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THE COST OF BLACK EXCELLENCE™ · SECTOR  
REPORT SERIES

# Property & Construction

*What the Excellence Tax™ Costs Black Professionals in the Built Environment*

96 participants · Construction, property, housing, surveying, architecture, real estate, facilities management

4 countries · United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia

Phase One, 2025 · Natasha Williams, Founder · The Cost of Black Excellence™ Research Institute

Property and construction is one of the least racially diverse professional sectors in the United Kingdom. Black professionals represent a small fraction of its qualified workforce and an even smaller fraction of its leadership. This is not an accident. It is the result of decades of professional culture that has not only failed to include Black professionals but has actively extracted from those who stayed.

This report documents what 96 Black built environment professionals' surveyors, architects, housing managers, project managers, engineers, property professionals told us about the real cost of working in a sector that was built, and continues to operate, without them in mind.

# What Is the Excellence Tax™?

*The Excellence Tax™ is the mandatory, uncompensated burden of additional emotional labour, identity suppression, and personal cost that Black professionals pay simply to participate in predominantly white workplaces.*

Organisations demand this labour and rarely acknowledge it, compensate for it, or take steps to reduce it. The word “tax” reflects reality precisely: payment is required simply for occupying professional space. Black professionals cannot opt out without forfeiting participation entirely.

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT LENS

Property and construction are not only dominated by white individuals; they are among the whitest and most male-dominated professional sectors in the UK economy. The Excellence Tax™ is not just a peripheral issue in this sector. For many Black built environment professionals, it is the defining feature of their working life.

Four Excellence Taxes manifest with particular intensity here:

TAX	HOW IT SHOWS UP IN PROPERTY & CONSTRUCTION
<b>Isolation Burden</b>	Being “the only one” in team, office, or site environments where there is no peer who shares the experience of navigating racial dynamics. The absence of other Black professionals means the cognitive and emotional weight is carried entirely alone.
<b>Boys’ Club Exclusion</b>	Informal networks built around socialising, sport, and shared cultural references that systematically exclude Black professionals. Promotions, project allocations, and client relationships flow through these networks. Black professionals who cannot participate fall behind without any formal discrimination ever occurring.
<b>Physical Appearance Burden</b>	Hair discrimination is reported at particularly high rates. Black professionals describe straightening hair for client meetings, wearing wigs to site visits, and concealing natural styles to avoid

	being perceived as less professional in an industry that has never questioned the appearance norms it enforces.
<b>Proof Burden</b>	Credentials and expertise are questioned by colleagues, clients, and senior figures who express surprise at Black professionals' competence, seniority, or qualifications. One participant made was told that he needed to achieve the MRICS qualification if he wanted to be promoted. There were other white colleagues that had made Director level without the credentials.

# The Numbers

96 Black built environment professionals across the UK, US, Canada and Australia. These figures are consistent across construction, property, housing, surveying, and architecture.

**61.5%**

have no access to culturally sensitive support — the second-highest no-support rate of any sector, and 13 points above the overall average

**84.4%**

work harder than peers (always + often) just to be seen as competent

**83.3%**

suppress aspects of their identity to succeed professionally in a sector with near-zero racial diversity at senior levels

**84.4%**

have experienced microaggressions, bias or discrimination at work (Frequently + Occasionally)

**56.2%**

report severe or significant health impacts directly attributed to their work environment

**83.3%**

have considered leaving a role to protect their mental or emotional wellbeing

**20.8%**

have already left a role in property or construction specifically to protect their wellbeing

**33.3%**

do not feel psychologically safe expressing opinions or advocating for themselves at work

**25.0%**

access therapy or coaching — the lowest therapy access rate of any sector, a third below the overall average

The support gap is the defining finding. 61.5% of Black built environment professionals have no access to culturally sensitive support. In an industry with almost no Black senior professionals, no peer networks, and deeply embedded white social norms, this absence compounds the isolation that defines the sector.

# Property & Construction vs the Overall Study

How Black built environment professionals compare to the overall research average of 1,037 participants.

