think - ohh yeah, this looks like something's changing."

"I feel there is a lot of talk in Government and organisations, but more real actions are needed to improve diversity."

"I think there is talk about ethnic diversity, inclusion, promotion but no action. BAME are excluded from opportunities through a combination of conscious and unconscious bias. I think it is unhelpful that managers/ selectors/sifters/short listers know the ethnicity of applicants whilst they so called blind sift applications. I think candidate shortlisting should be done externally or outside of area or by a panel of people who include BAME."

4. Tokenism

"You know I might have got in through the back door because of your uneven prejudices, but I shall over justify your choice."

"They tried to get me to do a task and they were quite up front about it. They said to be honest "we feel as if we should have at least one black face presenting. Would you at least try?". So, I went along to the screen test, and I was absolutely useless, really was useless, but they offered me the job."

"I feel I have been appointed to help with the ethnicity numbers."

5. The question of voice

"Being missed out of email chains I find is a really common thing. I don't know why I feel like maybe I'm forgotten. It seems to just be me, so I think that's a bit strange. I think mainly things like being missed out of email chains makes me not want to speak up. There is always something that I'm interested in and it is known that I'm interested in it and that kind of affects me because I think did someone just forget to think about me or what? To be honest it feels so normal and sadly, pretty normal that I don't even think about bringing it up. I've never ever thought to speak to HR about it or anything."

"I don't feel comfortable to say something if I was the only person of colour there."

"I always enter a job knowing that I am a black woman and so people are not going to take me that seriously, first off and I always know that people will react to me in a certain way initially."

"I know actually in my early days I am aware a little bit that I did have colleagues who were white and male who being paid a bit more than me. Not that I ever brought it up because I was too timid and too shy about it."

"We're having a meeting with somebody else and we both kind of give our opinion or I'm sort of talked over a little bit, but I've now sort of grown the confidence to stop in their tracks and say no hang on, let me finish here I've got something to say here. I think I am heard now, but I think at times I think unconsciously, probably you know, there's a little bit there, and sometimes I don't even pick up on it. And I reflect on it afterwards and think, oh hang on a minute my view wasn't put across as much as the other person's. Is that because I'm Asian. I don't have that same credibility."

"Ethnic members of the organisation felt you know it that they weren't listened to. They that ideas they had didn't come to fruition."

6. Relatability, belongingness and networks

"I think a lot of it is to do with, maybe to do with connections, a lot of it is to do with who you are friendly with, I think from what I can see anyway. I think the lack of relatability makes it harder for a black person say to move up. Because for me, there's a lot of... just such a lack of relatability to so many things, just even in general conversations. I get lost often."

7. Pressure on ethnic minority individuals

"I am often used by the organisation to talk about diversity and inclusivity and requested to be involved in BAME activities at work - however this is in addition to workload and feel that the organisation adds pressure on me and other BAME colleagues to improve diversity and inclusivity without undertaking work themselves - i.e., improvements won't take place unless BAME people do the work (sufficient resource is not provided to support EDI to instil improvement). Previous roles denied that staff needed any equality training although it was available and was and is still perceived by colleagues as a waste of time."

"I think it's quite hard to stay unbiased because I do want to champion more women and more ethnic minorities. But at the same time, I can't be seen to favour one type of person compared to another."

"There can be a huge burden placed on the few ethnic minority professionals we have to talk about their lived experience or to kind of be rolled out for you know whatever it is and yeah that they can't. You can't just rely on a few people to kind of drive this agenda forward. You want to tell them that you can catch a break. You don't have to be talking about your protective characteristics all the time or championing that cause, but you want to tell them. But then again, if you tell them that you kind of feel like that, who is going to. It's quite an issue for change to come because immediately by being under any of the EDI umbrella, you automatically are expected to be an advocate or a champion."

"We have a commitment to have a person of colour on the trustee board. We're really trying to find people who are sort of senior in the environment movement. And of course, they've been snapped up left, right and centre. The last person who is now on two boards."

