

What are the key pillars of BAME in Hospitality?

BAME in Hospitality was initially set up to address lack of representation, but we have a clear mission to do many other things within that, such as driving education, amplifying voices, creating a community and accelerating racial equality across the sector.

One of the key pillars of the business is partnerships: we work with organisations and provide a suite of services. We meet organisations where they are; we're very mindful that every business is on its own individual journey, and for that reason they need different levels of support. So we provide training, workshops and webinars that act as a source of education and information on all matters relating to diversity and inclusion, understanding the differences, understanding bias, as well as unconscious bias, and what anti-racism also looks like.

We provide a framework to implement diversity and inclusion [D&I], which starts at a point of audit, and then we provide reporting tools and support to implement a strategy. At that level of support, we generally work with business leaders, so chief executives or managing directors, because we recognise that with the problem we face, that change has to be driven from the top.

And you're also setting up the Elevate mentorship scheme?

The lead initiative for the pillar of learning and development is our Elevate mentorship scheme. It is a six-month scheme, for which we have a diverse group of mentors of all backgrounds. We've got some notable, amazing mentors, including Jimi Famurewa from the *Evening Standard*, James Cochran [of London's 12:51] and Nokx Majazi [sous chef at London's Holborn Dining Room]. So we have some really well-known names as far as hospitality goes, but we also have a lot of people who fly under the radar but have done amazingly well and are now in a position to share their knowledge and skills with those with less experience.

I suppose our mentorship scheme falls into two categories: we have less experienced employees working with the more experienced, and we also work on a peer-to-peer mentor basis. That has been devised and developed because we had a couple of our partners asking for support on ensuring that they can truly embed inclusion within their environments. As we know, the sector is currently in an utter state of turmoil – some organisations are not in a position where they're recruiting, but they also recognise that they do not have diversity at all within their businesses. So peer-to-peer mentorship allows them to match members of their leadership teams with people from a very different background to their own.

Our aim with the mentorship scheme is traditional to any mentorship scheme, in terms of professional and personal skills development that is created through the mentorship experience. We hope to extend learning beyond that, but there are a number of factors that will determine that.



Lorraine Copes

Lorraine Copes set up BAME in Hospitality to address the lack of Black, Asian and other minority professionals in leadership positions in the industry. She talks to *Katherine Price* about addressing the gaps in understanding and education and why all business owners should be rethinking diversity after Covid

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Black History Month

In celebration of Black History Month, an annual celebration of history, achievements, and contributions of Black people in the UK, BAME in Hospitality is hosting a two-part series called Black in Hospitality on 26 and 28 October at 8pm.

The discussions will be live-streamed on YouTube and feature leaders from the hospitality and food and drink sectors. Panellists will include Lerato Umah-Shaylor of Lerato Foods Cookery School, author Riaz Phillips, beer sommelier Marverine Cole and Didier Agueh, entertainment director at the Park Plaza Westminster Bridge hotel in London. The event is sponsored by up-and-coming Black-owned brands, including Eko Brewery, Life of a Tree, Shwen Shwen, Cham Cham, Woodford & Warner and Dane's Caribbean Jerk it Up Sauce.

Register for your free ticket at: www.bameinhospitality.co.uk/black-in-hospitality/

We're also working on how we can support members of the community as a consequence of being impacted by Covid. I have read quite a few studies that suggest that people from BAME backgrounds are disproportionately affected because of the positions that they hold within the hospitality sector.

And you're also running events?

The events pillar of our business is an opportunity to not only bring our members and allies together, but to also really focus on amplifying voices, educating the sector and creating understanding through food, drink, hospitality – that thing we all have in common.

Throughout September we ran a series of events called the Colour of Wine in partnership with WSET and Nyetimber. For Black History Month we have two digital events called Black in Hospitality; they are sponsored by several Black-owned brands. The premise of that event is for role models or leaders within the sector – in fairly unconventional pockets of the sector – telling their stories, talking about their heritage and how it has influenced their career choices. Chefs are definitely the rock stars of our industry and feature heavily, so we are not focusing on chefs for these two events.

The aim in 2021 is to move these to in-person events, some of which will be formal, some informal. It's about bringing people together to learn and shine a light.

Did you learn anything from the Colour of Wine events that might influence how you approach events in the future? What else have you got in the pipeline?

The event did what it said on the tin. The wine industry is pretty well-known for being an industry that's male-dominated, but specifically white male-dominated. We received huge amounts of really great feedback from people of all backgrounds and at all career levels. Never in my 18-year career have I ever seen panels of Black and Asian wine professionals talk about their experiences – and also to pair wines with foods of their heritage, and premium wines at that.

We'll be hosting monthly events with different themes, topics, audiences and conversations, with the underlying aim of amplifying voices, driving education and creating understanding. I really believe that we are where we

are now not simply because of recruitment practices and cultures that are created within the sector, but also because all of the service industries to the hospitality sector – such as events, food media, trade press – are also not representative. These voices have never been heard before and we want to give a place for that to happen.

“With the problem we face, that change has to be driven from the top”

Are you still looking for mentors and mentees for the mentorship scheme?

Our first 'semester' is ready to go. It will be an ongoing mentorship scheme, but we'll only have intakes three to four times a year, so we can make sure our mentors and mentees are getting value from the scheme as intended.

Where do you think hospitality companies are in their journeys and do you think they're genuinely championing diversity?

