



The **#inclusiveHR** is a social movement for change to improve the experience of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic HR & OD professionals within the NHS. We want to close the compassion gap and advance equality, diversity and inclusion and lead with credibility as a HR & OD profession.

In a series of monthly articles, curated by Cheryl Samuels, Deputy Director of Workforce Transformation, NHS England & NHS Improvement, we will share case studies and personal leadership journeys to inclusion with a human feel illustrating the diversity of thought with HPMAs members.

Each article aims to showcase how HR and OD leaders as well as directorate and department teams are making the step change towards greater and deeper levels of inclusion. This series will amplify their learning over the years and their intentional actions to proactively foster cultural cohesion and increased cultural competencies with a view to inspiring the actions of others within our profession to close the inequality gap and lead by example.

In our first article, Norma French shares her personal journey to inclusion as a workforce leader. She reflects on pivotal points of learning over the past 18 months and concludes that we all need to acknowledge, educate and lead.



**Norma French,**  
*Director of Workforce,*  
*Whittington Health NHS Trust*

Over my career of 30 years, I've come to realize that as a society we continue to face challenges in the diversity and inclusion space. That has been no more obvious to me than the impact COVID has had on people.

I feel ashamed to say that the pandemic and the George Floyd killing in 2020 really brought my personal ignorance and the need to acknowledge my own white privilege and unconscious bias into focus. I have been determined to expand my knowledge of these areas to better understand the challenges colleagues, family and friends from a black Asian and minority ethnic background face on a day-to-day basis; not just in the workplace.

**There were two pivotal points of learning for me in 2020:**

The first involved one of our black HRBPs who came to me in a state of distress following their attendance at one of our early BAME Network meetings. They felt attacked by those present who were saying things like "well you are HR, it is all your fault, what you going to do about it?" What this really drove home

to me was how isolated they felt and how, as an HR professional themselves, it was very difficult to find that safe space and place to share their own fears and concern.

The second was when I was trying to get to terms myself with the use of the acronym BAME. I had been participating on national webinars as well as local listening events and heard that the acronym was not welcomed by many. I picked up on the term "people of colour" from media coverage, and used that term in an internal meeting, thinking it was more acceptable. A colleague rang me later to chat about it and I realised that I had perhaps been wrong in its use. I took advice from my reverse mentor and black colleagues. I listened, learnt, and have since put that into practice.

The pandemic itself has taught me personally that I function so much better if I can bring my whole self to work – and that is how I define myself now. I hope that reflects in my style and approach as a manager and as a leader as well as my practice as an HR professional.