To BAME or not to BAME?

Here at SHSU, we currently use the term BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) to refer to our ethnic minority student and staff population. However, we understand that this term is contentious, and many industries choose to shy away from its use.

In our research this year, we wanted to explore how students at SHU feel about the term BAME – whether they identify with it and whether they prefer other terms.

**So, what’s the matter with BAME?**

BAME is a term made to encompass all ethnic minorities in the UK, including those not specifically referenced in the term like the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community. Generally, BAME is made to refer to anyone who isn’t White British or Irish, which comes with its own complications in a country with many White European communities, but it has a number of other arguments against its use.

Some argue that the term is “othering” separating ethnic minority communities from their White peers, whilst also assuming similar experiences across groups within the BAME category.

Additionally, sometimes the term can be used to mask or minimise experiences of different ethnic groups – for example, a company may report high BAME representation in their workforce, but have a much higher proportion of Asian staff than Black staff. In academia, students of an ethnic minority background receive lower grades on average than White British students (known as the degree awarding gap), but within the BAME category, Chinese and mixed-ethnicity students outperform Asian and Black students, meaning demographics in need of more academic intervention may be hidden when BAME is used.

We believe that BAME can be useful and inclusive language if used in appropriate settings, but we value your opinion as students too!

**So, what do students think?**

In March 2022, we sent out a survey to students asking whether your background affects your student experience. Here, we asked students who identified themselves as ethnic minorities whether they identify with the term ‘BAME’ and if they prefer another term.

We found that:

* 53% of ethnic minority students identify with the term BAME, whereas 24% do not.
* 34% of students went on to say of all terms, they prefer BAME, however, 38% of students prefer to primarily use their individual ethnicity.
* Other terms also have some favour, such as ethnic minority (13%), person of colour (8%), and minoritised individual (3%).

In further discussions, students identified issues with the use of the word “minority” potentially creating feelings of inferiority in ethnic communities. Students acknowledge the shortcomings of the term BAME but understood its importance in certain contexts.

**So where do we go next?**

As the majority of students we reached identified with the term BAME, we will continue to use it, but in appropriate contexts. The BAME Ambassadors will continue to advocate for all students of an ethnic minority background, however, we won’t shy away from referring to individual ethnicities when necessary.

We’ll also keep on top of student opinions as they change and develop, whilst also keeping track of public opinions on the term. For now however, as it suits our students, it suits us!