

Organising an event: a toolkit

This toolkit is designed to be a starting point for event organisers. Whether you are part of a grassroots organisation putting together an event as a volunteer, or if you work for an organisation where this is part of your paid work, you will need to ensure that your event is high quality, represents the people and the issues that are important to the sector you serve, and that you are not consciously or unconsciously doing things that may perpetuate a narrow view of the world or that may exclude voices from typically marginalised groups being included in the programme. Similarly, if you are asked to speak at a conference or to take part on a panel, there are proactive things you can do to ensure that you are part of the solution and not part of the problem. Intentions are important, but outcomes are what matter most.

The toolkit will comprise of two parts:

- 1) A flowchart designed to help map out things you will need to consider (coming soon!)*
- 2) More detailed challenge and support around the likely issues you will need to consider and overcome when organising an event*

2) Challenge and support

This section will feature some of the questions you may ask, may be asked by others, and some possible responses or things to consider. There are also links to further reading and where appropriate, data and evidence to support the responses.

Why is it necessary to be inclusive and have representation?

At a time when the UK ranks 57th in the world in terms of women's representation, men outnumber women 4 to 1 in parliament, Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) school leadership is at around 3%, and government cuts mean that disabled and marginalised voices are even harder to hear, it's only right that we celebrate diversity to create a more inclusive, representative and inspiring events programme in the education sector.

We live in a diverse country and we serve increasingly diverse student populations in our schools. We also live in a diverse, global world, and should be integrating a range of voices in our events, regardless of the population we serve locally.

If you are looking for high-quality and stimulating content for your event, you will need a wide range of voices. [Research by McKinsey](#) shows that having diverse voices in your organisation is great for productivity, creativity and decision-making. It creates diversity of thought and action, which is a goal any education event should be seeking to work towards in order to cater for a diverse range of attendees working in a variety of contexts.

What does diversity of thought and action mean?

This means that although it may feel comfortable working with people who are like you, you will achieve more if you work with a group of people who have had different experiences from each other, especially in terms of their socio-economic background, their race, gender, education and political outlook. If we all look, sound and think the same, and have had broadly similar experiences, we may be operating under the false assumption that this is what reality looks like for everyone. We will also be in danger of recycling the same old ideas and action; perpetuating our existing biases and remaining unaware of the blind spots in our thinking and action. Please watch [this animated explanation by the Royal Society](#).

Thinking the best person for the job happens to be a white man

“If you only play football with the same ten people, your idea about who the good footballers are, will be limited.” [Amjad Ali](#)

This is not an easy one to summarise in short, but there is a vicious cycle which can make people think that white men are the best voice of authority on many if not most matters. We are conditioned to think that white men are the best fit when it comes to speaking authoritatively, because we are accustomed to seeing white men speaking authoritatively. This means that there will also be a larger number of white men who are authorities on a subject and are well-known, as they are the ones that have been given legitimisation as voices of authority. We need to break this cycle so we don't only draw on this narrow pool of people. This means it is crucial to look beyond those that have been used a lot at events and start to promote a more diverse range of voices, that may be unfamiliar to you. You may even need to be brave and choose someone who may be for now less famous, and yet really knows their stuff.

When is it tokenistic?

It would be tokenistic to choose someone *only because* they are from an ethnic minority group (or global majority, which is more accurate terminology) and/or a woman, for example. It would also be tokenistic to choose someone to talk about a subject they are not an expert on, or who is not a good public speaker, or not qualified for the job *because* they are Black and you need to fill a quota. This would also be counter-productive, as if they were less than convincing, the vicious cycle is further reinforced by doing this.

What does balance look like?

Balance means *intentionally and purposely* looking for a range of opinions, as well as a range of routes to getting to a certain opinion. It means thinking creatively about who is speaking and what they are speaking about. Because the accepted norm for authority is

typically a white man, you will want to challenge that and think carefully about how to include a range of voices that are not *only* white men.

