

GOOD GROWTH BY DESIGN

**RECOVERY**

**ROUNDTABLE**

EQUALITY DIVERSITY + INCLUSION

**MAYOR OF LONDON**

The *Good Growth by Design (GGbD) Recovery Roundtable* series invites Mayor's Design Advocates and other external experts to discuss the most pertinent topics facing London's built environment in the wake of the global health crisis and its ensuing social and economic impacts.

This second Recovery Roundtable was held on 30<sup>th</sup> June, chaired by Philip Graham, Executive Director Good Growth, GLA, and focused on *equality, diversity and inclusion* (EDI). Thirteen participants, including Mayor's Design Advocates and other practitioners from the public, private and civic sectors each contributed their ideas for how London could respond to the Covid-19 crisis to address the broader challenges of representation in the built environment professions.

It was recognised that the issues of EDI are persistent, and existed long before the Covid pandemic, which has only served to further highlight the issues. This discussion occurred against the backdrop of the international Black Lives Matter movement, in the wake of the killing of George Floyd by Minnesota Police. Many members of the discussion expressed frustration at how these discussions have been going on for decades, with little progress having been made in terms of BAME representation at leadership levels in private practice and the public sector.

Participants addressed issues including procurement processes which work to exclude emerging and Black led practices, opportunities for young people from

disadvantaged backgrounds, the under-acknowledged power of gatekeepers in architecture's establishment, the poor quality of data for measuring progress of representation, and the intersectional nature of many of these issues which are magnified by class, gender, religion, and mental health.

Proposals highlighted the leadership role that the GLA can play in effecting change, the importance of educational and early-career opportunities, such as apprenticeships and mentorships, and the active promotion of BAME-led practices.

The following is a summary of key reflections and propositions for how London can react to this challenge, and the role that the Greater London Authority should play in the recovery.

## MEETING NOTE – 30TH JUNE 2020

### ELSIE OWUSU

Elsie Owusu Architects, Mayor's Design Advocate

**Despondent:** 'I'm feeling quite despondent about all of this. I've been having this conversation since 1995, and it hasn't changed, it's gone backwards. The way that we judge this is not by how many people are attending meetings [like this one], but by how many BAME led practices are successful. And I think you'll find the number is pretty close to zero.'

**Parity of fees:** 'If there's £1.7bn being spent on design fees in London, and the percentage of BAME people in London is 43%, then we should be looking at 43% of £1.7bn. Just saying that sounds totally ridiculous, and that's the token of the failure.'

**Young people:** 'We've got how many young people coming out of college, from BAME and other underrepresented groups – where are they going to find work? We've seen what the government can do if it considers there is an emergency, it gets money out to people quick. But I don't see people acting with urgency.'

### DIPA JOSHI

Fletcher Priest Architects, Mayor's Design Advocate

**Diversity in senior roles:** 'I'm one of eight partners of a larger practice, and the only BAME person within the management group. This is a big issue that we need to address across not only all private architectural practices, but also the public sector associated with the built environment. How are we going to do that?'

**HR network:** 'A number of practices are part of an HR network who should discuss and apply change for positive steps forward. At my practice, we have set up an internal group which is a safe space to discuss changing policies, and how we are recruiting people. We are looking at three things: 'measuring, monitoring, and mentoring'. We have begun the measuring process, refined our job advert wording and unconscious bias training will be offered to all staff.'

**Black lives matter:** 'The other big thing is to educate people that Black lives matter is not a political statement, because a lot of people think it is. It is a human rights movement. Our industry has now acknowledged the LGBTQ+ group needs public support, which has taken a lot of work. Now let's start talking about Black lives matter as something that people feel they should corporately support.'

### JAYDEN ALI

JA Projects, Central St Martins

**Representation in GLA:** 'The GLA is a maximum point of leverage. What are you doing to get your house in order? What are the statistics of, for example, the number of Black regeneration officers that you employ? These people have the capacity to see the city through a different lens.'

