

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

“ Be authentic, be humble, keep learning, and listen to viewpoints that differ from your own. ”

Zaheer Ahmad is a multi-award-winning Diversity and Inclusion thought leader. From his beginnings in the police, his extensive professional career has focused on equality and inclusion in the workplace and pushing for greater diversity. Zaheer is a Chartered Companion with CMI and an advisory member of CMI Race.

“ At the time, I was only one of a handful of Black, Asian and minority ethnic trainees. ”

The influence of his community-minded parents drew Zaheer Ahmad to the police service from a young age. Zaheer was keen to learn and make a difference, but he was conscious that not many trainees or trainers at police college looked like him. His subsequent post at a police station was again a predominantly White, male environment.

“ Diversity and inclusion were considered a ‘soft’ subject, and managers couldn’t really see the organisational benefits. ”

Zaheer asked his line manager to consider trying a small diversity and inclusion initiative to demonstrate its merit. His conversations about diversity eventually took him to boards at divisional and national levels.

“ It’s a great example of allyship, and why having allies is such a crucial part of making diversity and inclusion work. ”

Zaheer credits his superiors, but it was his persistent arguments that persuaded senior officers to revisit recruitment procedures. This resulted in a four-fold increase in the number of officers from diverse ethnic groups.

Afterward, Zaheer continued a meteoric rise as a diversity advocate: he became a member of the Home Office’s ministerial progression group in 2009; in 2010, he joined the race advisory board for the Ministry of Justice and the National Prevent Board. As an advisory committee member for CMI Race, Zaheer contributed to CMI’s Moving the Dial on Race guide in 2020.

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Zaheer Ahmad MBE, CCMI
Global Head of Inclusion and Diversity
for Consumer Healthcare, GSK

In the private sector, Zaheer became Head of Strategic Delivery, Diversity and Inclusion at EY. He pioneered technology-focused initiatives, such as a VR experience that positioned managers as a young Black man wanting to work at EY.

“ Authenticity was the crucial thing. The VR experience was scripted by young Black men from the community. ”

The VR project kept balance and realism at its heart. Great pains were taken to ensure the dialogue was authentic to the culture and experiences of Black people.

“ We did an initial trial with a number of key stakeholders. It opened their eyes to a completely different perspective. ”

In his new role as Global Head of Inclusion and Diversity for Consumer Healthcare at GSK, the plan is to continue that work with other underrepresented groups.

“ The GSK role gives me a chance to make a difference on a global scale, which is something that I’m very excited about. ”

Zaheer is straightforward in his advice to other managers wanting to improve diversity and inclusion in their organisations: **be authentic, be humble, keep learning, and listen to viewpoints that differ from your own.**