

Racial Justice Annual Report for 2024



(1) Introduction

1. This a delayed Annual Report for Diocesan Synod, Bishop's Council and Bishop's Staff on progress to date with the ten recommendations agreed by Diocesan Synod in December 2023. A Racial Justice update is now a regularly part of all meetings which is welcomed, but an annual report was also one of the original recommendations.
2. This annual report is an assessment on progress to date since December 2023, however from the outset it is worth noting that overall, progress has been limited. Although there are good reasons for this, including staff turnover and the urgent re-prioritisation of safeguarding in 2024, it is disappointing not to be able to report more progress.
3. In this report each recommendation will be re-stated and then a brief update provided. A conclusion will detail some suggested next steps.

(2) The Recommendations reviewed

1. *The Diocesan Synod reaffirms that all people are created in the image of God and are equal, and recognises that Racial Justice is a particular focus which sits within a larger commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion in our diocese.*

This recommendation is ongoing and affirms our valuing of all people. However, without further evidence of action in racial justice this affirmation will be challenging to maintain.

2. *The Diocesan Synod affirms Racial Justice as a key priority for each one of us in our mission and is an urgent response to some of the injustices, inequalities and prejudices experienced daily in our communities and churches, yet unseen by many in our congregations.*

There is significant evidence that this is a priority in some local parishes and communities. Anecdotal evidence includes the work of local parishes joining public anti-racism demonstrations in July/August 2024 following the riots and threats of violent action generated by events in Southport. More positively, there continue to be a number of baptisms and confirmations of UK Minority Ethnic/Global Majority Heritage Christians in parishes. However, we do not yet have a common system for the recording of useful statistical data in this area.

3. *The Diocesan Synod establishes and commissions a Racial Justice Task Group (RJTG), with clear terms of reference drafted and agreed by Bishop's Council on behalf of the Synod, with membership appointed by Bishop's Council, and with the ability to co-opt further as the work may require.*

There are other specific responsibilities listed for a Racial Justice Task Group under this recommendation, but the primary point to note is that we have yet to identify this group and terms of reference have not yet been drafted or agreed by Bishop's Council. This should be a higher priority moving forwards.

4. *The Diocesan Synod identifies, or invests in the appointment of, a lead officer or adviser (ideally paid) with capacity to enable this work and staff the RJTG.*

One of the key reasons why progress has been limited in this whole area lies with the lack of capacity to support Diocesan Synod in moving work forwards. Funding for a part-time role has been identified and some conversations with the national Racial Justice Unit around how this role may be deployed have been helpful in teasing out priorities for the role. A role description is now being drafted and it is hoped recruitment will commence after Easter – this work is a high priority.

5. *The Diocesan Synod commits to increase UK Minority Ethnic/Global Majority Heritage (UKME/GMH) representation at every level, starting with:*

i. *Ensuring there is one person on every appointment panel, for stipendiary clergy or paid staff posts, who has done unconscious bias/equality, diversity and inclusion training;*

This has yet to be guaranteed. A next step could be to ensure that both Bishops, both Archdeacons, the Director of Mission and Ministry and Diocesan Secretary, as a minimum, have received up to date training in these areas.

ii. *Ensuring recruitment to diocesan leadership posts always includes a welcome to applications which will strengthen the diversity of the team, and where possible short-lists UKME/GMH applicants;*

This has yet to be adopted as standard. A next step would be to ensure that a suitable statement is agreed after appropriate HR advice.

iii. *Ensuring there is diversity of representation on Bishop's Council, including UKME/GMH;*

UKME/GMH diversity has not been maintained following the move of one member of Bishop's Council away from the diocese in 2023. A next step would be for members of Bishop's Council to support the Bishop in identifying appropriate representation.

iv. *Ensuring annual reporting on recruitment and retention of clergy and lay appointments each year, recording number of UKME/GMH appointments made and number of UKME/GMH applicants shortlisted for interview, using information from Diversity monitoring forms or other methods.*

A standard method of recording this information has not yet been identified and is a significant undertaking if we are to annually record both clergy and lay appointments which include churchwardens, PCC members and ALMs as well as licensed Clergy and Readers and those with PTO. Any next steps will require additional capacity and central administrative support.

- 6. *The Diocesan Synod commits to holding and advocating for at least 2 education or awareness raising events each year; for example, marking Racial Justice Sunday and Stephen Lawrence Day in 2024 by highlighting resources and local events; offering an Advent or Lent Course in 2025 for parishes; and, longer term, acquiring and commending racial justice awareness raising resources for use with congregations.***

We collaborated with Durham Diocese and Lindisfarne College of Theology to offer a seminar with Revd Canon Dr Kelly Brown Douglas in Lent 2024 at the Cathedral; and we have been further encouraged by Kelly Brown Douglas accepting the Bishop and Dean's invitation to become Newcastle Cathedral's first Anglican Communion Canon – we look forward to her inspiration and support as we move forwards. Although the Communications Team highlight other national events and direct people to appropriate national resources we have not yet done much more than this. This is an area where the RJTG would support implementation.

- 7. *The Diocesan Synod commissions the drafting of a diocesan anti-racism policy for adoption by the end of 2024.***

There has been no progress towards drafting a diocesan anti-racism policy. This remains outstanding.

- 8. *The Diocesan Synod requests consideration of commissioning or contracting unconscious bias training, or an anti-racism learning programme, to complement existing clergy and lay leader training across the diocese, and ideally delivered in a coordinated way with other training (e.g. safeguarding, continuing ministerial formation, etc).***

There has been no progress on this request to date.

- 9. *The Diocesan Synod encourages fruitful collaboration in this area with other partners and co-workers; for example, with schools and education, community projects, local authorities and Durham Diocese; and also connecting with the many networks serving racial justice in the wider church.***

We continue to partner with others in this area, though progress is limited. We are grateful for the encouragement and partnership of the Racial Justice Unit and others more locally.

- 10. *The Diocesan Synod annually reflects on this work and reviews the targets and expectations of the RJTG.***

Although the Diocesan Synod and Bishop's Council reflect briefly on racial justice at every meeting, this is the first annual report since December 2023.

(3) Next steps:

1. Although this a delayed report, the original report and recommendations anticipated a 5-year window to put everything into place. This was in expectation of the work needed to get things off the ground anticipating a degree of institutional inertia, inevitable staff changes, and the need to build capacity and a coalition of the willing in order to develop greater advocacy and agency.

2. A key next step is finalising the recruitment paperwork for a Racial Justice Officer; this piece of work is currently with the Bishop of Berwick and Director of Mission and Ministry to progress on behalf of Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod. A recruitment after Easter would be ideal.
3. The drafting of terms of reference for the RJTG is a task for Bishop's Council and a person to draft these should be identified by the Council as soon as possible. This should happen as soon as possible with terms of reference agreed by the end of 2025.
4. Drawing together potential members of a RJTG with representation from Diocesan Synod, Bishop's Council and the wider diocese. This could happen in parallel to the drawing up of terms of reference for the Task Group. This should happen as soon as possible, ideally before the end of the Summer.
5. In terms of increasing representation there are a number of actions:
 - a. ensuring up to date unconscious bias training or equivalent for key senior staff involved in clergy and staff recruitment.
 - b. agreeing a diversity statement for recruitment for all leadership appointments.
 - c. Bishop's Council to offer advice and recommendations to the Bishop of co-opted members of council who would increase diversity of representation.
6. There are other outstanding actions, but these require the above next steps to be in place before further implementation is possible.

+MW draft
31 March 2025