

MBCC Awards – Excellence in diversity and inclusion

Harbouring an inclusive and supportive environment

A diverse and vibrant institution

Birmingham City University is committed to ensuring that they go above and beyond their public sector duty to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- Advance equality of opportunity;
- Create a safe environment for students and staff;
- Foster a fair and equitable place where everyone can access opportunities, achieve their true potential and achieve their ambitions.

The University's mission statement is to be the University *for* Birmingham, enabling personal transformation and ensuring that equality is advanced in everything that they do.

BCU is located in the heart of a large, diverse and vibrant city, with its student body reflecting this.

69 percent of BCU's students are from the West Midlands, reinforcing the University's determination to serve the area and its hinterlands. 63 percent of its students are female, with 54 percent from a Black or minority ethnic background.

With this mind, the University is committed to ensuring a level playing field, where staff and students can succeed without any limitations or barriers.

To help meet this, BCU has outlined its ambitions via its [Respect at BCU policy statement](#), a document outlining its ambitions to achieving equality.

Furthermore, the University runs a series of [employee steering groups](#) in order to combat inequalities and provide a supportive network for professionals. These include:

- **The Race Equity and Inclusion Steering Group** – Comprising of Black, Asian and ethnic minority staff and students from across the University, the group embarks upon actions that will lead to parity of opportunity, driving equality throughout all areas of the institutions. The group assisted the University in achieving the Race Equality Charter and created the BCU BAME Allies programme.
- **The Disabled Steering Group** – Bringing together representatives from professional services, academia and the Students' Union to progress disability equality. The group has assisted the University in achieving Disability Confident Level 2, reviews access information for the University and proposes activities for various awareness-raising initiatives.
- **Mental Health and Wellbeing Network** – After requests from BCU staff to receive informal peer-to-peer support in this area, BCU formed this network where confidentiality, openness and honesty are core values. The network compliments existing offerings in mental health from the University and signposts people to further information and support.
- **LGBT+ Staff Network** – Open to any member of BCU staff who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, non-binary or any other minority group determined by their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Committed support and enlightenment on LGBTQ+ challenges

BCU is a registered Stonewall Diversity Champion with an active LGBT+ Network and student LGBTQ+ Society, and continues to work collaboratively with local and national partners to ensure a sector-leading approach to inclusion for staff and students.

In 2019, BCU launched [the Going for Stonewall project](#), developing and embedding best practice in LGBT+ inclusion with numerous stakeholders within the University.

The project has made significant progress, including making the University's first submission to the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index, the UK's leading employer award for LGBT+ inclusion.

In February 2021, the team worked with the Staff LGBT+ Network and BCU Students' Union to deliver a virtual calendar of events celebrating LGBT History Month. Guest speakers included Birmingham's Director of Public Health, Dr Justin Varney, and a panel of European experts discussing the situation facing LGBTI rights in Poland. Birmingham LGBT also delivered a talk on local services.

Previously for LGBT History Month 2020, guest speaker Andrew Moffat MBE spoke to the University about the No Outsiders programme and the recent protests held at local schools in relation to LGBT+ inclusive relationship education.

The University's LGBT+ Allies scheme was launched in February 2021, providing learning opportunities to staff to develop a more inclusive university community. It provides:

- A calendar of training opportunities, including workshops and online modules;
- A growing bank of resources developed in partnership with LGBT+ staff;
- Those that completed the workshop added an 'LGBT+ Ally' logo in their email signature, to notify colleagues and students that they are approachable and can signpost to relevant support.

So far, the scheme has delivered training sessions to over 200 staff members and led to the creation of a network of over 130 LGBT+ allies, all committed to developing inclusive practice at the University.

A range of resources have been produced in collaboration with the LGBT+ Staff Network, including a guide to pronouns and a freely accessible playlist of over 50 films, shows and documentaries. The HELS Faculty library have also created an LGBTQ Reading/Viewing list and expanded their range of texts and other resources.

In December 2020, LGBTQ+ professionals from a range of disciplines were brought together for an exclusive panel event. Discussing what it's like to be 'out' in the workplace, the panel shared personal stories of the challenges LGBTQ+ people face in different areas of work.

This was followed by a monitoring taster event in February 2021, offering LGBTQ+ students the chance to discuss any concerns and receive support.

