The Black and minority ethnic (BME) Student Ambassador Toolkit

This Toolkit is a resource developed by Malia Bouattia, The NUS’s Black Students’ Officer and Jane Tope, the University of Birmingham’s Equality and Diversity Adviser in 2014

For further information contact Jane on d.j.tope@bham.ac.uk

The purpose of the Toolkit is to:

1. Give context to why we need and support the Ambassadors by outlining the BME student experience
2. Be used as a training resource for staff and students wishing to improve the representation, performance and inclusivity of Black and minority ethnic students

The focus of this Toolkit is to work towards better supporting the success of BME students by improving understanding and recognising barriers to success.

The focus is on removing barriers NOT suggesting a problem with the students.... IT IS NOT A DEFICIT MODEL!
1. Being BME at the University of Birmingham - the experience and performance of BME students

- I, too, am Birmingham
- The ethnicity attainment gap at UoB

2. How to be an ambassador and supporting ambassadors in the Schools

- Previous work/pilot assessing the efficacy of the approach
- How you can effect change

3. The Toolkit

- First steps
- Engaging with BME students in your School
- Engaging with members of staff/academics
- Creating BME safe spaces/events
- Seeking support
- Feedback
- BME postgraduates

4. BEMA - here to help!

And other resources

Contacts
Section 1.

I, too, am Birmingham

Your “Post-racial” is a MYTH #ITooAmBirmingham

“Wow, you’re quite articulate for a black girl?” #ITooAmBirmingham

It’s not okay to measure me from a Scale of Zero to White #ITooAmBirmingham

“No, sorry, I don’t speak African, but do you speak European though?” #ITooAmBirmingham

“My faith is not a FASHION statement #ITooAmBirmingham

No my Mum is not white! No my Dad is not white! #ITooAmBirmingham

Not enough SPACE #ITooAmBirmingham
I AM PAKISTANI
WHAT IS THAT?

#ITooAmBirmingham

Your English is
sooooo good! -Jah.

#ITooAmBirmingham

No thanks, I don't need
saving from a forced marriage
...to my cousin.

#ITooAmBirmingham

"Where's Kashmir?
The Cardigan textile??"

#ITooAmBirmingham

YES I'm International
AND
I CAN SPEAK ENGLISH

#ITooAmBirmingham
"OMG, YOU'RE NIGERIAN!! .... BUT YOU'RE MIXED WITH SOMETHING ELSE RIGHT?" 
"ERM... NO"
#ITooAmBirmingham

NO I DIDN'T GET HERE ON THE A2B ACCESS SCHEME
#ITooAmBirmingham

YES, this is my real hair!!
#ITooAmBirmingham

It's not funny to say we should have a pro-racism officer!
#ITooAmBirmingham

"Jamaica is in Africa, right?!"
#ITooAmBirmingham

Why should my assertiveness be deemed aggressive?
#ITooAmBirmingham
I'm not Pakistani. I'm Syrian.
#ITooAmBirmingham

My name is not ABDI.
#ITooAmBirmingham

No, I'm not "one of those rich Asian guys!"
#ITooAmBirmingham

No, you can't touch my hair!!
#ITooAmBirmingham

No, I'm not a ghetto princess because I'm from Handsworth!
#ITooAmBirmingham

I see white people...
#ITooAmBirmingham
What do UoB BME students say?

Research was conducted in 2012/3 as part of a nationally funded project supported by the Higher Education Academy into what activities can help narrow the ethnicity attainment gap. Here are some of the views expressed by students who were individually interviewed or took part in a number of focus groups:

- Experienced a feeling of ‘White campus’ – BME students chose Birmingham because it’s multi-cultural, but the campus ‘feels white’ – its ambience/culture/environment and this leads to feeling ‘othered’/’minoritised’/ in an ‘alien environment’

- Important to experience a sense of belonging, respect and mutual interest and academics very important in this because students want to feel their identity is valued

- Segregation in lecturers and seminars happens and needs to be challenged

- Curriculum should reflect diversity—a ‘heart-thumping moment’ happens when students feel their perspective is understood and valued

- Some Schools feel more isolating than others...

- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0J_jhtlzeE0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0J_jhtlzeE0)
The issues and ...

The attainment gap

The issues include BME students are less likely to gain a place at university (UoB = 23% UK BME), they report poorer experiences ref. NSS, BSS, NUS’s Report (see end references) and less likely to gain fulltime employment after graduation. [http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/WhenEducationIsntEnough.pdf](http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/WhenEducationIsntEnough.pdf)

What is the attainment gap?

The attainment gap measures the difference between the proportion of first degree undergraduate qualifiers who obtain a first class or upper second class honours degree.

Sector ethnicity attainment gap


This report states the sector gap.

The attainment gap at UoB

At the University of Birmingham there is an ethnic attainment gap of around 12%. This is variable across Schools but it remains the case that BME are less likely to gain a first class or upper second class honours degree and have a poorer poor experience. Furthermore, BME students are also less likely to finish their degree and less likely to gain a fulltime job after graduation.

Some of the reasons include:

- Institutional racism/unconscious bias maybe? Lower expectations and ‘folk pedagogies’ (Singh 2012)
- Feelings of isolation from BME students who expected UoB to more reflect of the wider multicultural community but finding it is a culture of exclusion
- BME students feeling ‘minoritised’ and ignored
- Lack of diversity in the curriculum, not reflective of BME groups and diversity in general
- Lack of diversity amongst staff and role models
The ‘gap’ at the University of Birmingham

<table>
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<th>College %</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
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<tr>
<td>Life and Environmental Sciences</td>
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<td>13.0</td>
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<td>12.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engineering and Physical Sciences</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>20.5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>University % totals</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reasons for the ‘gap’ and other research:

- [http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/retention/black_minority_ethnic_student_resources#publications](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/retention/black_minority_ethnic_student_resources#publications)
- Final report available from [d.j.tope@bham.ac.uk](mailto:d.j.tope@bham.ac.uk)
- For an up-date on NUS’s report contact Malia
Section 2.
The importance and role of a BME ambassador

- As a BME ambassador you will be responsible for creating BME safe spaces so that students in your School and Department are able to voice their concerns, seek guidance and support, and feel represented because often the sense of being a minority is very prominent.

- You will also be responsible for creating a dialogue with staff members so that the issues which may be faced by BME students in your School can be addressed.

- Your role is to be representative and raise issues of concern, or for change at School committees and other fora.

- You will call meetings for students within your School and be prominent because you will have a student ambassador T shirt!

- You will be paid a small sum as a ‘thank you’ for your involvement.
Why is it important to create BME safe spaces?

Malia says:

‘A BME safe space can be anything from an event for self-defining students, to a Facebook group/email thread, or even your presence as a BME ambassador.

On a campus which is mostly attended by white students, and a staff population which is also reflective of this, it is important for minorities to feel represented and heard because in reality, barriers such as racism and other forms of prejudice continue to exist. The presence of autonomous spaces are a recognition of these issues and are implemented so as to alleviate some of these social and systematic burdens on groups who are most affected.’

Join the University’s Network:

• [https://www.facebook.com/BMEPROJECT](https://www.facebook.com/BMEPROJECT)

• [https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/collaboration/equality/students/getinvolved/bme/index.aspx](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/collaboration/equality/students/getinvolved/bme/index.aspx)

See Paul Allen’s research
Section 3.
The Toolkit

• First steps
• Engaging with BME students in your School/an advert to use
• The pilot 2013/14
• Engaging with members of staff/academics
• Creating BME safe spaces/events
• Seeking support
• Feedback
• BME postgraduates
First steps

• **Training**
  You will receive training sessions from Jane Tope (Equality and Diversity advisor) and Malia Bouattia at the beginning of term. It’s important that new students feel an immediate sense of belonging...and this is where ambassadors and mentors can help.