METRIC	PROP & CONST	OVERALL	DIFFERENCE
No culturally sensitive support	61.5%	48.5%	+13.0 pts ABOVE average
Work harder (always + often)	84.4%	86.4%	Consistent with average
Identity suppression	83.3%	86.8%	Consistent with average
Microaggressions (freq + occ)	84.4%	89.3%	-4.9 pts below average
Severe / significant health impact	56.2%	63.2%	-7.0 pts below average
Already left a role	20.8%	23.1%	Consistent with average

The lower microaggression frequency and health impact rates partly reflect a sector where the norm of endurance is so well-established that professionals absorb conditions without naming them, and where many who have experienced the worst have already left.

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THE SENIORITY FINDING

## Self-employed carry the highest burden

Self-employed professionals show the highest “always” rate at 68.8% — consistent with a pattern where departure from formal employment does not end the Excellence Tax™. It follows.

CAREER LEVEL	WORK HARDER “ALWAYS”	HEALTH SEV + SIG
Entry level (n=8)	37.5%	62.5%
Mid-level (n=20)	60.0%	60.0%
Senior / Manager (n=36)	63.9%	55.6%
Director / Executive (n=12)	50.0%	58.3%
Self-employed (n=16)	68.8%	37.5%

# What the Body Carries

56.2% of Black built environment professionals report severe or significant health impacts from their work environment. In a sector with the lowest therapy access rate of any studied and the second-highest no-support rate, these health impacts accumulate without adequate clinical resource to address them.

SEVERITY	%	WHAT THIS MEANS
<b>Severely impacted</b>	16.7%	Health deterioration requiring medical attention
<b>Significantly impacted</b>	39.6%	Substantial effects on daily functioning and capacity
Somewhat impacted	31.2%	Noticeable effects on wellbeing
Minimally / not impacted	12.5%	

SYMPTOMS IN LAST 12 MONTHS

SYMPTOM	% REPORTING
Persistent fatigue or exhaustion	<b>64.6%</b>
Sleep disturbances / insomnia	<b>51.0%</b>
Burnout or emotional collapse	<b>50.0%</b>
Tension headaches or migraines	<b>45.8%</b>
Muscle pain or tightness	<b>37.5%</b>
Anxiety or panic attacks	<b>33.3%</b>
Digestive issues	<b>27.1%</b>
Depression or emotional numbness	<b>24.0%</b>

## THE GENDER DIFFERENTIAL

GROUP	HEALTH SEV+SIG	SUPPRESS IDENTITY	WORK HARDER ALWAYS
Women (n=59, 61.5%)	64.4%	88.1%	66.1%
Men (n=37, 38.5%)	43.2%	75.7%	48.6%

*“The Excellence Tax ruined my life. Cost me my marriage, made me spend less time with my children, and made me ill. And I am only slowly beginning to rebuild my life in my 50s. I had to work three times as hard to get half the level that my white counterparts got to at work.”*

Senior/Manager · 45–54 · United Kingdom · Property & Construction

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

# Voices from the Research

96 Black built environment professionals documented what the Excellence Tax™ costs them in one of the most racially homogeneous professional sectors in the UK economy.

ISOLATION & VISIBILITY

*“At my workplace, the Excellence Tax shows up in constantly having to prove my competence while tolerating racism for the sake of ‘company culture.’ I’m both hypervisible and invisible — expected to overextend, yet perceived as a threat. I’m forced to shrink myself in the presence of mediocrity.”*

Mid-level · 25–34 · United Kingdom

*“Being overlooked at work for my hard work. Constant comments about my hair makes me feel like I need to suppress my Blackness. Not many Black people in my organisation. It has been presumed that I have a lower role, likely due to my race. People are always surprised at my knowledge and expertise.”*

Mid-level · 25–34 · United Kingdom · Property

THE PROOF BURDEN & INFORMAL NETWORKS

*“Thankfully it does not really show up for me now as I finally made it to Partner aged 44, having been in the profession by then for 23 years. You hear of white males who make Partner after five years.”*