In May/June 2021, LGBTQ Inclusion surveys were conducted for both students and staff about their experiences at BCU. These received over 450 responses and are currently being analysed, with a report to follow which will inform inclusive curriculum developments.

During Welcome Week in September 2021, BCU supported the LGBTQ+ Society and LGBTQ+ Staff Network with distributing rainbow lanyards and support information to students. Over 3,000 have now been distributed among staff and students.

Additionally, an online LGBTQ+ Student Welcome event was held in partnership with the LGBTQ+ Society, our Enablement and Wellbeing team and Birmingham LGBT.

BCU, alongside five other higher education institutions from across the region, worked as one to show support for the LGBTQ+ community by sharing [a message of unity and float at Birmingham Pride 2021](#). The movement, called UNIfied at Pride, is widely regarded as the first show of collective unity between West Midlands universities at Pride.

Advancing the careers of women in higher education

BCU is passionately committed to utilising and advancing the Athena SWAN principles, a charter that was established in 2005 to encourage and recognise the commitment to advancing the careers of women in higher education and research in a range of disciplines.

Athena SWAN activity continues to expand across the University's four faculties. In May 2020, two schools – Nursing and Midwifery, and Social Sciences – submitted first-time applications for Athena SWAN Departmental Bronze Awards. The School of Engineering and Built Environment submitted their application a year later.

Each submission requires detailed analysis, collaboration and SMART action planning. All three schools were successful in their applications and are now implementing their five-year action plans.

The awards are a tribute to the immense commitment and hard work conducted by colleagues across the University. That the Athena SWAN is school-wide demonstrates determined collaboration in pursuit of the advancement of gender equality at the University.

Departmental progress is overseen by the BCU Athena SWAN Steering Committee (ASSC), led by Professor Maxine Lintern. The ASSC has members from across the faculties at every level, as well as members from Human Resources, Professional Services and the Students' Union.

The Athena SWAN team host an annual festival, [xCHANGE](#), which takes place during the month of March to mark International Women's Day.

The 2021 festival included discussions on the barriers women face in academia, how to challenge existing ideas and the BCU Menopause Café, a confidential space open to all to discuss the menopause.

The festival also included radio shows dedicated to female artists and #ShowtheSash, in which BCU employees wear a special sash in Suffragette colours to various engagements in order to bring the subject of women's equality into everyday life.

For the future, more schools within the University are preparing and finalising their applications for Bronze Awards.

Addressing inequalities while supporting staff and students

BCU continues to break barriers and prides itself on its diversity. 54 percent of students are from Black or other minority ethnic backgrounds and 60 percent of young entrants are the first in their direct family to enter higher education.

Reflecting on this, as well as the inequalities that Black and ethnic communities face, BCU has signed up to the [Race Equality Charter](#). This aims to improve the representation, progression and success of minority ethnic staff and students within higher education.

Improving young people's prospects in deprived communities

In 2019, BCU joined forces with national education charity IntoUniversity in order to help thousands more young people progress into higher education.

The University opened a new £1.2 million learning centre in the Birmingham area of Kingstanding, where only 13.5 percent of schoolchildren go on to study at university, as opposed to 78 percent in areas of Sutton Coldfield.

The programme also aims to ensure that more young people in the area go on to study at university.

The centre is the first of its kind to be opened in Birmingham, as well as being the first IntoUniversity facility to focus on the arts.

Staff deliver a mixture of one-to-one and group tuition, as well hands-on community-based education programmes, to children in the local area.

Impactful research on inclusivity and diversity

Amplifying injustice and eradicating barriers for black and ethnic minority professionals

[The Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity](#) (LHC) has helped expose inequalities, as well as examine and increase diversity across the UK's media.

The Centre [worked with Channel 4](#) to ensure that their ambitious **Black to Front project** – in which the channel's entire programme schedule for was fronted by Black talent for an entire day – left a lasting legacy.

Principally, the LHC helped C4 to shape ambitious and meaningful off-screen commitments and to address specific challenges identified in the industry. These commitments include:

- Funding progression placements to provide Black talent with real jobs and a supported step-up in seniority;
- Continued mentoring to ensure genuine progression;
- Maximising the number of credits Black talent receives on programmes;
- Monitoring all commitments to ensure all learnings and data are recorded and used to inform policy going forward.

