

A Proposed Amendment to Governing Documents:

The Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Network and the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Students' Officer should be renamed as the 'People of Colour (POC) Network' and 'People of Colour (POC) Students' Officer'

What would you like the Union to do?

Currently, the network is known as the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Network. The elected officer is currently known as the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Students' Officer. The network (and elected officer) represents the views of students at UCL who self-define as BME, including, but not limited to, students with African, Asian, Arab, Caribbean, and Indigenous heritages.

I would like to propose that the Governing Documents are amended so that the BME Network and BME Students' Officer can change their name to the People of Colour (POC) Network and People of Colour (POC) Students' Officer, respectively.

I would like these new names to come into effect immediately and to have this change reflected in 2023's Leadership Race.

Why would you like to do this?

Since being elected as the BME Students' Officer, I have seen that the term 'BME' does not reflect our network members, with many students not feeling able to either identify themselves under the term or feeling that it misrepresented them. For example, during the welcome fair, many students either did not recognise that the network (or my role) represented them, or they showed dissatisfaction towards the term.

This initial hypothesis has been supported via an opinion poll and focus groups. This data collection has taken place over the last month (November 2022) with the support of Students' Union UCL's Equity and Inclusion Unit and the Policy and Research team.

Focus groups were conducted in order to collect qualitative data. This allowed us to gain an in-depth understanding of the student view. We held two one-hour focus groups: one online (six participants) and one in-person (six participants). Participants received a briefing before attending and were compensated for their time (£15 for the hour). In the briefing, students were provided with a non-exhaustive list of alternative names, along with additional context. The briefing is attached in [Appendix A](#).

Following the focus groups, I ran an opinion poll via the BME Network Instagram account. All mailing list subscribers (+80) were also emailed. Following a brief analysis of the focus group data the most popular options were put to students: 1) 'Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Network'; 2) Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Network'; 3) 'People of Colour (POC) Network'. The poll received 80 responses within 24 hours; 55% of respondents voted for the network to be renamed the 'People of Colour (POC) Network', 33% voted for BAME, and 12% voted for BME to be retained.

Consequently, I believe that there is a strong, evidence-based case for the names to be changed.

How will this affect students?

It is hoped that this will help improve the profile of the network by giving these students a sense of belonging within the Students' Union UCL community. This name is modern and reflects the current attitudes of our students, allowing us to lead on topics of belonging and community, and to commit to being an equitable and inclusive environment.

Has your policy proposal considered the following:

Is it affordable?

N/A

Is it sustainable?

N/A

Is your idea new and unique?

N/A

Appendix A



Students' Union UCL's BME Network: Should it be renamed?

Introduction

Currently, the network is known as the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Network. The network represents the views of students at UCL who self-define as BME, including, but not limited to, students with African, Asian, Arab, Caribbean and Indigenous heritages. As of 2015, the proportion of BME students at UCL was 29% of UK- domiciled students and 62% of non-UK domiciled students.

The BME Students' Officer, however, has raised concerns over its usage, and has suggested there may be a more fitting network name.

To help us understand the best way forward, Students' Union UCL are supporting the BME Network to conduct focus groups so that the student voice can be heard.

The issue with 'BME'

A survey by the Race Disparity Audit, the best available evidence, found **that** among nearly 300 people across the UK, <1% either recognised the acronyms BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic)/ BME or knew what they stood for. This is against a required government standard of 80% of the UK population.¹

Black British Academics say that BME and BAME “reproduce unequal power relations where white is not a visible marker of identity and is therefore a privileged identity”.² They write that “The terms ‘BME’ and ‘BAME’ are also problematic because they mask inequalities as they are experienced by different racialised ethnic groups, for example rendering anti-Black racism invisible. The use of these terms reinforces racial inequality by maintaining White ethnic identity as privileged. Since ‘White’ is never named as an identity, it continues to be normative so that people of colour only exist in a marginalised position that is de-centred by whiteness”³

Whilst the term BME had previously been widely used since the 1980s, many organisations are now moving away from it.

- » For example, the Race Disparity Audit, a small unit in the Cabinet Office state that they no longer use the terms BAME or BME due to their emphasis on certain ethnic minority groups

¹ <https://civilservice.blog.gov.uk/2019/07/08/please-dont-call-me-bame-or-bme/>

² <https://blackbritishacademics.co.uk/about/racial-categorisation-and-terminology/>

³ Ibid.