Head of Real Estate · 55–64 · United Kingdom

*“In my line of work, it feels like the only way to get promoted is to go out drinking with colleagues and be friendly with your line manager, who can then put in a good word with the boss. I’ve also noticed that not many people who look like me get promoted as often as those who don’t.”*

Senior/Manager · 35–44 · United Kingdom

## WHAT YOU WISH PEOPLE UNDERSTOOD

*“I wish more people understood that being a Black professional often means navigating spaces that were never truly designed with us in mind. Success doesn’t mean the absence of struggle — it often means we’ve been grinding through pain, silence, and invisibility.”*

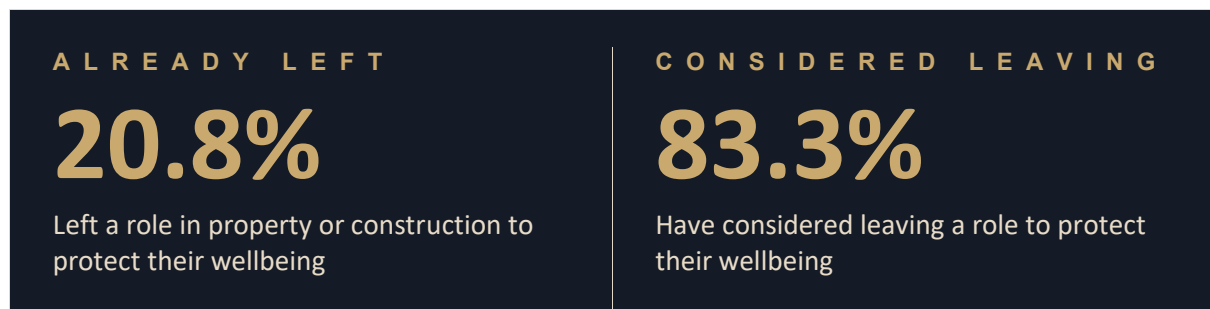
Principal Consultant · 55–64 · United Kingdom

*“I wish more people understood that success as a Black professional requires navigating structural bias alongside performance. Evidence shows that Black professionals are subject to higher scrutiny, lower tolerance for error, and slower progression even when outcomes match or exceed peers.”*

Director/Executive · 55–64 · United Kingdom

# What Your Exit Interviews Miss

20.8% of Black built environment professionals have already left a role specifically to protect their wellbeing. When someone leaves a sector as isolating as property and construction, they are unlikely to cite the daily cost of being the only Black person in the room as their reason for going.



LEAVING CONSIDERATION DETAIL

RESPONSE	% OF PARTICIPANTS
A few times	22.9%
Already left	20.8%
Frequently	16.7%
Yes (considered)	11.5%
Once	11.5%
No	9.4%
Never	7.3%

16.7% of participants are self-employed — one of the higher self-employment rates across sector reports. Many describe leaving formal employment in construction and property specifically because the Excellence Tax™ became unsustainable. Self-employment offered autonomy their employment within white-dominant firms could not.

*“So much work done but no appreciation. No credit given. Others take the credit. Careers develop on the back of one’s skills. A hijacked career path. You tolerate, or you leave. Speaking up equally means eventually leaving.”*

# What This Costs Built Environment Organisations

Construction firms, property companies, housing associations, architectural practices, and surveying firms absorb the financial cost of the Excellence Tax™ while the sector simultaneously struggles with a well-documented skills and diversity shortage. The two things are connected.

<h2>£61,140</h2> <p>estimated Excellence Tax™ cost per Black built environment professional, per year</p>	<h2>£6.1M</h2> <p>annual cost for every 100 Black professionals employed</p>
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COST COMPONENT	WHAT DRIVES IT	ANNUAL COST (100 STAFF)
<b>Excess attrition (20.8% vs 13.3%)</b>	Experienced professionals leaving when the isolation and extraction cost exceeds the benefit of remaining in an already underrepresented sector	<b>£2,055,375</b>
<b>Presenteeism (56.2% health impact)</b>	Professionals working through fatigue, burnout and anxiety in roles where errors carry significant commercial and legal consequences	<b>£913,000+</b>
<b>Unresourced peer support</b>	Senior Black professionals providing informal mentorship for the rare junior Black professionals who join — with no structural support network anywhere	<b>£250,000</b>
<b>Voice &amp; innovation suppression</b>	83.3% suppressing identity in a sector facing significant design and delivery challenges that genuinely diverse perspectives would help address	<b>£750,000</b>

