

BAME employment in West Midlands BVCS Birmingham

On the 21st April 2017 ROTA ran a seminar with local equality think tank [BRAP](#) on BAME employment in the West Midlands. With Black people three times more likely to be unemployed in Birmingham than White British people, the seminar focused on the barriers and solutions to unequal employment outcomes.

Guest speakers:

Professor Monder Ram OBE, Director of Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship, *University of Birmingham*

Sally Bromley and Lawrence Cooke, Resourcing Consultants, *Severn Trent*

Joy Warmington, CEO, *BRAP*

Key findings:

- More support and recognition for BAME entrepreneurs who **contribute 14% SME job creation** in Britain
- It should be recognised that **experiencing discrimination and unconscious bias has an immeasurable impact on the mental health** of BAME people.
- It is vital that there are spaces for BAME groups to discuss the barriers they face in the job market and receive support.
- Companies should **consider strengths-based interviews** that examine potential, levelling out the playing field for candidates from all backgrounds.
- **Recruit outside of Russell Group universities** alone – BAME groups less represented at these institutions.
- For apprenticeships and work experience schemes, **use OFSTED data to recruit in schools** with pupils from BAME backgrounds and on free school meals (FSM).
- Increasing representation alone is not the only important outcome.

Support for BAME businesses

- Central government policies often do not consider local needs and it's not clear where regional policies fit.
- BAME contribution to our economy via entrepreneurship must be more widely recognised – **BAME people are responsible for 14% SME job creation** in Britain, but this is not a key feature in the entrepreneurship narrative.
- When crafting business support initiatives, policymakers should consider BAME businesses needs.
- Birmingham Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) strategy for growth had no mention of ethnic minority business support: business support intermediaries must reach out to ethnic minority business and offer relevant support.
- Self-employment is not necessarily a sign of success and can evolve out of necessity in response to a lack of alternative employment opportunities. Supporting entrepreneurship alone will not solve the wider issue of unequal employment outcomes.
- BAME is a wide-ranging heterogeneous group and not all ethnic minority groups benefit equally from entrepreneurship.
- NGOs and academics should engage with the private sector to look for solutions and support. It is important to diversify our audience.

Actions for local corporate employers

- Employers should measure the impact of interventions to find out which work best and carry out pilots to see what's the most effective.
- It is important to recruit outside of Russell Group universities alone – BAME groups less represented at these institutions.
- For apprenticeships and work experience schemes, using OFSTED data to recruit in schools with pupils from BAME backgrounds and on free school meals (FSM) can diversify the workforce.
- Increasing representation alone is not the only important outcome – if work experience schemes equip pupils with skills but they do not subsequently apply to your organisation, this is still a success.
- Companies should consider moving to strengths-based interviews rather than competency-based:
 - Competency **interviews favour those from higher-income groups** with more access to work experience or internships to use as examples
 - Strengths-based interviews examine potential, **levelling out the playing field for candidates from all backgrounds.**
 - There is **no evidence** that this affects the performance of new hires.
- Changing the imagery on the company website to include BAME staff and recognising faith days creates a **more inclusive working environment.**
- Ensure senior leadership team have **unconscious bias training.**

- Senior-level buy-in is crucial – commitment to improving representation must be clear.
- Staff must be able **to talk about diversity openly** and ask difficult questions.
- Companies should collect data at each stage of the recruitment process to monitor the success rate of BAME candidates and which phase might be a barrier to progression.

Further actions

- These issues are entrenched and have existed and persisted. **Communities feel impatient for change.**
- It should be recognised that experiencing discrimination and unconscious bias has an **immeasurable impact on the mental health** of BAME people.
- It is vital that there are **spaces for BAME groups to discuss the barriers they face** in the job market and receive support.