“The Centre’s input will allow Black to Front to provide genuine opportunities for Black talent to progress their careers and transform the next generation of creative decision makers,” says Kelly Webb-Lamb, Deputy Director of Programmes and Head of Popular Factual at C4.

The Centre was shortlisted for a Times Higher Education Award in the category of Outstanding Contribution to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion 2021. It has recently published a new report in partnership with the BBC, [investigating the use of BAME terminology](#).

BCU, alongside with the University of Wolverhampton, has also had a project approved by Research England and the Office for Students **to tackle persistent inequalities that create barriers for postgraduate research students from BAME groups across the region.**

Focusing on health, education, business and law, the project aims to improve access to postgraduate research study by tackling university processes and cultures, creating an enabling regional employment environment and facilitating outstanding peer support.

Meanwhile, studies carried out by BCU academic Dr Karen Patel has [uncovered how people of colour working in the UK's craft sector](#) **have been hit by racist behaviour and micro-aggressions.**

Despite being a thriving industry, the vast majority of those working within craft – as well as those that sit on interview panels – are white.

The research, carried out in collaboration with Crafts Council UK, discovered that creative makers have felt “dehumanised” by the experiences they have encountered, and have expressed the difficulties of working in the craft industry if you are from a marginalised group.

Interviews with Black, Asian and ethnic minority women in craft revealed they feared revealing themselves online would negatively impact their business, while those from a South Asian background felt they were discouraged by their family from taking part.

Patel's research has led to the [We Gather exhibition](#) at the Craft Council Gallery in London. The exhibition was a celebration of diverse craftswomen and the issues they face in a typically white, elitist field.

It featured five female makers of Black and Asian heritage whose work shares a commitment to craft and its cultural value. It formed an essential part of the Crafts Council's 50th anniversary celebrations.

“This is an important study and we are privileged to be a BCU partner,” says Rosy Greenless, Executive Director at Crafts Council. “The findings inform our commitment to use Crafts Council programmes of activity to promote a different narrative – one that challenges institutional racism and inequality.”

After conducting research in the UK for two years, Patel has now secured follow-up funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council to expand the studies globally. Work will commence in Australia and will focus upon social enterprises, community organisations and exploring inclusivity practices.

Addressing underrepresentation in British cricket

BCU researcher Tom Brown's work into disparities in professional cricket has garnered widespread acclaim, national media coverage and on-the-ground research with professional cricket clubs.

Brown conducted research on the difference between private and state school-educated cricketers, discovering that 56 percent of under 16 – under 19 cricketers, and 45 percent of professional cricketers, were White-British and attended independent schools, meaning that a lack of access to wealth has created barriers to entering the professional sport.

His research featured as part of [a news report on Sky Sports Cricket](#), while he has also conducted research with Warwickshire Cricket Club into the lack of professional cricketers with a South Asian heritage.

“You are 13 times more likely to become a professional cricketer if you attended a private school, and 34 times more likely if you are white and privately educated compared to being British South Asian (BSA) and state educated,” says Tom.

“There appears to be a problem of racial bias in the talent selection systems that needs addressing.”

Tom's research was [recently cited in Parliament](#) during the Aseem Rafiq case, in which Rafiq exposed the racism he received while playing at Yorkshire Cricket Club.

In order to remedy these inequalities, Tom has launched [the South Asian Cricket Academy](#), which aims to increase the percentage of British Asian cricketers to eight percent by 2024 and 15 percent by 2027.

Reducing disparities in learning outcomes for refugee children

Research from the University's Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences has enabled schools and colleges to revolutionise their practice and approach to families from refugee, asylum seeker and migrant contexts.

[The Open School Doors project](#) conducted thorough literature reviews related to refugee and newly arrived families in schools and six focus groups in each partner country. This highlighted a lack of knowledge about schools and the community, as well as the language barrier causing issues.

Conducting research with primary and secondary schools, as well as newly arrived families, Birmingham City University provided a set of recommendations for teachers and school leaders. This will help teachers and schools continue to meet the educational and support needs of families from newly arrived refugee, asylum seeker and migration contexts.

The project has been integrated by members of the project team into their taught modules on the MA Education, BA Early Childhood Studies, Primary ITE, Teach First PGDE and Secondary PGCE.