**Tender requirements:** 'For example, one of the requirements of the ADUP 2 framework was that my practice had experience of delivering projects to a grade one standard. Now, there's not many small BAME-led practices that can deliver a project like that. Whoever composed that as a tender requirement, didn't see the city through that lens.'

**Language:** 'It seems like we're all still committed to the term BAME, and I'd like to see some efforts to redress that, because the experience of Black people and South Asian people are not the same, and I don't think the term does that justice.'

**Inclusion vs. Exclusion:** 'Inclusion as a project is about you offering us a seat at the table, being included in a discussion - that's already happening. Whereas I think exclusion is a far

more radical project, requiring you to address deep racial imbalances that exist within an institution. It's not saying you can have a seat at a table within a process that is institutionally racist. It means that the process needs to be revised.'

**Promotion:** 'The simplest thing is just to promote people of colour. We can talk about data, we can assess it all we like, we can put together policies, but I think the message can get lost in institutional speak. Just promote people of colour, and they will provide your institutions with a valuable, additional, lens, which will be self-fulfilling.'

## **ADAM KHAN**

**Adam Khan Architects, Mayor's Design Advocate**

**Black experience in profession:** 'I absolutely support Jayden's point. I think we need to foreground the Black experience from the BAME experience. Living in London, it's obvious to anyone that Black people get treated differently from other people, and that's playing out in our profession, and we need to recognise that.'

**University sector:** 'Through speaking to students from the University of Manchester about the impact of Covid, it is clear that the impact of diversity on the digital divide is not just a resource issue – access to computers – but that by working together in the studio, they are able to gather social capital, cultural capital, in a way that you can't in a Zoom meeting. There is a complacency amongst the academic institutions.'

## **DAVID OGUNMUYIWA**

**Architecture Doing Place, Mayor's Design Advocate**

**Handbooks are not enough:** 'The frame for this conversation for me is what's been done before and hasn't worked. It's the standard institutional response. Even at the beginning of this process of Good Growth by Design several of us made the point that another handbook, even one with the best intentions, would only do what had been done before.'

**Not an accident:** 'The lack of diversity in architecture almost feels like an [intentionally] designed process, rather than an accidental process. It is a function of a disproportionate society. This is a public accounts issue. For example, Southwark council spends £650m annually to suppliers, in a borough that is 46% diverse, and yet it hasn't employed anybody that looks like Stephen Lawrence in over 20 years. That is a career span. The same is true of Hackney, and other councils.'

**Covid response:** 'I am asking people, 'What do you think it looks like if we get this right?' I'm very passionate that it needs to be inclusive. It's needs to be about a place that allows everybody to contribute. But the systems actively mitigate against that, and people who say they want that in one meeting, will then actively act against that.'

**Disproportionate burdens:** 'What Covid has revealed isn't that [BAME] people have a genetic disposition towards it, but that they are more likely to be affected because of an additional set of burdens which accumulate to undermine your resilience. Furthermore, architecture graduates who can't find work, are ending up in frontline service sector jobs. It is just unbelievable.'

**Fundamental change:** 'Change needs to be fundamentally systemic, and not opportunistic. Institutions only engage with these issues in moments of extremity. Grenfell has happened, Covid has happened, Black Lives Matter has happened. Institutions that really care about this need to do something about it in a fundamental and systemic way.'

## NEIL PINDER

### Celebrating Architecture, Graveney School

**Language:** 'I use the word non-traditional and traditional backgrounds. The word BAME has been used to lump people from X number of continents together, and it's to sanitise what people have done in the past.'

**Mentorship:** 'Mentoring is what we do in Celebrating Architecture. We say to young people 'you can become architects, you can become engineers, you can become creative, you can make that step.' But unfortunately, the pandemic has disproportionately affected certain groups [which makes this harder].'