<b>Pipeline destruction</b>	A sector that makes Partnership or Director level virtually inaccessible for Black professionals — reinforcing a white leadership monoculture	<b>£500,000</b>
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Industry bodies including RICS, CIOB, RIBA, and the British Property Federation have set diversity commitments for years. The data in this report show what those commitments have achieved for Black professionals still in the sector.

# Three Requirements for Built Environment Organisations

The built environment sector has diversity initiatives, apprenticeship programmes, and commitments from industry bodies. None of them has produced meaningful change in the conditions documented here.

01

## **Measure Excellence Tax™ burden as part of every firm's diversity accountability — not just headcount**

RICS, CIOB, RIBA, and the British Property Federation all publish diversity data showing representation at different levels. None measure the specific conditions that determine whether Black professionals can remain and advance. Firms that sign industry diversity charters should be required to demonstrate Excellence Tax™ assessment as part of their reporting — asking specifically about identity suppression, psychological safety, performance burden, and support access.

02

## **Dismantle the informal networks that determine advancement and rebuild them on transparent criteria**

The research consistently names informal social networks as the primary mechanism of exclusion in property and construction. Promotions, project allocations, client introductions, and career-defining sponsorship flow through networks built around shared culture and personal familiarity. Firms must audit the informal determinants of advancement, make promotion criteria explicit and measurable, and hold managers accountable for who benefits from informal networks and who does not.

03

## **Fund culturally competent support — and address the isolation that makes its absence so damaging**

61.5% of Black built environment professionals have no access to culturally sensitive support, and only 25% access therapy or coaching. Firms should fund access to Black therapists and culturally aware coaches as a standard employment provision. Industry bodies should create funded peer networks

for Black built environment professionals — as structural responses to an isolation problem that the sector’s demographic reality makes inevitable.

*“One thing that many people don’t fully grasp is that for many Black professionals, navigating success often means balancing two parallel jobs. The first is doing the job you were hired for. The other is managing the perceptions, biases, and extra scrutiny that come with being one of the few — or in some cases the only one — in the room.”*

Senior/Manager · 35–44 · United Kingdom · Property & Construction

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

# Natasha Williams

Natasha spent thirteen years as a Managing Director in building surveying and property — a sector where Black professionals remain severely underrepresented. She subsequently retrained as a trauma-informed coach, holds a Level 7 postgraduate Diploma in Business and Organisational Psychology, and founded The Cost of Black Excellence™ Research Institute to create the evidence base that organisations have consistently refused to collect themselves.

She delivers keynote presentations, executive briefings, and leadership sessions that translate this research into what organisations need to understand and act on. Phase Two of the research is underway, targeting 2,000 voices.

THREE WAYS TO TAKE THIS FURTHER

## 01

### Book a Briefing

A 30-minute conversation to explore what the research means for your organisation and whether a keynote, executive briefing, or leadership session makes sense.

[calendly.com/blackexcellenceresearch/meetings-with-natasha](https://calendly.com/blackexcellenceresearch/meetings-with-natasha)

## 02

### Request the Full Report

The complete research report — 1,037 Voices — includes the full framework, all fifteen taxes, demographic analysis, all sector breakdowns, and organisational recommendations.

[research@costofblackexcellence.com](mailto:research@costofblackexcellence.com)

## 03

### Share With Leadership

If this report raises questions your senior leadership or board need to be asking, please pass it on. The research exists for the people with the power to act on it.

[costofblackexcellence.com](https://costofblackexcellence.com)

*The Excellence Tax™ operates in the gap between what organisations claim and what Black professionals experience.*

*This research closes that gap.*

**The Cost of Black Excellence™ Research Institute · Birmingham, United Kingdom**

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