

## Dr Waqar Azmi, OBE



**Waqar Azmi OBE** is listed in the world's 500 most influential Muslims<sup>[1][2][3][4][5]</sup> by Georgetown University as well as the Asian power 100 list of the most influential Asians in the UK and, the Muslim power 100 List of the most influential Muslims in the UK.

He is chairman of Waterhouse Consulting Group<sup>[7]</sup> and EU Ambassador of Intercultural Dialogue.<sup>[8]</sup> Prior to this, he was the UK Government's Chief Diversity Adviser at the Cabinet Office.<sup>[9]</sup>

### **Early life and career**

Waqar Azmi grew up with his family in Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, India, and moved to the UK at the age of 13, speaking no English when he arrived. He attended the University of Central Lancashire, graduating in 1993 with a degree in Politics and Social Policy. During his time as an undergraduate, Azmi helped to set up and teach on the University's Combined Honours Degree Course in Urdu Language, while still studying for his degree.<sup>[10]</sup>

In 2001 he became Managing Director at the world's largest consultancy firm, TMP Worldwide Advertising and Communications and Monster.com. Azmi founded the British Federation of Racial Equality Councils,<sup>[11]</sup> a UK body of racial equality councils and partnerships representing over 100 councils across England, Scotland and Wales.<sup>[12]</sup> He also founded the think tank Race Equality West Midlands<sup>[13]</sup> and the Herefordshire Equality Partnership.<sup>[14]</sup>

### **[edit] Civil service career**

In October 2004, he was appointed as UK Government's Chief Diversity Adviser at the Cabinet Office. He launched the 10-Point Plan on diversity<sup>[15]</sup> to drive change across Whitehall and for the first time in the UK, linked diversity performance of each government department to the pay and bonus of Permanent Secretaries.<sup>[16]</sup> *The Times* wrote: "Azmi raised eyebrows when he announced that the bonuses of permanent secretaries would be linked to their success in meeting the targets".<sup>[9]</sup> Britain's only Asian Permanent Secretary, Sir Suma Chakrabarti, and a former Minister, Keith Vaz, welcomed the announcement, saying it would accelerate change in the civil service. But Keith Vaz warned: "I'm quite sure there will be resistance to this".<sup>[17]</sup> Azmi also led on a new recruitment code to change obsolete practices across government departments and shed the "male and pale" perception of Whitehall.<sup>[18]</sup>

Azmi's work led each government department to prepare a delivery plan and stepped up the pace of change including advertising for open competition the posts of Permanent Secretaries, Ambassadors and other sensitive and top governmental jobs.<sup>[9]</sup> As a result there are now far more diverse people holding top governmental jobs like Darra Singh OBE the new Jobcentre Plus Chief Executive at the Department for Work and Pensions,<sup>[19]</sup> Jitinder Kohli who is the new Director General at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills,<sup>[20]</sup> and Minouche Shafik, Permanent Secretary of the Department for International Development.<sup>[21]</sup> *The Guardian* called Azmi "The Equaliser"<sup>[22]</sup> and *The Times* called him "Whitehall's diversity champ."<sup>[9]</sup> Pat McFadden, the then Cabinet Office Minister said in a speech that Azmi was "doing a hugely important job".<sup>[23]</sup> Other commentators like Paul Zickel writing in *The Times* said: "Disability in the Civil Service recently moved out of the shadows and into the mainstream. For me, the key driver was the Civil Service-wide ten-point plan developed by Waqar Azmi".<sup>[24]</sup>

### **Public inquiries**

Azmi has been involved in several Public Inquiries in the UK. In 2004 he was invited by the then Home Secretary, David Blunkett, to sit on the Judicial Public Inquiry into the murder of Zahid Mubarek, a British Asian teenager who was murdered by his cellmate on March 21, 2000, at the Feltham Young Offender's Institution in South-west London.<sup>[25]</sup> He was also on the Oldham Riots Inquiry which was set up to investigate the riots that occurred in May 2001. He was an open critic of the Inquiry, claiming that under government pressure the Inquiry was steered towards language and citizenship, instead of structural inequalities and the growing influence of far-right groups such as the British National Party (BNP).<sup>[26]</sup>

### **Awards and honorary degrees**

Waqar Azmi received an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours in 2002 at the age of 32 by Her Majesty the Queen in recognition of his major contributions in the UK<sup>[27]</sup> and in 2003 he was awarded Britain's Young Asian Achievers Award by Lloyds TSB.<sup>[28]</sup>

In 2001 Azmi was awarded an Honorary Masters Degree by the University of Worcester.<sup>[29]</sup> In 2004 he was made an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.<sup>[30]</sup> In 2006 he was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Letters degree by Southampton Solent University,<sup>[31]</sup> and later that year, the University of Central Lancashire awarded him an Honorary Fellowship.<sup>[32]</sup> In 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012<sup>[1][3]</sup> he was listed in the World's 500 Most Influential Muslims<sup>[5]</sup> published by Georgetown University