8. Cultural barriers

"I know Asian Indian that you are pushed down this very kind of engineering or science or maths or you know, lawyer. I've got loads of cousins who are lawyers and it's that's what's pushed. And I don't think they even know that the environmental sector exists."

"There's like quite a lot of pressure on me growing up to fix an academic success, and especially there was a focus on doing a degree to getting it like a successful stable job, not just, I guess maybe for other people would be more just out of interest and see where things go. My parents are very focussed on getting a specific goal at the end for me."

"I think one of the issues is that the environmental sector is not well paid and culturally - immigrants or those from an immigrant background strive for high value and steady careers - neither of which are associated with the environmental sector and therefore make it less attractive or not a realistic or considered option."

9. Recruitment

"Our profile – the way in which we're advertising or where we're advertising is perhaps not reaching out to a diverse set of communities."

"There's something about how and where we advertise those roles and how we describe our organisation. We're trying to be a lot more careful about the type of imagery that we use and also about where we advertise and how we describe our organisation."

"There's a real issue around the language we use that we're just not connecting with people and then we've also had some feedback. We do have evidence that says that people struggle – and this has come from ethnic minorities as well – people really struggle with the competency-based application forms. And then also the interviews that it's just, it is a skill, and we don't support people in, you know, in filling our application forms, or kind of preparing people for interview. So, if we're going to be asking people to interview in a certain way, I think there's a lot more that we could be doing around supporting them to go through that process."

"I think that's a systemic issue because even the CVs and everything that we come that we're getting through there isn't that diversity even in the pool of people we're looking at."

"The recruitment system is itself inherently flawed because the kind of qualities or skills that we ask for are almost predispose certain groups to apply, and certain groups do not apply."

"We actually have quite a lot of fairly robust conversations with organisations about those criteria and getting them to really challenge themselves on why they've specified certain things. You know aptitudes rather than skills, and you know to make their roles more accessible to greater numbers of people, and actually really thinking, do we need this? Is this just the role profile that we've had for this role for 20 years and we filled that role with the same sort of person for 20 years? And if so, is that really?"

"So, you have to bring rigour, into the selection, performance and development process and underpin that by data and then you adjust the process based on the data to remove and minimised the bias."

"On a macro level, there is a skill shortage, I get that. But it's a convenient excuse that the candidates don't exist, frankly, that's rubbish on a micro level. On a macro level, there may be some truth into that, but on a micro level, no, you can't possibly tell me there aren't enough BAME environmental specialists for one organisation. Come on, that's rubbish."

10. Career progression and role models

"A couple of years ago, when I joined the performance management process, the promotion process basically showed that you know if you're white and male, you are three times more likely to get a high-performance mark, and you are three times more likely to be promoted."

"The promotions process in my company at the time was just a mess. It was different rules. Some people didn't have to meet all the criteria, I did, and I never really got a straight answer of why I was not getting promoted."

"A lot of people from other ethnicities are really qualified, a lot more qualified, but you would find them doing jobs that is, which is supposed to be done by someone else who is underqualified. Yeah, most of them are overqualified for their roles. Why is that so? I would say they would need to look at these employees or overqualified and not doing the roles equal to the qualification and skill set and find out what's wrong, what's happening."

"Frankly, I think in both engineering construction and environmental sectors, your network and confidence is more important than your competence."

"Looking at how hard it is to progress in career, I see that it's not moving. I don't know whether it's my background, but I feel I've not been given the opportunity and whether somebody else with less qualification would get the job immediately, so I have questioned that in the last two years and whether is it something I'm doing wrong or something, I'm not fulfilling my qualification wise. Or is it my background?"

"I don't think I've been listened to asking for progression. So, I sometimes I do feel trapped doing the same thing repeatedly, hitting a wall not moving anywhere."

"They keep changing the goalpost, there is always a block to moving upwards."

"Management teams, no matter what sector you go at, when you get to a certain point are more homogenous than they are diverse."

"I just don't feel like I've ever really, really had anyone to look up to."

