

Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic (BAME) diversity and inclusion:

Research to improve engagement with business incubation at SETsquared
Bristol, May 2018

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Contents

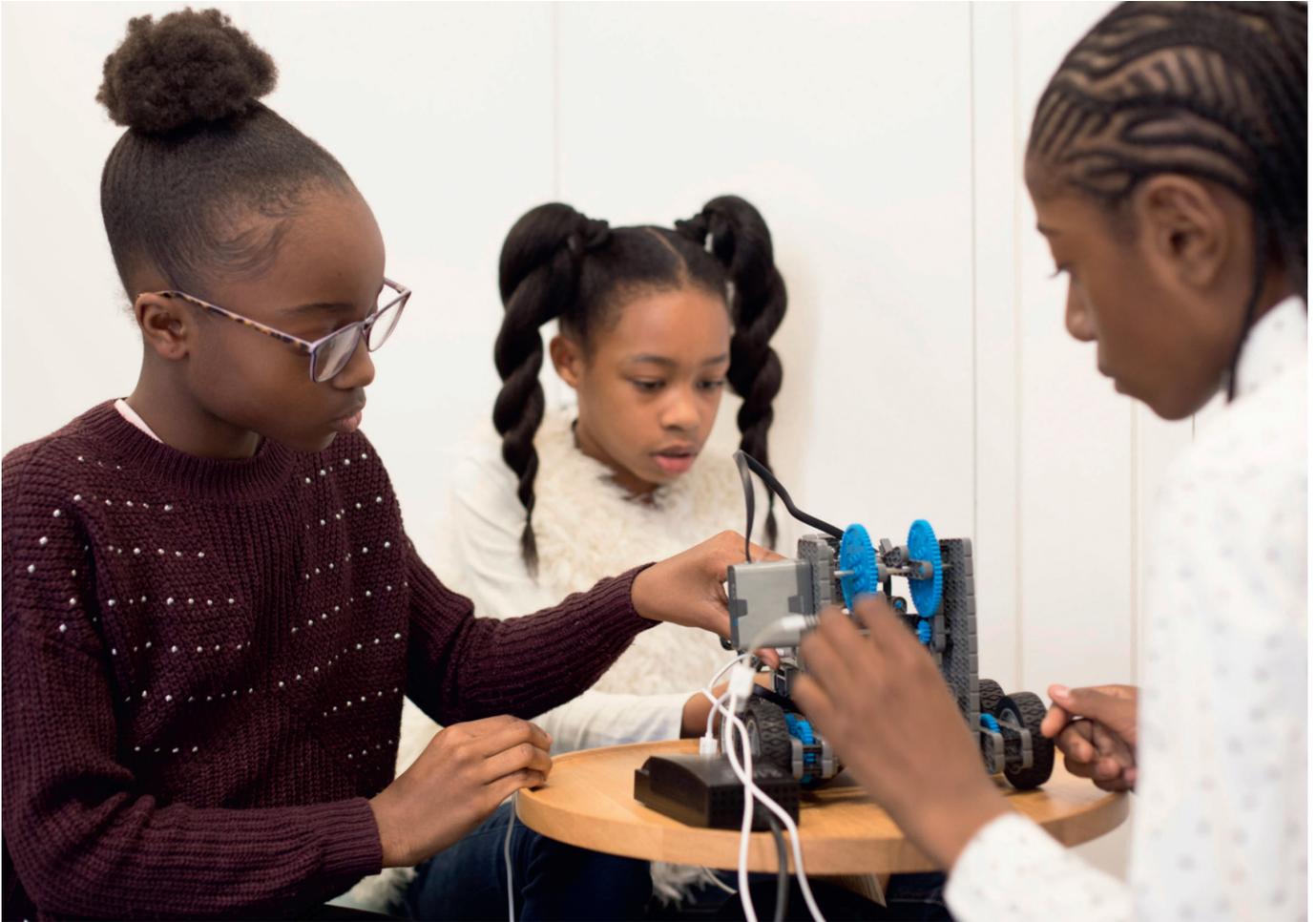
1. Introduction	003
2. Findings	004
2.1. Where are all the BAME techies? Understanding the potential BAME applicant pool – current levels of BAME diversity and inclusion	
2.2. Understanding barriers to BAME led business inclusion	
3. Recommendations	009
3.1. Get uncomfortable	
3.2. Making SSQ more visible to BAME applicants	
3.3. Adapting SSQ's selection process	
3.4. Investing in the future: long-term recommendations for inclusion at SSQ	
3.5 Consulting with groups and organisations	
3.6 Dissemination	
Conclusion	012

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1. Introduction



From the research proposal

“This research project involves the determination of the characteristics of Bristol’s BAME population likely to be involved in/or looking to be involved in high tech industries, a determination of the nascent and current BAME high tech economy and furthermore, an analysis of SETsquared’s (SSQ) approach to entrepreneurial recruitment to determine if this represents a barrier to BAME entrepreneurs, or whether BAME entrepreneurs have established other routes to market which do not necessitate access to SSQ services. The key outcome from this project will be the identification of opportunities for SSQ to increase its social impact and demographic diversity through informed policy recommendations. In addition, the use of our own community researchers, and local facilities will help to boost local employment and bring new income into the local economy.”