(Asian and Black) and exclusions of others (mixed, other, and White ethnic minority groups).⁴ They write that “the terms can also mask disparities between different ethnic groups and create misleading interpretations of data”. This advancement, however, does not apply to wider government usage.

- » Moreover, in December 2021 UK broadcasters committed to avoiding using the acronym wherever possible.⁵

Additionally, many prominent individuals have also expressed discomfort with the term.

- » For example, author and teaching fellow in the Africa department at SOAS, Emma Dabiri also supports moving away from the terms BME and BAME. She believes that they are “unsuitable”, and that the vagueness of both BME/ BAME and People of Colour (POC) “obscures the racial hierarchy wherein whiteness is arguably placed at the top, while black remains firmly at the bottom”⁶
- » Rosemary Campbell-Stephens, author and visiting Fellow at the Institute of Education, University College London notes that the issue with phrases such as BME/ BAME, is that “they all situate whiteness as the norm within their respective local contexts even when the opposite is true.”⁷

Other Commonly Used Terms

For information and consideration, a non-exhaustive list of other commonly used terms is laid out below:

Global Majority

- » The term Global Majority was coined by Rosemary Campbell-Stephens as part of her work in London on leadership preparation within the school sector between 2003 and 2011, as part of the London Challenge initiative.⁸
- » She writes that “Global Majority is a collective term that first and foremost speaks to and encourages those so-called, to think of themselves as belonging to the majority on planet earth. It refers to people who are Black, African, Asian, Brow, dual-heritage, Indigenous to the global south, and or, have been racialised as ‘ethnic minorities’.”⁹
- » Significantly, these groups represent approximately 80% of the world’s population. Consequently, this wording points out the demographic inaccuracy of the term “minority” and can therefore feel more empowering for some individuals.
- » However, some people feel that this does not accurately reflect the fact that people of non-White ethnicities experience life as a minority within the UK, and that this often carries real-life

⁴ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity>

⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-59559834>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/22/black-asian-minority-ethnic-bame-bme-trevor-phillips-racial-minorities>

⁷ <https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/-/media/files/schools/school-of-education/final-leeds-beckett-1102-global-majority.pdf> (p.2)

⁸ Campbell-Stephens, R. M. (2021). Educational Leadership and the Global Majority: Decolonising Narratives. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

⁹ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/global-majority-we-need-talk-labels-bame-campbell-stephens-mbe/>

repercussions.

Ethnic minority, minority ethnic or minoritised ethnic

- » These terms usually refer to racial and ethnic groups that are in a minority in the population. In the UK, they typically cover all ethnic groups except White British. For example, they include White minority ethnic groups such as Polish or Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller.
- » 'Minoritised ethnic' has been recommended more recently as it recognises that individuals have been minoritized through social processes of power and domination rather than just existing in distinct statistical minorities. It may also better reflect the fact that ethnic groups that are minorities in the UK are majorities in the global population.

Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME)

- » Like BME, BAME has been used to refer to people of non-White ethnicities who are minoritised in the UK.
- » It is typically used when making comparisons with the White population in the UK. For example, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) use it when gathering and collating statistics.
- » More recently, UK broadcasters have committed to avoiding using the acronym wherever possible.¹⁰
- » As the Law Society writes, "The controversy and unease with the term 'BAME' largely stems from the grouping together of diverse ethnicities, and the implication that it reflects a singular or homogenous ethnic identity."¹¹

People of Colour (POC)

- » This term is primarily used in the USA.
- » Whilst some people see this term as more positive than BME, others see it as similarly problematic in that it groups together people of great ethnic diversity and different shared experiences and identities.

Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC)

- » According to Cynthia Frisby, a professor of strategic communication, 'BI' was added to the shorter 'POC' acronym in order to account for the erasure of Black people with darker skin and Native American people. "The Black and Indigenous was added to kind of make sure that it was inclusive [...] I think the major purpose of that was for including voices that hadn't originally been heard that they wanted to include in the narrative, darker skin, blacks and Indigenous groups, so that they could make sure that all the skin shades are being represented."¹²

Visible Minority

- » This term is primarily used in Canada.
- » Visible minority is used in Canada to refer to visually recognisable racial groups ("non-Caucasian in ethnicity or non-White in colour") whose members constitute less than half of the population.¹³

¹⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-59559834>

¹¹ <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/ethnic-minority-lawyers/a-guide-to-race-and-ethnicity-terminology-and-language>

¹² <https://www.nytimes.com/article/what-is-bipoc.html>

¹³ <https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3Var.pl?Function=DEC&Id=45152>