11.   Organisational challenges
11.1. HR related issues

"Most organisations don't have the data to minimise bias and the HR professionals either don't have the skill to do it or the organisation doesn't have the will for them to do it."

"HR are very much in a sort of processed mechanistic space of kind of looking at the recruitment as a process. So looking at whilst they are open to kind of looking at tweaking kind of bits of it, they're very… they're very much less open to looking at the process as a whole and actually thinking about how we could really do things differently."

"[my organisation] is an organisation where people have been here for many years, and so they tend to think they know their roles inside out and they know what's best. So, something like performance management, that's another area that needs to change. I don't think the person who leads on that will be in agreement with me at all, and so that will be a battle."

"There is no intent that is made clear in terms of hiring policies and practices, for instance to be more diverse or in terms of going out there and making the organisation, making employees feel like there's a focus on ethnic diversity, or there is not even that kind of communication about issues around ethnic diversity happening."

"I think there's a naivety in thinking that they think that what they're doing around recruitment is enough. Uhm, they've implemented some changes around recruitment this year, for example. And I think they're expecting that it's going to show that you know, there's a great improvement. Well, maybe not a great improvement, but an improvement, and I think that it's gonna show that absolutely nothing's changed."

"They're recruiting for people, and there's been no talk about changing the language of the job ads to try and attract a more diverse group of people to apply."

11.2. Lack of empathy and/or understanding of diversity issues

"Uhm, that there was an awful lot of talking about talking about talking and not useful action."

"What I've noticed for most ethnic minority staff is just like a complete lack of cultural competence or cultural intelligence from a lot of staff in terms of the things that have been said or the way that yeah, progression occurs. Or so, like all the barriers that people have raised with me truly stem from just a complete lack of care. But also like lack of awareness, it's not malicious, it's a by-product of the fact that you just think you're doing things in a fine way and you don't actually know what it means to think about something from someone else's perspective."

"I've had questions like, uh, "are you telling me that our recruitment processes are biased?" I was like, "well, well, yes I am," it's like "well, if they are, I need someone you know I need… I want to know" it's like, "well, look at the screen. You know we're all sitting in this meeting because we've all you know, the systems worked well for us. We've all got to a certain grade within the organisation, and you know, it's fine for us. But actually, there's a real lack of diversity" in you know what about for everyone else you know, like speak to the people who don't get through the sift. Why is it not working for them?"

"You know questions around well we need the right person for the role, yes, but are you the right person to be saying who the right person for the role is? You know, let's challenge ourselves about what we mean by that. So yeah, I think a lot of it does come from them, that there is just that real lack of lived experience but also kind of not having been in contact really with people who have that lived or have shared that lived experience with them so they just don't get it."

"I think they can say the right things if you ask them, but then there's very little… particularly if look at the directors that sit under the Exec committee, a few of them are champions of networks, some of them aren't very active. But really that you don't see anything else from them in terms of EDI, I say there's a real lack of leadership around it in the organisation."

"I sort of get comments like you know it's not the only thing that I do, you know there are other parts of my role that you know I can't spend all my time dedicated to EDI. Well, no that's not what I'm asking you to do, but it's not something that is just going to happen on its own, that they really need to kind of get behind it and lead it. And they'll say the right things you know, and kind of on video calls or kind of conferences and stuff. I think this is where they're going to get into trouble quite soon - is that it's then not translating and people are picking up and saying well at the Conference in March you said this and now… and what you know now it's August - what's happened? What have you done about it? Why? Why is this not changed?"

"Lots of diversity programmes kind of put the emphasis on the wrong syllable and by that, I mean you know there's a focus on fixing the people. We will make the ethnic minorities do mentoring, so they're more like us etc., and essentially the focus is not on ensuring that the evaluation development systems are free from bias and the best breakthrough, et cetera. And then a lot of organisations then compound that by doing a lot of attraction work. So, you know they spend a lot of time getting diverse groups interested in the sector, but then you know they hit these evaluation systems, which essentially disadvantage them and keep them out. So, there's a lot of wasted effort drawing a diverse pool into the sector, but then hit these requirements and can't go any further and that perpetuates a negative cycle."