**Education:** 'Students in the state system have been disproportionately disadvantaged [by cuts to funding]. In a lot of schools, textiles, drama, product design, art, music have been dropped. This is affecting a whole group of young people from entering the profession when they are talented enough to do so. Meanwhile, the private schools realise the importance of creativity, and they stream ahead.'

**Power:** 'In terms of the architectural world, we're looking at power. The profession is made up predominantly of people from the same socio-economic background, and there's a power struggle. They don't want people to come in from non-traditional backgrounds because they're scared it will show up their inadequacies.'

## ANGELA DAPPER

### Grimshaw Architects

**Equity:** 'At Grimshaw, our first action is representation. We talk about inclusion and diversity, but what we don't talk enough about is equity. We don't just want the voices in the room, but to create the structures where [those voices] are not excluded.'

**Advocacy and allies:** 'Architecture is 86% white. Advocacy and allies are key to make sure that we are amplifying the voices that we do have. That's important to hold up voices, but also to create opportunities. For us, as a big company, that could mean partnering with other companies to give them a leg up.'

**Statistics:** 'How do we know how we're doing unless we're measuring and monitoring? This is absolutely key. We've been looking at lessons that can be learned from gender equality. We're not there yet, but we're on a road, and we know what it looks like. We need to do the same for racial equality.'

## NIKKI LINSELL

### Public Practice

**Education and outreach:** 'It's not just the education and mentorship of young people, but it's actually about their parents, to encourage them to see careers in the built environment as an attractive route, because it can often be a cultural thing as well.'

**Inclusion:** 'Recruitment is mainly what Public Practice does, and with Covid, one of the things we have been looking at is accessibility, particularly considering people on the autism spectrum. We have been getting feedback from [neurodiverse] architects saying they're uncomfortable [with digital communication], they're not going to apply for a job that requires an online workshop.'

**Retention:** 'We are keen to ensure workplace retention. While we can do lots of things to help get people in, but once they're in, how do we monitor if they're in a really bad environment, or how do we ensure that that environment is improving?'

**Procurement:** 'One of the things we are starting to see with Covid, is that it could make people more risk-averse, and nepotism could bubble up again, particularly within public sector'

procurement and recruitment. What are the mechanisms we could put in place to address this?’

**CORINA KWAMI**  
**Royal Academy of Engineering**

**Early career prospects:** ‘The pandemic raises massive questions around job availability. A lot of our early career engineers have experienced challenges either entering the workforce, or just being in precarious work. The impact on people of different ethnicities is shocking and staggering.’

**Double burden:** ‘The people who do stay end up carrying a double burden. They are the ones invited to participate to have to speak on behalf of the group. It’s about accompanying them on that journey.’

**Power:** ‘We have to talk about power and influence. We need to shift from unconscious bias training to something more like anti-racist training, in the same spirit that we treat anti-bullying.’

**FEMI ORESANYA**  
**HOK, RIBA / Architects for Change**

**B of the BAME:** ‘I hate the word BAME because if you put it all under the one umbrella you might think we’re not doing too bad. However if we just look at the Black-led practices, there are almost zero on the Mayor of London’s ADUP framework.’

**Advocacy:** ‘[For those that do make it onto the shortlist] they cannot fall at the first hurdle because, for example, they don’t have three years of accounts with more than £1m turnover. This would show some level of advocacy. There needs to be a mentoring process in place to help them to succeed.’

**Social mobility:** ‘As we begin to recover from Covid, there will be a lower number of students from economically-challenged backgrounds that will choose architecture due to the cost of study. Practices can do much more to offer apprenticeships for young people, to give them the experience of what it feels like to be an architect.’

**Intersectionality:** ‘The RIBA has seven work streams – social mobility, gender parity, BAME representation, LGBTQ+ Communities, disability, mental health and wellbeing, and religion and belief – and at HOK we are setting up work streams to focus on each one of them. It’s about intersectionality. If we as a profession are serious about being an exemplar, we need to deal with all of those issues.’