• **Plan**
  A meeting with Jane and Malia will be organised so that you can discuss potential ideas you have for your School. You will then be asked to produce a clear plan of action and timeline.
Engaging with BME students in your School

First event
Organise a first meeting for all BME students in the School. This is an opportunity to bring all BME students together and for them to know who you are. They need to know that there is support should they require it in the future. This is also an opportunity for you to discover the exact needs of BME students because the year groups will be varied. Remember:

✓ Don’t be disheartened by a lack of engagement in the first instance, it takes time to establish a good group
✓ Find out who can help you in your School. Is there a student engagement officer?
✓ Discuss with others the notion of targeted intervention. Are you ‘comfortable’ advertising events aimed at BME students?

MENTORING There is a BME peer mentoring scheme at UoB. Don’t forget to tell everyone
https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/collaboration/equality/students/getinvolved/bme/mentoring-scheme.aspx

INDUCTION and School/First year meetings- ensure you and your fellow ambassadors go into as many all student meetings as possible to explain your role

You will need to...
-Contact Jane and Malia about booking a room.
-Design an eye-catching poster and leaflet to distribute and contact Jane to access printing.
-Request for an email to be circulated within the School and through my.bham
-Contact BEMA who can also advertise and support the event
An advert to Schools about what student ambassadors do

Development of student ambassadors - trained and discussed issues. They are to work in Schools as ambassadors *for success*

With the students’ agreement they:
• Wear the T shirt! This identifies them and states: ‘UoB supporting student success’
• Contact their Welfare Tutor/academic tutor who will be the main source of contact and support
• Talk to students- call a meeting / social
• Set up a group....
• Discuss the issues faced by some BME students
• Talk about BME SUCCESS( not failure)
• Are role models
• Consider curriculum and resource issues and make recommendations
• Be diversity course reps.
• Be a point of contact for BME students
Student ambassadors – the pilot in EDACS

BME Student Ambassadors- trained and pilot in School of EDACS. Blog

The email:

Hi all,

It was great to meet you today and it’s really exciting that you’ve agreed (maybe not Jemima, but as you see, it’s not too much work!) to be BME student ambassadors in the School of EDACS. I met with Tom after I left you and he is v. supportive of your ideas and keen to meet up with you to give you the School support. Chantelle Edwards (maybe, not her name?) can help with advertising things and booking rooms.

Here’s the list of things we discussed;

• Establish a book club, possibly named the BME Lit Book Club? And have a first meeting on the 30th October (end of BHM, good point!). Together you will decide a book to discuss but ‘The God of Small Things’ might be a good first one, as that might attract new students. The BC would be open to all but ‘badged’ as one focussing on BME lit. This would provide a ‘space’ for BME students in particular, and would give you the opportunity to get folks together.

• A ‘diversity’ rep is a good idea as this would enable the rep to focus on voicing issues from BME students’ perspectives.

• I will contact Cheyenne Bunsie to give a talk this term. Tom says she may be able to be part of the B-ham Futures series?

• Tom agreed with the idea that in future a more diverse group of guest speakers could be invited but maybe, it’s too late this year for the invitations?

• DON’T forget the blog...your chance to get your voice heard as a group, or as an individual...and the T shirts( I need to give them out to you, what size do you want?). http://scholarshipofblackness.tumblr.com/

• Please let Worklink know that you’re doing the ambassador work and I’ll email them too.

• Plus, think about how to reflect BME diversity in the department through a display/ book covers or whatever. Tom says there are noticeboards available for some displays.

• Finally, ‘the more the merrier’ so do let others know...and I’ll bring the T shirts next time ( Najmin!)

THANKS to all for your support in this. You are real ambassadors! And keep in touch with me, as I can let others know around the University of the good work you’re engaged in.

