

Council Statement – Thursday, 16th March 2023

Dana Lazarević

Ladies and gentlemen, honourable members of this Council!

Thank you for letting me speak about the most disturbing matter of institutional discrimination which has been an ongoing plague of this society, despite the existence of legislation aimed at addressing the issue. My name is Dr Dragana Lazarevic, I am a naturalised British citizen and a resident of Bath since 2005. By education, I have two Master degrees: in Structural Engineering (University of Belgrade) and Conservation of Historic Buildings (University of Bath). I also hold a PhD in Heritage Studies (Cardiff University). Since my arrival to the United Kingdom, I faced unprecedented level of discrimination when trying to obtain professional work from a range of companies and institutions, including the BANES Council. Never **ONCE** over this long period had I managed to get employment through standard process of application.

In the past I tried to address this issue through various agencies and institutions, but was always met with denial, distrust, a certain dose of hostility and ostracism. When trying to identify what was wrong with my applications or skills, I was patronised and dismissed. One common denominator in all rejections of my applications was that my skills were insufficient and/or that I lack UK experience. Another common denominator was that no highly skilled or professional job was available without possessing an intricate network of important connections. As a foreign-born woman, I did not have any, which meant that despite my high qualifications, I was never given a chance to obtain work in this society without cronyism and nepotism. I have evidence of such practices elsewhere, but for the clarity of this address, I will focus on those exercised by the Council in the past 16 months. Over the period in question, I applied for four roles advertised by the Council for which I was educated or had previous experience, albeit abroad.

After a painful inquiry, the Council admitted that 3 out of 4 roles have been offered to the Internal Candidates, whilst the fourth was given to an external candidate from a different Council. This practice, massively repeated across the job market, puts us, the “aliens” (to use a correct anthropological term) in a severely disadvantaged position and keeps us permanently away from the job market which, so we hear, screams for highly skilled workers. And, yet, available highly-skilled people are constantly denied entry to the job-market because of their background. “Closing doors” to the “aliens” by knowing in advance that jobs will be given to pre-selected persons directly discriminates against highly-skilled individuals actively looking for work. Hiding behind an excuse that it is a legal requirement to advertise jobs “as widely as possible, so the best candidate could be chosen for the role” wastes time and energy of those who remain outside the “chosen” circle. Furthermore, it has a far-reaching damaging impact on individual’s mental health and sense of acceptance by the society.

I am aware that speaking to the Council like this is Don Quixotian fight against the windmills which will probably forever shatter my prospects of obtaining a job in this country. Nevertheless, **I would like to urge the Council to reconsider its practices of pre-meditated**

employment of people and address the unconscious bias against non-domicile born candidates. By maintaining current standing, the Council, as well as the society as a whole, denies themselves blue-sky thinking and influx of new ideas.

What is the percentage of offering jobs to Internal Candidates? What does that percentage indicate in terms of fairness?

I would also like to point out to another consequence of such practices: **What are the messages which nepotistic recruitment is sending to the younger generation?**

My children, Sophia and Alexander Holms, are both excellent Y5 pupils of Bathwick St Mary's CofE Primary School. They have been born here and half of their heritage is English. As a single mother who has always been driven by desire to learn and achieve more, I am thoroughly concerned that I may not represent the best role-model for them. Whilst I strive to install in them the importance of education and learning, the only message they are currently receiving is that education is not important, since their highly-skilled mother is not even considered for work? **What kind of message my daughter receives if her mother, trained in the field in which the government wants to encourage young women to choose for their careers, is constantly being denied an entry?**

Is this not a case of gender-discrimination, as well as that of ethnicity?

After my experience, I am led to believe that this is the case.

To summarize my plea: **Is there a mechanism in the Council which controls that the fairness is exercised during the recruitment process and jobs are indeed offered to the best, rather than pre-selected candidates?**

Who is monitoring how the jobs are offered?

Who is observing that the anti-discriminatory laws are justly applied?

I would very much appreciate if the Council could provide answers to my questions.

Thank you.