12. Sectoral challenges

"I believe that the diversity of the sector is very likely to approximately represent the diversity of applicants to positions, and of qualified graduates from universities in the relevant fields, while leadership positions are likely to approximately reflect the diversity of people historically entering these fields, and therefore reflects the diversity of the people with more experience."

"I don't feel that the environmental sector is a place that most people, regardless of ethnicity, aspire to work in. Most people I know who work in this sector do so because of a wider interest in the environment. Most of these people are white. If people from more ethnically diverse backgrounds already have to work harder than most white people just to get to the same place in a career, why would they necessarily choose something that did not seem aspirational or rewarding? I think the environmental sector is niche, even for white people, so I don't see it as a surprise that those who have the odds stacked against them anyway would want to get into a sector that doesn't really pay well, unless they were passionate about it."

"There's also something around tradition as well. Nature conservation as a as a as a sector if you like, has been around since about the 1940s. And at the end, in the 1940s it was very traditional. It was done by, you know, people who looked like me, white, male, and middle class. And it was seen to be very much the privilege if you like of middle class to be, you know able to access and enjoy the countryside."

"The environment sector is often based in rural areas with little or no ethnic diversity. Hard to attract people to jobs in locations where they see no role model and do not have the community support around them."

"Geographical location would also have an impact. For example, if I was Black or Asian, I would be more likely to notice my ethnicity affecting my experiences if I was based in Devon than if I was based in a more racially diverse area such as Bradford."

13. White privilege: perceptions of ethnic majority professionals

"The questions made me question whether my ethnicity has been a helping factor in my opportunities/ experience in the sector and workplace."

"Whilst where I work is not diverse, there is a big push to re-balance the organisation and become more inclusive. If this hadn't happened, I would have been less aware of how un-diverse we are."

"As a white person completing this though I feel that I am unable to answer some of the questions because I have not ever had to think about some of these aspects before."

"I am white, but a huge B.A.M.E ally!"

"We should be looking for meritocracy and not ethnicity. Reducing and grouping an individual based on the colour of their skin or culture is demoralising and condescending."

"I would expect most organisations to select the most appropriate members for the position available irrespective of ethnicity, based on ability. I believe this is the correct approach for all organisations, profit or otherwise and I see no evidence to the contrary that this is not the case other than where it is necessary to appoint a person from a specific ethnicity to achieve diversity quota. To do anything other than appoint on merit, would be construed as 'racist'."

14. Associated organisations

"Back when I first started and I started going out to site doing field work, I even had like a drilling contractor say, "oh, I don't see many people that look like you" and now he didn't mean it by gender, he meant it by race."

"When I was on site where, the site agents and you've got to listen to their rude jokes and things like that."

15. EDI focus and role
15.1. Why is there a sudden organisational/sectoral focus on diversity?

"I think, a recognition that as an organisation their diversity is really poor. I know the environment sector, it's poor anyway, but I think they recognise that for them it was, you know they were even worse. And I think there was a bit of momentum off the back of the Black Lives Matter movement last year."

"Well, I think the fact that the realisation and the almost universal realisation that there's a problem was hugely important because I don't think we had that before."

"We were having feedback from certain customers or members of the public that they were really surprised not to see cultural representation. We were being provided with feedback from an external view before we even started to look at it."

> "BLM last summer literally spurred them into action and forced them to designate funding to EDI issues."

15.2. Why is an EDI role needed?

> "It's frustrating, but then, also, I think it's another one of those things where it's like, I wouldn't know who to speak to about that. So, like who would, who would be able to kind of understand or relate so unfortunately you do kind of get used to just not…"

> "There is not enough organisational support, or culture that allows to voice out how you feel in terms of race issues, like there's nobody who can who understands or there's nobody you can approach in terms of like the EDI head for instance, or the line manager is not educated in EDI issues so much that you can voice it out."

15.3. Why was an EDI role created?

> "It was client-led really. The guy who was pushing for it was saying we need to understand what these diversity impacts assessments are and we need to be pushing it, so that's where it came from."