Balance also means *what is on the programme, not just who*

Thinking about balance and diversity means considering the programme contents as well as the people who speak on stage. Therefore, you may need to think carefully, do some research or ask/seekout a critical friend to help you consider how to widen your perspectives when planning the programme. For example, if your event is about curriculum design, have you included something around decolonising the curriculum? Are all your curriculum examples from a traditionally white canon? If your event is about recruitment and retention, have you included something about women, people of colour, disability, parents, flexibility, class, age, and so on?

Ensure people from diverse backgrounds are included as experts

“Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance!” [Verna Myers](#)

Balance also means ensuring that you have diverse voices speaking about issues that they have expertise in within the education sector, and not (just) being asked to speak about their identities. This means that you will not want to annexe people into talking only about their race, gender or other marginalised aspects of their person, unless your event directly deals with these issues and/or these are their explicitly stated areas of interest, experience and expertise. A Black man or a visibly orthodox Jewish woman should be able to be seen as an expert in curriculum design or data analysis if that is their field of expertise.

Quota systems to explain why your event is all-white doesn't work either

Ensuring people from diverse backgrounds are seen doesn't mean that they should only be seen in areas where schools typically serve diverse student populations. Saying that your event is taking place in an area of the country which doesn't serve a diverse population and/or that there are no diverse teachers in that area is not acceptable. People can and do travel if necessary. Representation doesn't mean an exact science of like for like. It is about a range of voices. It would, in fact, be sensible to be even more committed to diverse representation in an area where this isn't seen much, as we are prone to the white man bias described above unless we actively disrupt this and provide more variety of voices and views.

How do we reach diverse people?

You may find that your social, professional and social media circle doesn't include people that are from diverse backgrounds. Aside from the fact that this should indicate to you that you need to broaden your own echo chamber of professional acquaintance, there are ways



that you can get help to find speakers if you are not familiar with anyone outside of your own narrow pool.

Organisations like the teacher unions, universities, local networks of schools, The Equalities Trust, the Runnymede Trust, the BAMEed Network, WomenEd, DisabilityEd, LGBTEd can help.

The BAMEed Network has a page on its website with a list of diverse speakers on a range of topics <https://www.bameednetwork.com/speakers/> for example, specifically for the purpose of making it easier for people to find who they need.

The Women's Room has a directory that can help you find an expert to speak at an event or appear on a panel <http://thewomensroom.org.uk/findanexpert>

The BAMEed Network, LGBTEd, and WomenEd are planning to work together to create a directory of credible leaders, speakers and experts that can be called upon - or at the very least, link to each other's websites once these directories are up and running on LGBTEd and WomenEd websites. It would be good to work with DisabilityEd on this too.

How do we ask people to take part in a way that doesn't feel awkward?

As mentioned earlier, be clear on what you want people to talk about and make sure you know what their expertise is. If you don't know, ask them first to tell you what their expertise is, and what they would be best speaking about. Tell them about your event and ask if they see themselves as someone who would be happy to speak at it, should there be an opportunity to do so.

A woman from an ethnic minority background who is an expert on leadership development, being asked to speak about curriculum makes her know that you want her for her colour, not her expertise. This is tokenistic and insulting.

“We're a grassroots organisation and don't have time to organise ourselves like this”

There is only one response to this. If you can't do it well, don't do it at all. There are plenty of grassroots organisations that are run by people who work full time in other jobs and have families, studies, and other volunteer roles on top. Their commitment to doing it well is not compromised by this and there are many other grassroots organisations that will be keen to support yours to get it right. In the words of Spiderman, “with power comes great responsibility”.

“We ask people to volunteer themselves so we can't control who comes forward”

Again, taking into account the fact that your own circle of acquaintance might be skewed towards a certain demographic, this is problematic as the *only* way to recruit speakers. Think

of other ways to reach deeper into schools and other institutions - perhaps create a poster or flyer on a document that can be shared, printed and put in staff rooms across the country. Reach out to large organisations to help you circulate these either by email or in their newsletters to their members e.g. the unions, Ambition Institute, Chartered College of Teaching, Teaching School Alliances, WomenEd, BAMEed Network, Challenge Partners, Teach First and so on. For help with this, please contact penny.rabiger@gmail.com who will be happy to connect you and support you with your strategy on this.