**NEBA SERE**  
**Black Females in Architecture, GLA**

**University response to pandemic:** ‘In terms of the pandemic, we have seen a big strain on our student BFA members who have struggled with the university sector’s response to marks and criteria. They have faced challenges in having deadlines pushed back, for instance, and they will miss their exhibitions, which is an important showcase for access to employment.’

**Institutional support:** ‘Our members are from the specific groups who have been impacted the most – with many losing family members or friends – and yet there has been little recognition at an institutional level, in terms of access to counselling, or even being entitled to a break.’

**Content of curriculum:** ‘We have seen BFA members use our resources to challenge their tutors and their university about the content of their education, specifically in terms of the history of architecture, to showcase a more diverse range of designers, for instance.’

**Collaboration with grass-roots organisations:** ‘There needs to be a recognition of the work that has already been done [on these issues] on ground level, and we need to be mindful to collaborate with them. Often these organisations aren’t able to engage with the terms set out, such as the time frame, or the budget.’

## ZOË BERMAN

### Part W / Studio Berman

**Value:** ‘It’s problematic to be asking the experts on this call to offer their expertise for free, in micro sound clips. This isn’t deep listening. For the points of view to be being properly valued there’s a real need to monitor change, to [evidence] long-term commitment to EDI and long-term monitoring.’

**Procurement:** ‘We need to review competition framework processes. At present, they favour big practices with sustained experience in particular sectors. We need to support different forms of practice, such as collectives and collaborations – alternative groups coming together to offer design knowledge.’

**Commission:** ‘We are writing outline ideas right now to call for a commission whose role it is to review the impact of design decisions on women and minority groups. It would operate in a similar vein to the work being done by the Future Generations commissioner for Wales, which looks at policy at all levels of government.’

**Collaboration:** ‘We need these discussions to be interdisciplinary, to reach out to work with planning consultants, placemakers, engineers, transport designers, and researchers, otherwise we risk having separate silos of knowledge.’

## ROWAN LONGHURST

### Landscape Institute diversity and inclusion working group

**Representation:** ‘We are equally aware that the landscape profession doesn’t represent the people we are designing for. And I think that Covid has brought that to the forefront. The representation of minority groups is tiny, and it certainly doesn’t reflect where it should be given that as a profession we are designing for everyone in the most easy to reach democratic spaces in our communities.’

## VICTORIA HILLS

### Royal Town Planning Institute

**Plan:** ‘Our action plan at RTPI makes major commitments to apprenticeships, education review, role models, targeted bursaries, data and monitoring. We are developing the BALANCE (Build a Legacy and New Community Equality) project which is a targeted approach to areas of highest growth layered with areas of highest diversity.’

## FURTHER READING

The following resources were highlighted during the discussion:

[Supporting Diversity handbook](#)

[Data read-out from AJ100 survey](#)



[The Diversity Gap podcast: Building Equity from the Ground Up with Dr. Darnisa Amante-Jackson](#)

[HOK Voices: Cultivating the Next Generation of Designers](#)

Since March 2016 the GLA has published its gender pay gap and related action plan. In 2019 the gender pay gap in the GLA was under 1% compared to 6.1 % in 2016. In 2017 the GLA initiated the same process for the ethnicity pay gap measured and published their overall mean and median ethnicity pay gaps. The ethnicity pay gap action plan sets out a programme of activity aimed at closing the ethnicity pay gap in the GLA. which in January 2019 was 11.4 % down from 16 per cent in 2017.

[2019 GLA pay gap report](#)

[GLA Ethnicity Pay Gap Action Plan](#)

Mayor's Design Advocates, Advocate Organisations and GLA staff are inputting into a [shared repository](#) of literature, which is a useful resource in framing built environment issues in the COVID context.

## UPCOMING ROUNDTABLES

Child-friendly city  
Public realm  
Housing design  
Social infrastructure

## CONTACT

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