> "We can't just rely on staff networks, which is essentially a voluntary role to change anything. So, a couple of the network champions got together and wrote a proposal to get some resource in and that's how it came about."

15.4. Where do/should EDI roles sit?

> "It is presented as a technical director role I think because they want it to be technical rather than getting embroiled in HR and therefore people think, well, there's an HR issue, it's nothing to do with the core people within our business."

> "I think where EDI sits in the organisation, which has an impact on the governance of it really, and how decisions are made and how linked in it is with other work streams. So, it very much sort of sits out on a limb and it is sort of on its own which has caused problems with it then not being fully integrated into our people strategy or a workforce strategy."

> "I wanted to take EDI on as my remit because naturally I felt that it sits very well with resourcing because we are the functions that are bringing new co-workers into the organisation."

15.5. What are the challenges that EDI professionals face?
15.5.1. Lack of training

> "It can be a very difficult area to work in because you can deal with some really quite difficult situations and people who are very upset. One of the things that I'm recognising is that I probably need to do formal training, or you know, even just attend some conferences or something like that."

> "I have seen a lot of white EDI professionals who don't do any kind of learning and development for themselves around people's lived experience and how to start thinking in a certain way. And I find it really disgusting because fundamentally you are not trying to do the work from that perspective of empathy and that means you're not doing a good job."

15.5.2. Lack of resources

> "It's just such a huge agenda for just me to manage, and I work part time as well. There needs to be awareness of the limitations of the fact that you've hired one person to do this job on a part time basis, so my capacity is very limited."

> "The funding model seems very like we're just going to pull money out of thin air and trying to pull it from places to make up whatever it is you tell us you need, as opposed to like getting a budget and being told you can use that how you want to use it."

15.5.3. Monitoring issues

> "We probably need to find better ways of monitoring. The monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of equality, diversity, inclusion policies are really important. There is an almost universal reluctance to participate in monitoring activities on equality and diversity."

16. Kinds of initiatives

> "My company has tried to work with local charities to kind of expose people you know, you know you can do apprenticeships in consultancy, engineering, and things like that. So there has been work in the past, but it just so happens that you know it's been with local charities, and these are the local charities close to the head office."

> "We have a method of recruitment called blind auditioning which remove CVs and applications entirely and is kind of an anonymous skill-based assessment which reflects what you doing in your day job and that can be applied to a number of different disciplines. The results for diversity are fantastic out of the present success rates for women and BAME groups have jumped by more than 30% of the shortlisting stage. The other thing that we've done, which is very successful is our reverse mentoring programme which essentially junior people mentor the senior people."

> "I managed to get the Champions from our staff networks from formal time for their roles, so it's only half a day or between half a day and a day a week, but it's dedicated, ring-fenced time for them to do that role rather than join them trying to do it on top of everything else. So, the idea is that they have some stuff that gets taken off them so they can then do this role because it's recognised as a corporate role."

> "We put diversity interventions into the performance management process, which meant that in the rooms the decision makers have the diversity make-up of the room, they had to have evidence requirements for why they would give this performance rating or not, and the comply or explain principle. Within three years we've eliminated disproportionality and performance and talent, and promotion rates for diverse groups are proportionately better."

> "To support our commitment, as part of our management development programme we introduced EDI training as a fundamental module for all right managers to attend, but at the end of this month we will start compulsory EDI training for all co-workers right across the board. And managers will need to attend that as well."

> "Of all the things that we're doing, simply recognising it as being an issue, being open about the fact that there are issues is a huge achievement, and something that we we ought to be proud of."

> "We've actually included equality, diversity, diversity and inclusion as one of the four pillars of our strategic goals of the organisation and really now it underpins every project that we're involved in so and I mean diversity in in its broadest sense as well."

17. The way forward
17.1. Sectoral focus
17.1.1. Education

> "The work maybe needs to start earlier in people's journey when they're in education to open the door as to you know, these are the kind of careers you can have."

"It's a long-term thing about exposing children to environmental sector jobs from a very young age, I think."