It's impossible for me to answer a question on where all businesses are on their journey, because it would just be a broad-brush statement and probably wouldn't be accurate. I've worked in the hospitality sector for 18 years and during that time I know of many organisations that have had D&I managers or D&I directors, yet for the past seven or eight years I've been in director and leadership roles, at decision-making tables, and there is never another Black or Asian person in the rooms that I am in. However, those are just the businesses that I've worked for. Having worked in procurement, a very external-facing role, it is something I've witnessed sector-wide.

My guess would be that the large majority of companies are on a journey of reassessing what they had in place and what needs to change. Some businesses are at the very start of their journeys, in terms of understanding how they need to change and the way they need to move forward. The reality is that some businesses are not on the journey and they're probably not yet willing or wanting to go on that journey. Some organisations lead on driving change and some lag behind. ▶

◀ I would say that there has been a lot of PR since June, with organisations talking about initiatives – things like scholarships and bringing people in at a fairly junior level. There is a real challenge with 16- to 24-year-olds in terms of getting into employment, but in my experience the hospitality sector is already diverse at a junior level. My hope is that those organisations are also providing pathways for people to progress, because that has been the single biggest problem – not people getting into the industry in the first place.

Do you think business leaders are afraid of having those conversations for fear of making a mistake?

It's really difficult to broadly answer that question because only they can know the reasons for their action and inaction. But for many that sit in leadership positions, race is an uncomfortable conversation to have.

Some business leaders, and we see this demonstrated by some of the amazing brands that exist within the UK and London, have people at the heart of everything they do. And you'd hope that those are the organisations that recognise that this has to be a strategic objective with quantifiable outcomes, with accountability. It's something that's revisited every month at the board meeting.

A lot of the questions that I am asked in interviews are probably questions that should be asked of those people in decision-making positions, because they would be best-placed to answer them.

What sorts of targets do you recommend to businesses you work with?

It's not really for me as a consultant and the team that I work with to recommend to a business what their targets should be. With gender diversity I often see the target of 50% men, 50% women in leadership positions. When you look at racial equality, the KPIs all look very different.

One thing I would add, and it's something that we make a real point of: BAME is an acronym of Black, Asian and minority ethnic, but setting targets and measurements that don't look at those individual ethnicities is a problem. It's a problem because the term BAME when using measurement is often weaponised. It's exclusive and sometimes it excludes people within that categorised group.

I'm not here to say as a business you should ensure that you've got 30% or 40% – it's not within our remit, really. We will make recommendations, we will conduct audits and we'll work with business leaders and collectively we'll arrive at a target, but it has to be something that's comfortable for them and achievable, too.

You've previously spoken of a 'gap in education' in the industry – is that in terms of the challenges faced and felt by different ethnic minorities within the sector?

Yes, it is. The reason I drive education as part of our mission is there is a lack of understanding.



“As well as surviving, a number of companies are really looking at how they can improve their business in every possible way”

We will be conducting a survey to give us more information on that. I think that narratives are important, but quantifiable data is also really important, and I've never seen any study of any kind conducted within our sector that will give organisations a better insight on what those experiences look like.

I feel that driving education is important at all levels of an organisation. Yes, it starts from the top and it starts with creating a strategy that is inclusive and creates feelings of belonging and is diverse, but that education is required for people and teams at all levels. You can't mandate people feeling like they belong. There's an educational journey that a lot of individuals need to go on because, in some instances, they don't know what they don't know.

Has there been an organisation focused on racial equality in the UK hospitality sector before now?

There hasn't, no. It's for that very reason that I have set the business up. It was very intentional that the start point of BAME in Hospitality was from a grassroots perspective, because we are very community-focused. We have 360 members in the community, of all levels and ethnicities within the sector, and from that comes learnings in itself. During the lockdown period we were able to connect with our members as they onboarded and talk to them about their experiences. And in my mind, 360 isn't necessarily a representative number, which is why we want to do some surveys to better understand.

Up until this point there hasn't been anything. It is sheer coincidence that we officially launched in the month of June, shortly after and the murder of George Floyd. We had set up the group on Instagram in November of last year and started to build the community from then. Covid and the downtime that afforded helped us to get straight and clear with our strategy, build a website and start to move forward.

Many businesses have spoken about 'building back better' post-Covid, for example with regards to sustainability. Do you think this is an opportunity for businesses to 'build back better' in terms of racial diversity?

I do. Over this time I've had so many really amazing and inspiring conversations with business leaders who are willing to have really honest and frank conversations. I spoke with one in particular, and he said to me that, during the downtime, especially lockdown, he basically pulled apart the strategy of his business. He wants to make sure that his business is bigger and better than they ever were before. And that includes all aspects of the business, from the food to the service, but also in terms of diversity and inclusion.

Our approach to partnerships has been about collaborating with businesses who recognise and want to change, who need support and help making that change. This is exactly what we're hearing time and time again – it's an opportunity. It's a really difficult time at the moment – you can't ignore that – but as well as surviving, a number of companies are really looking at how they can improve their business in every possible way.

Where do you hope BAME in Hospitality is in five years' time?

My hope longer term is that a business like mine won't need to exist! I hope that when we look around the hospitality sector from a trade perspective, an events perspective, an employee perspective, that that representation exists and it's equal. That's ultimately my objective, to make the business redundant.

I genuinely really wish that businesses like mine or businesses supporting women in business needn't exist. But the fact that there is a gap is why we're absolutely necessary here and now.