Jane
I have noticed that as the academic year goes on, students feel more and more settled into their study and university life, and are not so keen to attend events to make friends. So I think that any event we organise needs to be right at the start of the year – maybe during Welcome Week so that we do have a group of students who are there to make friends and are more likely to settle into this idea and group.

– These events could include welcome meetings, cinema trips, etc.

– I also think that these events should require as little preparation as possible for our audience. Shorter books, popular films, etc. Requiring more prep could deter students from out events as they would feels as if they should not/cannot attend. And by starting off with more popular material, students will recognise it, so more people might show up and have an opinion on the topic.

I think that the Book Club idea that was discussed at first is a concept that should be reconsidered. I think I fell apart due to conflicts in schedules and by the fact that we were slightly busy with dissertations. But I really do like the idea – discussing ‘diverse’ and cultural books, films, documentaries, etc. There could also be trips organised to cultural events. Regarding audiences, I think that BME students/staff should be targeted, but it should be open to all. Having a range of students there ensures a range of opinions, allowing us to make the most of the discussion/debate. In order to improve from last time, I think that the advertising needs to be improved, and the location and time needs to be more accessible.

I really like the mentoring idea – it think that we could continue to work with Jane here with her BME mentoring scheme. This could be more advertised (through Shantel) within the EDACS department and maybe we could develop the mentoring to hold a range of one-to-one meetings and group meetings?

Film screenings is another thing we could do again. The one we did last semester was not properly planned and advertised, so it can be refined. I think that we should make it a weekly/fortnightly event at a regular time and place. This was difficult to organise last year due to conflicting schedules, but I think that we can overcome this problem by having a schedule – 1 or 2 Ambassadors will only be required per screening. This would rely on a defined schedule – something that would need to be organised as early as possible.

Another idea that I was thinking about a bit was maybe we could start a BME newsletter? This would have a range of sections – cultural event reviews, recommendations, a summary of upcoming events, profiles on BME-focused students and staff, contact details, etc. I haven’t thought it through properly yet but I think it will help with advertising. Us in general. I think it would be nice if we could get some help with BEMA regarding this idea, but it has to focus on the EACS department or else it will be ignored and passed off as something general.

Developing on this idea, it is vital that the BME Ambassadors focus on EDACS and BME rather than just BME in general. So anything we do must be connected to literature, drama, film, culture, etc. If we don’t then the role get’s more and more vague and everyone will have difficulty recognising what our targets are and who we are. I found that this was slightly the case during the last half of semester two and it resulted in less enthusiasm and distraction.

I think that the BME Ambassador role needs to be planned in as much detail as possible before or during the start of the academic year. If we don’t (like last time), then it is difficult to decide what to do and when to do it, meaning time is wasted, which is not good at all during the start of the year. By having a vague plan of events, things like advertising and scheduling can be taking into consideration asap, resulting in a smoother, improved cycle.
What happens after the first meeting/event?

• As a BME ambassador and diversity rep, is worth hosting regular meetings where BME students can drop-in for a chat and to discuss any of the issues they are facing or simply coming along to meet other BME students?

• The consistency will not only ensure that the efforts to narrow the attainment gap will continue, but it is reassuring for BME students who may be having a difficult time and are in need of the space.

• Depending on the School, you can also offer events which correspond to the subject areas e.g. BME Book group with diverse literature
Engaging with members of staff/academics

Staff and academics can be very helpful and supportive of the work you do as an ambassador. They may be keen to engage with you because they want the ethnicity attainment gap to disappear.

✓ Find out who to contact, Jane can help, and arrange a meeting to discuss your plans. This can also lead to having a say at staff/student meetings where issues such as a non-reflective curriculum are addressed.

✓ If there are BME academics in your School, organising a meeting/event where they can engage with BME students about their experiences. They can introduce an event or suggest a speaker.
Support

• Having regular meetings with other ambassadors so that you can support one another, share ideas about events or engaging with members of your School.

