



JMO Statement

What do you mean by “full face black or other skin tone makeup?”

Any solid full face coloured make up which could be taken by an observer as likely to imitate or parody a skin colour different from your own. ‘Make up’ is used here as a general term to mean any kind of stage make up, face paint, soot, charcoal, or similar.

Although we acknowledge that our member teams are not intentionally racist, this practice has long been associated with making fun of other races, through the portrayal of memes and stereotypes. Since these historical portrayals most often used “blacking” of various sorts, full face black make up is now irrevocably associated with giving offence. It does not matter that it is not meant in that way. It is the effect on others – not the intent – which could give rise to a legal challenge for racial harassment under the Equality Act.

The key words are “solid” and “full face”. If you want black to be part of your makeup or disguise, that is fine. If you want to use only black, including smudgy or streaky designs, that is fine too – just keep it to less than half of the visible skin on your face. Obvious patterns and designs are also a good way of using black without the potential to cause problems. If you want to use a mask or face covering, please make sure that it doesn’t imitate full face black or other skin tone.

We want teams to honour the spirit of the request, not to worry about the minutiae of what is and is not allowed.

In short, we are asking teams to work with us on this matter, to help protect themselves and their fellow member teams from unintended problems.



Open Morris FAQ

Why has this move been made?

In the current environment there is growing awareness of inequality and so much need to support those who have previously been made to struggle because of their race. We think that this is the right point in history to move on from this problematic practice. Many bystanders at dance outs will not be aware of the history behind the guising tradition, and without that context, offence or hurt could easily be caused. We know that no one looks to cause offence or hurt when they dance out and would therefore like everyone to feel comfortable with what they are seeing regardless of their race. Similarly, there have been instances in the past where sides wearing black face have been caught up in disputes with audience members and even groups – we need to keep everyone safe and able to enjoy their dance outs without worry!

Does this mean you think people dancing in full face black paint are racists?

We would like to make it very clear that we do not believe that any of our teams dancing today use full face black paint with any racist motivation.

What does the Equality Act have to do with it?

The Equality Act 2010 lists race as a protected characteristic, and states that harassment has taken place if someone's conduct has the purpose or effect of '(ii) creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment...' it goes on to state that '...the following must be taken into account: a) the perception of (the harassed party)...' So this legislation effectively defines harassment, in this case racial harassment, by the perception of the harassed party, which means that the intent of the conduct being called into question has little or no importance under law. Although the effect of this legislation hasn't been tested in a court of law with regard to the practices of Morris teams, protecting our members from becoming part of a



first test case is a big priority for us. Although this legislation has been in place for a while, we believe that the global political climate makes a case of this nature more and more likely, which is another reason to make this move now.

Can I still use some black in my look?

Absolutely! Please see the JMO statement at the top for guidelines.

We're not sure how this applies to our situation, is our look ok?

Please feel free to discuss things with us! You could send a picture, or please ask for any clarification you need.

But new make up for the whole team will cost a fortune, we can't afford it!

If this is a genuine problem for your team, please get in touch with us and we may be able to help.

What does 'JMO' mean?

JMO stands for "Joint Morris Organisations" – a group made up of The Morris Federation, The Morris Ring, and Open Morris. This is the umbrella organisation under which insurance is purchased.

What does this all actually mean?

The announcement is a declaration of the JMO's intent. Each individual organisation will have different processes to be followed, but we felt it important to give advance warning to all member teams at the same time.

What is going to happen and when?



There will be an item on the agenda at our AGM on Sunday 29th November 2020. The unanimous view of the Committee will be that teams who use full face black make up will not be accepted as members at the 2021 renewal.

What are we supposed to do in the meantime?

We are currently in the discussion phase of the process. This is a chance for you to share your views with the committee. You may also wish to discuss the impact of this statement with your team if you currently have full face black make up as part of your kit.

We would urge any team considering dancing in full face black make up in the intervening period to consider their actions very carefully. We strongly believe that there is a serious danger of legal action.

What is Open Morris doing to support teams who are affected?

We would really like to talk to teams and support them at this time. If your team currently dances in full face black paint and you would like some help in coming to a decision regarding change to another pattern or colour, then please contact us. We may even be able to put you in touch with a team who have recently changed so that experience and ideas can be shared!

But don't you have a duty as a Morris organisation to protect tradition?

Our primary duty is to protect the interests of the Morris community. We are not trying to stop the guising tradition – in fact we are looking forward to seeing all the creative and wonderful things that can be done to move away from full face black make up. Morris is, and always will be, a living and evolving tradition, and this is an important step to safeguard the future of that tradition. Using make up for disguise is a recognised part of Morris history, but the use of solid full face black paint is a relatively modern development in the tradition, and again, whilst we do not believe that any team uses it with racist motivation today, research indicates that the origins are inextricably linked



with offensive practices. You may be interested in the papers and article linked at <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/blog/morris-dancers-blackface>.

Who can I talk to about this?

Please contact your Area Representative or any member of the Committee to open a discussion if you are affected by these issues. Please do remember though that the Open Morris team are all volunteers. Abusive or aggressive messages will not receive responses.

What will happen if my team is unwilling to change?

The effect of the proposal will be that, under the Open Morris Constitution, applications for membership or membership renewal for teams who wish to keep using full face black make up will be refused. This will mean that your team will no longer be covered by JMO insurance, will no longer be invited to any organisation or JMO dance outs and may also struggle to gain permission to dance out in other places that require Public Liability Insurance.

However, we would really like to avoid losing any teams and are very keen to support and work with teams in the coming months.

If you have any additional questions, please contact us. All contact details can be found at <https://open-morris.org/about/contact/>.

The Open Morris Committee