"Given we need to recruit people with the relevant knowledge, perhaps we can also focus on assisting universities with their uptake of these types of courses or encourage those in schools to take up the courses."

"A greater emphasis on marketing and inspiring younger children, such as through STEM ambassador events, careers fairs, etc. can be much more beneficial to address the situation in the longer term."

17.1.2. Access to the environment

"I saw on TV, there's a group that's been set up just for females from ethnic minorities, where they go on walks and take people out to the countryside to see and speak about the environment that perhaps they wouldn't normally have done because they thought "oh I can't go walking there because people might look at me or whatever.""

"Traditionally we've been an organisation that's been largely focused on the rural. Coming much more into the towns now and talking about the quality of green space that is around people and dealing with issues that might stop people currently from using it, bike antisocial behaviour, or poor lighting or whatever it could be good."

17.1.3. Changing associated factors

"Even things like when you think of things like, say, wildlife programmes on TV, It's always... It's generally always used to be a white presenter and often also outdoor, like you know, hiking, camping, that's often seen as more... I guess a white middle class hobby. And I know like a friend of mine from India, she said she loves hiking but she often says sometimes when she's out hiking and she didn't see anyone else of her colour and she sees people look at her because, I guess, because they don't often see them. And it makes her feel self-conscious, so I do think the whole sort of.... even as a hobby as a field, it's the very same thing."

17.2. Organisational focus
17.2.1. Open conversations and cultural intelligence training

"A good place to start would be for all organisations in the industry to recognise the issue."

"I will go down the route of cultural intelligence training for all of our staff. They're labour intensive, they take time, but they lead to results in terms of how people think about things and the effort they make, especially if you do them on a consistent basis. So, you know the training is like the first step and then you do refresher discussion forums that team leads can facilitate themselves, like how do you do it so it's like at a more local level and so I think that's a huge part of getting the mindset to shift really slowly."

"Getting people to join staff networks, especially in the areas that we have problems and like empowering them to speak truth to power like speak up to their senior leaders. Like show people they're welcome to say something and there's no retribution for that, basically."

"Educating the existing workforce is important, otherwise you're not going to be able to foster an inclusive environment that will make, that will attract more diverse candidates and you'll forever be stuck in the cycle of just hiring the same type of people."

17.2.2. Supportive organisational structure

"There's obviously that danger of hiring candidates who are more diverse but not actually having an organisation culture that supports their growth, for instance. So, you have the numbers to show that, well, we're diverse. But are the experiences of people who are diverse or who come from protected characteristics equitable or egalitarian in any way now that makes a lot of sense."

17.2.3. Recruitment

"We could look at what we call the role titles, we could look at the language we use, we could look at what kind of, what qualifications, what skills like quite a lot of our roles historically have always asked for a degree."

"I'm actually on the side of thinking that for senior recruitment we need to completely change the recruitment system so that you need to have diverse shortlists so you can't interview unless you have some ethnic minorities within that short list to interview."

"I would be collecting, collating data, and then making some very serious changes to the performance management system and then to our recruitment system overall. I would say like some simple things like diverse panels like the way we advertise their jobs, changing the language, all of that. We don't do any of that, and I don't think it helps at all."

"Just a very simple clear message that we want people of all ethnic minorities to come forward. I think it would help them. I think it would encourage them and maybe just give them that little push to think you know I can make a difference and my opinion really counts."

17.2.4. Career development

"I would be concentrating not only on the intake but on a high potentials programme work where, whoever they are, whether they be asking minorities, women etc., etc., You identify this high potential through their accelerator programmes that you can access which are universally accepted by organisations in the environment space so that it can accelerate some of that career development."

"When looking at diversity you look at it in three stages, entry, mid-career and senior level. It's easy to hide between entry level statistics and people will give you wonderful stats about their apprentice programme or their graduate programme, but the decisions are made in middle management. So, it's midpoint career that's important. We need to have diversity KPIs linked to the performance management system for those middle managers and for executives, that you need to demonstrate competence in managing diversity, etc., to move through the levels."