Think also about where you advertise the event. Getting beyond Twitter can be tricky for some, but using Linked In, Facebook and even Instagram can be excellent quick ways to still use social media platforms, but widen the pool of people that will see your call for speakers. If you use a platform like Eventbrite, this will also ensure that people find your event.

Widen your network and start with an ‘over-subscription’ of diverse people

The most commonly-heard excuse for events that have all-male or all-white speakers is “we had a woman/person of colour on one of the panels but s/he dropped out at the last minute” What would happen if you started building your speaker preference list and started with an ‘over-subscription’ of people from typically underrepresented groups? Try it, and see that this will help you to stay diverse throughout the planning and execution of your event.

Attracting a diverse audience is important

“You can’t be what you can’t see” (Marian Wright Edelman)

Having a diverse range of speakers on the programme may boost the number of people from marginalised groups that attend your event. However, many events in the education sector, especially those aimed at leadership, will see few people from BAME backgrounds in attendance. There can be reasons why this may occur, and there are a few things you can do to ensure that it doesn’t happen at your event.

The cost of tickets and getting away from school can be factors for some people from BAME backgrounds, especially if you consider that these will be the people who are less likely to be progressing into the higher paid and more autonomous roles that allow event attendance. You may wish to offer a travel subsidy or early bird rate for people to take advantage of should they wish to attend but find it financially difficult. There is no shame in offering a bursary for early career teachers or aspiring leaders from BAME backgrounds and/or other marginalised groups alongside your statement around commitment to diversity and inclusion. Some people feel uncomfortable about the prospect of being the only person of colour in a roomful of people that they don’t know, so group discounts or two for one offers are also useful so that a delegate can extend the invitation to a colleague they feel comfortable with.

You have responsibility if you are taking part in a conference as a speaker

If you are asked to speak at an event, to facilitate a workshop or be on a panel, you also have a responsibility to ensure broad and balanced content and representation. I will repeat that, as this may be an alien concept to many people on the speaking circuit: you too are responsible for the diversity of speakers at an event if you are invited to speak at it. Even if it's not your event, you don't know the organisers and you were just asked to take part, you can and should take responsibility for the diversity of voices included if you agree for your voice to be one of them.

When you are approached, you can ask "I'm interested to know a little more about your event, who else is speaking, how did you come to ask me?" There is a growing number of white men who do this and will decline to speak as a white man on an agenda full of white men. They will of course do this cordially, and will offer solutions and suggestions of other people. This can be hard to do if you would quite fancy speaking at the particular event, and if you would like to get some exposure for yourself. But this is also an active commitment to anti-sexist and anti-racist activism that is powerful and effective. Chances are also, that you will get to speak after all since your suggestions will have helped the organisers to create a better balance and your presence isn't going to be part of an identical line up now.

Leading think tanks like IPPR and some universities, like [LSE](#), have committed to [no longer holding or supporting events that feature all-white or all-male panels](#).

What if we can't afford to pay people?

"I asked a Black woman and they asked for payment, when other speakers are doing it for free" is something we have heard.

There is a complex system of privilege in place in society which means that in some cases, a senior, white, man, may be able to generously give their time to speak at your event for free. Many women and people of colour may find themselves less able to give of their professional expertise free, without personal financial sacrifice, and in some cases, that includes having to pay not only for travel, but also fees to carers for dependants while they travel to and take part in your event. In many cases, a man may not be expected to take on these roles and will be freer to use their time as they wish. They are also more likely to be on a higher pay scale, as white men tend to reach leadership positions with greater ease and more frequently, which affords them the luxury of giving their time for free. You only have to look at the [data on gender](#) and [race pay](#) gaps to understand why this is fact.

Grassroots conferences and how to pay your speakers' travel costs

There are ways to ensure that you can at least pay travel costs for your speakers.

