



DIVERSITY MATTERS BUT ACTION MATTERS MORE

Taking diverse company representatives on campus will engage students and demonstrate your inclusivity.

The University of Hertfordshire (UH) is committed to transforming lives through increasing access to higher education for students from under-represented and disadvantaged groups. As such we have an incredibly diverse student population with around 50% of students from Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups and 42% who are first in their family to go to university.

You may be aware through the high level of media coverage that there are awarding gaps in universities especially for BAME students, who receive first or upper second class degrees in smaller proportions than their white counterparts. The Office for Students, the higher education regulator, has challenged all universities to eliminate the gaps in access and student success to zero by 2025.

Our staff have been working very closely with students to reduce this gap including recruiting paid committed BAME Student Advocates to work in partnership with academic schools on actions such as improving inclusivity in the curriculum.

For the Careers and Employment Service (CES) eliminating the gap means our focus is on getting students into graduate level jobs no matter what their background. We are very proud of the richness in experience, perspective and outlook of our students and we are keen to ensure that we provide them with information about career opportunities that are accessible and welcoming to people they can identify with. As such, we are making a conscious effort to work with employers and alumni who reflect our student body.

Recently, a couple of the BAME Advocates told us that they cannot identify with some of the employer representatives they meet at our careers events, and we felt it important to feed this back to employers. We could tell

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Judith Baines
Head of Careers and Employment, University of Hertfordshire and ISE Board Director



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you that it can really inspire a student to enter a profession or to aspire to work with an organisation if they can see people already in those roles who followed a similar path or share similar characteristics with them. Or we can let the students tell you themselves:

“It is important for students to be able to see people who look like them or somewhat represent them, and for students to be able to say, ‘hey, they’re like me, if they can do it so can I’. In having a diverse group of employers, it gives all students the opportunity to feel seen and have realistic role models from all areas of life.”

“... it gives students a visual representation of where they can be after their studies. This is crucial because in corporate and academic positions there are so few BAME representatives. My hope is to galvanise the next wave of BAME students to enter spaces such as law, finance and technology which traditionally have not had adequate representation.”

“I was able to connect with the sessions provided due to the fact it was directly aimed at my demographic and featured people that spoke and looked like me and understood the struggle of being a black person in a predominantly white society/industry.”

“Felt like I finally belonged to a certain ‘society’ or activity in university without that anxiety of being judged by the way I look. This event also opened my eyes to opportunities that I really didn’t know were available to students who are from a struggling financial background... it really inspired me to go after my dreams no matter the obstacles put in front of me.”

As you can see, employers representing diversity on campus is important to students and so we recently sent out an email to our partner employers to focus on this issue. You may be familiar with the term ‘positive action’ from the Equality Act 2010; this is the introduction of measures to eliminate or reduce discrimination, or its effects. Proportionate measures may be put in place where there is evidence of disadvantage, different needs or under-representation in relation to one/some of the protected characteristics.

When we approach you for a member of staff for a careers event, we may ask you to volunteer a member of your team that has a protected characteristic, usually because that characteristic is under-represented in the profession, for example females in STEM or those from BAME backgrounds.

Through bringing representative employees to university events, employers are given the chance to show this generation of students, who put such value on inclusivity, that they do not discriminate and understand the importance of having a diverse workforce.

Ashley Hever of Enterprise Rent a Car appreciates the value of this when working with UH: “When Enterprise is out on campus, we want all students to engage with us. This is why it’s important that we have representatives that reflect our diverse workforce and that of the university. Students want to be able to interact with people who look like them or are from a similar background.”

Similarly Abies Iriowen of FDM said: “A diverse employer can be a role model, somebody whom a student can say looks like them and they have still been successful and able to have a good career. It encourages students from a diverse range of backgrounds to feel confident in approaching our stand and bringing their real self forward.”

Strategically choosing who represents your company at these events presents a valuable opportunity to demonstrate the welcoming environment you have to offer. We appreciate that it might not always be possible to meet this request, but we hope that where it is, you will help us to make it happen.

University careers services cannot eliminate these persistent gaps and inequalities without your support: it is an issue that requires urgent attention. After all a diverse workforce that represents the clients and customers your organisation works with is a key component of business success, and we hope that by working with us in a diversity positive manner you will see the immense benefits to your team and your business.