17.3. Collective pressure

"If our clients are asking for more diversity or wanting to see change within our organisation, I think that would push my company or any company really to take it seriously and really drive it."

"If I was the funding body for the environmental sector, I would be setting requirements around diverse teams and sort of top ups to funding for additional diversity."

"There are opportunities where you can start to make requirements of supplying organisations to meet certain criteria. For example, you know at the very least, to have their own policy for equality and diversity. There are policy opportunities around basically just being just being more demanding of other organisations that you're potentially working with or contracting with or who are supplying your organisation."

Summing up: A personal narrative

The following quote, shared during the research by an environmental professional from an ethnic minority background, has been included in full to provide an unabridged account of some common experiences and issues encountered by ethnic minority professionals within the sector.

"Not a single Black person in top management. When two white people and one black person of a similar age join a team and team members interact more and reach out more to the white folks, then that is wrong. These two are directly and indirectly mentored by senior colleagues in the team but the Black person always has to go above and beyond to get attention. In 5 years, who among those three do you think will be in a great position for some sort of promotion? It is happening as we read. When a Black person is the only one with a certified expertise in a whole organisation and still has to prove themselves to be part of panels, to provide advise on the matter, remember the only one with such a qualification, yet cannot add to the discourse if perhaps they were white is disappointing. Attending training sessions can be difficult especially when you are the only Black person in the room of say 100. I found myself asking questions on safety at a site because I am Black, but no response from the trainer because they didn't know how to respond. Has there been a risk assessment of Black folks visiting sites owned and or run by racists or folks with such leanings? Its been almost 3 years and I still can't see a Black person in the leadership team. I am struggling with to come to terms with colleagues who say they don't want to talk about race because they are private and don't like talking about personal things. This is coming from the same folks who talk about their dogs and cats and people laugh, they talk openly about their homes, family, losses, breakups, holidays and more. But when it comes to talking about race, something that affects your team member, suddenly nobody wants to talk. I struggle with sharing a positive news like publication of a scientific article or something positive about me, and all i get are blank stares and nor comments. A few seconds after another team member talks about their cat on the carpet or flowers and bees and the entire team is buzzing with life. How does one reconcile such a thing? I struggle with the fact that as a Black person, I can't speak to Black counsellor because they don't have such. I had a nasty experience with the counselling service, who were rude at most timers and provided an extremely poor and abysmal service. One told me to leave and find another place to work if I was not happy at the new place I was working. I had to go out and look for Black counsellor who has gone through experiences similar to mine, has experienced racism and discrimination and is well qualified. I am glad I found the Black counsellor. the question now is has the counselling service employed a Black counsellor or an ethnic minority counsellor, or still have only white counsellors? You will agree with me a white counsellor cannot understand the struggles of what is is to be a Black educated person who still experiences quite a lot discrimination and racism with its attendant mental health strain. I am yet to be convinced of the plan for inclusion, diversity and a strong no to discrimination and racism. I think people are comfortable with the status quo, at ease with seeing more white people at the helm, and ill at ease with discussing the problems people like me go through (I have reluctance to go back to the office even after lock down because of past behaviours towards me, I always looked at the clock happy to go home when that time arrived), people think talking about it and find workable solutions to these problems suggests they are culpable in the roles they have played or just don't want to be involved because it does not affect them or their loved ones. Sad thing is when one white person loses their lives, or have experienced police brutality, there are people like me who feel bad and want to talk about it so we can find a solution. If the top is not reflective of the organisation, we want it to be in terms of diversity and inclusion, then it follows that the other parts will emulate what is done at the top, therefore no change will happen, only more surveys, more safe space talks, more Black folks who are desperate to contribute their own without being judged, reprimanded or left out completely. Even a PhD does not guarantee you will not be treated like a "Yardie" in the office. I am learning to live with it, it drives me nuts, but whenever I get the chance to give a power point presentation, I make sure I show everyone what I have in my medula oblangata, just to prove that Black folks are also intelligent and outstanding."