The research aimed to ascertain what barriers there are to BAME entrepreneurs applying to SSQ for business support, why there have historically been so few BAME applicants to the incubator and how to attract a larger and more consistent number of BAME applicants.

For clarity, BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) is the abbreviation used in this report, even if the source cited used BME (Black and Minority Ethnic), given both these terms are commonly used in the UK to describe people of non-white heritage in general. Some of the quotes were edited to reflect this. The only exception is when we cite organisations, such as University of Bristol BME Network, where the abbreviation is part of the organisation’s name.

2. Findings

The research aims were to:

Understand the barriers faced by BAME entrepreneurs applying to SSQ for business support.

Understand the reasons behind relatively few successful BAME applicants to the incubator given Bristol's ethnic diversity.

Identify and recommend ways forward to attract a larger and more consistent number of successful BAME applicants.

2.1. Where are all the BAME techies?

Understanding the potential BAME applicant pool - current levels of BAME diversity and inclusion.

Underrepresentation of BAME communities in Higher Education: fewer BAME graduates = smaller applicant pool

Bristol is well respected for its burgeoning spirit in the tech start-up sector with the Engine Shed and SSQ at the centre of this trend. The problem for organisations working in the city is that they have not been able to significantly tap into the skilled BAME population in Bristol. While BAME involvement in UK Digital Tech (15%) is higher than the national average of BAME participation in the entire workplace (11%)¹, Bristol remains below average. Rife inequality has caused non-white residents to lag in achievement. The city was called 'the best place to live in Britain' in 2017 by the Sunday Times Best Places to Live Guide, but in the same year, the Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity

(CoDE) in collaboration with The Runnymede Trust² found that ethnic minorities experience greater disadvantage in education and employment in our city than in England and Wales as a whole (this is particularly worse if one is Black African). Additionally, a noted BAME higher education degree attainment gap exists across England which becomes wider for those studying science, engineering and technology degrees. However, it is worth noting that the University of the West of England's latest statistics from its Student Data Analysis figures show the Faculty of Environment and Technology saw a greater proportion of BAME undergraduates especially in Engineering, Design and Mathematics than in previous academic years³.

However, significantly fewer BAME students in England enter university than their White counterparts, and completion rates are even lower. The University of Bristol's Student Population Statistics by School 2017-2018⁴ show that there were only 61 home BAME Engineering Postgraduates registered in the 2017-2018 academic year studying

1. Tech Nation (2018) *Tech Nation Report 2018*.

2. CoDE and The Runnymede Trust (2017) *Bristol: a city divided? Ethnic Minority disadvantage in Education and Employment*. www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/CoDE%20Briefing%20Bristol%20v2.pdf

3. UWE (2016) *Student Data Analysis 2015/16 ETHNICITY*. www2.uwe.ac.uk/services/Marketing/about-us/Equalityanddiversity/pdf/Student-data-analysis-201516-ETHNICITY.pdf

4. UoB Academic Registry (2017) *Student Population Statistics by School 17/18*. www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/ssio/documents/sdit-web-stats/1718/by_school_1718_Dec.xlsx

5. HESA (2018) Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2016/17 – Where students come from and go to study <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/11-01-2018/sfr247-higher-education-student-statistics/location>

6. Up Our Street (2017) *Report on the influence of course title on the decision making process of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic prospective students to the University of Bristol* (unpublished).

7. Tech City (2017) *Tech Nation 2017 Report*.

8. Hall, S. (1997) 'The spectacle of the "other"' in Hall, S. (ed.) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London/Thousand Oaks, CA/New Delhi: Sage, pp. 234 – 239 only.



alongside more than 380 White home students. There were 354 overseas BAME students registered in the same period and while there was no available data on the ethnicity of said students, in the UK, the number of international students from China is much larger than those from any other overseas country⁵. The institution does not provide further information on how many are local to Bristol, however a 2017 Up Our Street research project⁶ for the University's Widening Participation office found that a majority of home BAME students move to Bristol for higher education and are not originally from the city. This would suggest that SSQ must wilfully seek out qualified candidates if Bristol is to retain BAME tech entrepreneurs leaving the university.

