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Introduction

The underrepresentation of BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) individuals is a longstanding issue in Chemistry, leading to a huge loss of talent.¹ It is therefore an urgent issue for us to address as a chemical community.

York Chemistry has worked extensively to support the careers of women in science since 2003.² This work has resulted in the department nurturing the careers of a growing number of highly successful women chemists.

We are now keen to use this experience to build the best possible environment to support BAME students and staff

Listening exercise

In this project, we will carry out a broad listening exercise of BAME chemists at York. This will let us identify ways in which individuals experience racism, better understand career aspirations and bottlenecks, and identify practical actions that would encourage individuals to continue with chemical careers.

The project will use an experienced external consultant (Dr Sean McWhinnie), to conduct a range of focus groups, one-to-one interviews, etc allowing individuals to be as honest as possible.

We will investigate how the experiences of UK BAME individuals differs from non-UK BAME individuals, and also aim to understand whether policy and practice to support gender equality has a positive impact for BAME individuals.

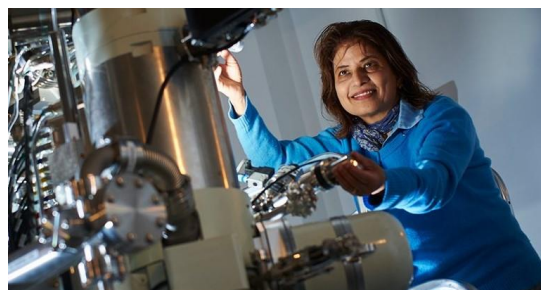
Project tools (e.g. surveys) will be transferable to other Chemistry Departments, and results compiled as an openly available report and disseminated widely.



Aims

The overall aims of the project are:

1. To conduct a series of surveys, focus groups and 1-2-1 interviews with BAME students and staff in York Chemistry to better understand their lived experience, and what actions would encourage them to continue in chemical careers.
2. To understand differences in experiences of UK and non-UK BAME individuals.
3. To understand whether actions by a department to support gender equality (e.g. under the Athena SWAN scheme) have a positive impact for BAME individuals.
4. To compile the results in an openly-available report that will be disseminated across the chemical community. The survey tools developed will also be shared openly.



Methodology

The first stage of the project will involve developing a survey tool that will be used to investigate the experiences of BAME students and staff. A combination of surveys, focus groups and one-to-one interviews will be employed depending on the number of BAME individuals and likely response rate of each cohort.

Numbers of BAME students and staff within our Department of Chemistry at York³

For undergraduate and postgraduate students:
UG = 660 (BAME 10%) PGR = 120 (BAME 22%)

Electronic surveys followed up by focus groups.

For research staff = 90 (BAME 18%) Focus groups

For academic and teaching staff = 62 (BAME 7%) One to one interviews

In analyzing the results of the surveys, we will aim to separate responses from UK and non-UK BAME individuals to understand whether the two groups have different experiences and aspirations.

Key questions

The survey will address the following questions for staff and students:

- Have you experienced racism?
- Do you think people treat you differently?
- Do you feel that there is unconscious bias against BAME people in academia/chemistry?
- Do you want initiatives specifically for BAME people, like a university mentoring programme?
- What are your views on the terminology BME/BAME?
- What ways could the department support you and encourage you to continue a career in chemistry?
- What are your views about the Athena SWAN work of the department?

Additional question for staff members:

- Do you believe that your race has been a barrier to you being promoted at this University?

Additional questions for students:

- Do you believe that unconscious bias has affected your assessments?
- How does your experience of university differ from your experiences at school?



Ongoing work

Equality and Diversity training part of core training for all Year 1 UGs. Redeveloped to include recordings covering many aspects of diversity, including an academic talking about their lived experience of being a BAME Chemist.



Decolonisation and Diversification of the Curriculum began in 2019. Lecturers encouraged to review the scientists they chose to highlight in their lectures to ensure diverse representation of gender and ethnicity.

We are very keen to hear from other Chemistry and STEM Departments who are already working on Decolonising and Diversifying their Curriculum or are interested in doing so.

Departmental Culture Survey looking at experience of staff and students analysed by ethnicity and gender.

Increased the number of BAME seminar speakers. Speakers invited to give both scientific and/or diversity talks.

Review of images in department and on web pages to ensure good representation of BAME students and staff.

Equality and Diversity lunchtime forum held on 'Being a BAME chemist'.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the Royal Society of Chemistry Diversity Fund and the Department of Chemistry at the University of York who have funded this work.



[1] UK chemistry pipeline loses almost all of its BAME students after undergraduate studies, Chemistry World, 10 August 2020 www.chemistryworld.com/news/ukchemistrypipelinelosesalmostallofitsblackasianandotherethnicminoritychemistsafterundergraduatestudies/4012258.article.

[2]. Department of Chemistry, University of York, Equality and Diversity webpages www.york.ac.uk/chemistry/ed/

[3] Department of Chemistry, University of York, Athena SWAN Gold Submission 2018 www.york.ac.uk/media/research/documents/athenaswan/York-Chemistry-Gold%202018%20for%20publication.pdf