• Jane Tope: Contact your E&D Advisor who is always willing to help! Keep her informed about any progress or difficulties. Regular ‘catch-ups’ will be arranged.

• The Ethnic Minorities’ Officer at the Guild and BEMA (Black and Ethnic Minorities Association) are always willing to help you book rooms, offer resources, promote events and generally support all your work.
Feedback

It is very important that Jane Tope receives regular information about the activities you are taking part in as an ambassador because this will help us to evaluate the positive effect you may be having on BME students’ experiences and their academic achievements. This also allows a better understanding of which methods work better so that BME ambassadors are trained accordingly in the future.

Methods of recording feedback:
- Attend monthly meetings with Jane
- Fill in progress sheets about any action you’ve taken/will be taking
- Provide any additional notes from drop-in sessions you organise (there is even a possibility of recording this with the student’s permission).
BME postgraduates

Representing BME postgraduates

Being a BME (postgraduate) ambassador or mentor
University of Birmingham Black & Ethnic Minorities' Association (BEMA) is a Guild Liberation Association exists to promote the interests and well-being of BME students who are of African, Asian, Arab, Caribbean and South American descent.

BEMA represents BME students on their welfare, social and political needs through the Guild’s democratic structures and bodies, and campaigns on their behalf towards these needs often alongside relevant student societies and local organisations.

They provide safe spaces for self-empowerment and discussion on the issues and commonalities of experience shared by BME students, and also for organising around these issues. BEMA also hold a range of events to celebrate the diversity of cultures within the University, highlight the historical contributions and achievements of BME people, and also to allow students to engage with BME organisations operating within higher education, locally and nationally. It hosts a series of events annually for Black History Month in October, Alternative Freshers’ Week social events and more throughout the year, and seeks to make these events as inclusive of BME students as possible, including hosting them in non-alcoholic environments.

Twitter: @BEMA_online
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/bemaonline/info
Email: bema@guild.bham.ac.uk
Website: bemaonline.wordpress.com
Racial micro aggressions are brief, everyday interactions that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racially minoritised group. Compared to more overt forms of racism, racial micro aggressions are subtle and insidious, often leaving the victim confused, distressed and frustrated and the perpetrator oblivious of the offense they have caused. Drawing on the counter narrative aspect of critical race theory that stresses the importance of understanding the role of race in the world through the experiences of people of color, I demonstrate the subtle but powerful ways in which racial micro aggressions can manifest.

Spaces occupied by black students, and the functions of those spaces were discussed in the research by Allen (1995). He did qualitative research between 1989 and 1993 using semi-structured in-depth interviews with 50 black students in a new university in the West Midlands. He suggests that black students formed their own informal support networks, particular meeting places within the institution.

This paper attempts, through the case studies of a group of ten higher education applicants, to develop a preliminary theoretical analysis of the processes of contemporary higher education choice which works both with the growing diversity of the client group and the continuing inequalities in access. It is argued that intersections of gender, ‘race’ and social class are key to understanding students’ experiences of higher education choice. Higher education policy, in widening access, could be seen to be promoting social justice. However, it is argued that the experience of these ten students points to a more complex, less optimistic conclusion.

An interesting article considering what mentoring for diversity may hide.

Absent from the Academy
http://vimeo.com/76725812
Contacts

• **NUS Black Students’ Campaign**
Website: http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/black/

• **Black Women’s Forum UK**
Link: https://www.facebook.com/BlackWomensForum

• **Black British Academics**
Website: http://blackbritishacademics.co.uk/
Email: info@blackbritishacademics.co.uk

• **Society of Black Lawyers**
Website: http://www.blacklawyer.org

• **Writers of Colour/Media Diversified**
Website: http://mediadiversified.org/
Email: mediadiversityuk@gmail.com

• **Little Miss Creative**
Website: http://www.wearelmc.com