- 1) The first way is to charge attendees a minimal fee for attendance and explain that this covers speakers and refreshments. There is a direct correlation between

attendance numbers and charging, which is good for your event as well. When people pay, they show up. And if they pay and don't show up, they have at least helped cover the costs of your event and the travel costs of your speakers so it is win-win - see above section 'Attracting a diverse audience is important' for suggestions on scaled costs to allow for a diverse range of attendees

- 2) Ask for donations from local or national organisations - consider your local university, the TES, or a local business that would like to see their branding on your event page acknowledging their support
- 3) Have some professional exhibition stands and ask for a fee from them. If you get 5 stands all paying £300 to have a few minutes with your attendees that visit them, that can cover travel costs for a good number of speakers. This doesn't have to bring down the tone of your event - quite the opposite, a useful interaction with an organisation that can help your attendees is an added bonus to attending the event. If you need help getting a list of potential exhibitors, please email penny.rabiger@gmail.com or consider using [Innovate my School](#) to deliver a speed dating session at your event, that they will usually organise themselves and which will fund your event nicely
- 4) Crowd-funding is an option. Explain what you want to achieve and why you want to repay your speakers for their time. You never know, you might get more than you need to put on a fabulous event

Committing beyond cosmetics

Gold standard event management includes the way that you treat your speakers, including how you brief them for their part in the event. How you prepare your speakers, panel members and workshop facilitators so there is a level playing field of experience on the day is extremely important. You should try to let them know what to expect in as much detail as you can, as well as who will be there, with a view to breaking down class and culture barriers. There is nothing worse than showing up, not knowing that there is a dress code, or that lunch is not included and you have no cash with you and so on. You can cover this by issuing a one page outline of what to expect specifically for speakers and panel members.

A word on panels

A good panel session will be dynamic, may have people chosen for their deliberately opposing views, and may have some controversial or even provocative elements. However, be very careful about setting people up for humiliation, or failure, or pitting people against each other in a way that is unfair. Ensure that panel members know what is going to be discussed, who the other panel members are, and who the chair will be. And again, make sure all participants are briefed well, and have an opportunity to accept or decline your invitation in good time. Although it may lead to lively debate and good entertainment for your audience, you need to avoid a discussion which compounds stereotypes, marginalises already marginalised people and so on. As above, don't ever invite someone from a

marginalised group to represent that group unless that is what they want to do, but do include a diverse range of voices who are experts in their field. You can read more about one panellist's experience [here](#)

Event organisation: self evaluation

	Y/N	Next steps
The event includes some level of diversity either in the speakers or the content		
Diverse speaker content and speakers were planned in from the outset		
There is a diverse programme with varied viewpoints and perspectives		
An external view by a critical partner has been given on the speaker line up and content of the event		
There is a balanced representation of speakers from across class, age, gender, race, sexual orientation, heritage, and so on		
There is a diverse range of attendees from across class, age, gender, race, heritage, sexual orientation and so on		
The people planning the conference come from a wide range of backgrounds and have different views from one another that they are comfortable expressing		
Where there aren't diverse organisers, support has been sought from others with expertise to challenge the programme content and speaker line up		
There is physical space at the event for people with different needs e.g a prayer room, a place to breastfeed, access for people with mobility needs, choice of food or clarity around restricted options for people with faith-based, health or other dietary needs		
Panel members and speakers are clear on the arrangements for the event, who the speakers are and what is expected of them		
The event is advertised in a wide range of places, both on and off line to ensure people from all backgrounds have more of a chance to see it		
The cost of the event is set with thought about affordability for different groups		
There are subsidies, bursaries and free tickets available for groups that may struggle to attend		

Speakers are offered payment and/or travel costs are covered		
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Further reading & resources

McKinsey & Company: [Diversity Matters](#)

The BAMEed Network learning page is [here](#)

The BAMEed Network speakers page is [here](#)

The Women's Room directory is [here](#)

Harvard Business Review: [Putting an End to Conferences Dominated by White Men](#)

The Royal Society: [Understanding Unconscious Bias](#)

Robin Diangelo writes and speaks about white fragility and racism:

<https://robindiangelo.com/>

Understanding the difference between being a racist and taking part in systemic racism [here](#)

Deconstructing white fragility [here](#)