It must also go far beyond the reaches of the university pipeline to appeal and respond to the needs of more potential BAME tech entrepreneurs since there is already a marked imbalance of representation at the starting point.

Cuts to non-university training programmes accessed by BAME groups means fewer people have exposure to tech

Community groups such as ACH, Bristol Energy Network and Knowle West Media Centre deliver

training in different kinds of tech, however their ability to do so is limited. The organisations that can deliver tech training at the community level are often reliant on public funds to stay afloat. With extensive cuts to the voluntary sector and community groups across Bristol, these groups are not likely to be able to train with cutting-edge technology innovations needed to thrive in the fast-paced industry. Nevertheless, there have been free 'build your own solar panel' workshops and similar events held in low participation areas in recent years by Demand Energy, Growing Futures and Bristol Energy Network. These are the kind of initiatives that need support to prepare future SSQ applicants.

Lack of culturally specific networking in the city

From our initial phases of research, it was clear that there are no active large-scale BAME tech networks in Bristol to naturally feed into SSQ. Further, there are few BAME tech entrepreneurs from Bristol who stay in the city to start a business. In fact, our survey yielded relatively few responses even though it was circulated widely among Bristol's tech, entrepreneurial and business channels. Two organisations responded to invitation emails openly stating that there were no BAME persons on staff while others forwarded the information to BAME

colleagues (one of whom became a focus group participant). Our research was able to identify a larger pool of participants who were engaged in software development, digital technologies, and “low-tech” initiatives. One participant in a focus group considered themselves “tech-adjacent” and others agreed that this term seemed to suit them. They were not fully involved in the actual making of tech but had built companies around it and had the potential to do much more. Other participants had business ideas for high-tech initiatives that responded to social problems but were still at the planning stages. It was through extensive review of newspapers, blogs and social media that the research team was able to identify BAME Bristolian founders of high-tech companies.

2.2. Understanding barriers to BAME led business inclusion

Bristol’s tech networks – an exclusive and unknown world

BAME people who were working with tech did not generally know about, and therefore were not involved in, existing tech happenings across the city. There was a resigned feeling among participants that BAME entrepreneurs would have a harder time growing a tech start-up than their White British counterparts because they did not fit in with the networking circle.

In 2016, Bristol and Bath had the largest number of tech events booked through meetup.com outside of London⁷, though none of these were dedicated to addressing ethnic diversity. While this divide is not specific to any single business sector, Bristol would benefit if all citizens were involved in solidifying its place as a tech innovator, since ideas from people from all walks of life have the potential to solve problems that affect a wider range of experiences.

A tech organisation board member pointed out that the top companies do not need to embark on research for new talent since they are likely to know a stream of people who can do the job. This is a prominent barrier – getting mainstream businesses and tech organisations to reach further afield for new hires and to hire without bias. Both focus group discussions turned to not feeling welcome in a workspace because of the “otherness”⁸ of their name, religion or accent. The discussion turned to responsibility of community members themselves to move into these spaces:

“Part of this is my own self-criticism, maybe I should do more [in Bristol], but I see lots of opportunities, there’s lots of skills that we can bring but it seems like the people with the powers that be are never truly saying ‘come and help.’” – P7

Even those interviewees who have been working in Bristol tech for more than a decade felt that coming to the table with a non-English name and non-white skin sometimes made others uncomfortable. Bristol-based tech entrepreneur and venture capitalist Dotun Olowoporoku says that in this way the city’s organisations are missing out:

“Business ideas are there, regardless of the race or culture. Talent is evenly distributed but opportunity is not. When people don’t have the opportunity, they cannot scale as others who do.”

The definition and understanding of high tech

Engine Shed is not on BAME communities’ radar of places to work though some participants were aware of the space, but very few knew about SSQ before this research began and they were unclear about what the incubator does. It is worth noting that the terminology seemed to deter some participants who otherwise may have taken part in the programme. Similarly, an SSQ Bristol BAME founder was unsure of using the term ‘high-tech’ in their operations as they felt it isolated a pool of people who might not recognise the level of the tech capability of their business. This was echoed in focus groups where a majority of participants did not have a definitive answer for the difference in tech and high-tech.

At one focus group, partners in a digital business explained that they had applied to SSQ, and on not being successful, reached out for comment. It was through feedback from researchers that they realized they had far more work to do before application. It could have saved time and labour if the right message and constructive feedback had come across in the first place.

Dominance from the centre

Tech is generally concentrated in the city centre. The different circles are not inviting community groups to collaborate on initiatives that could benefit Bristolians nor are they dipping into local or national BAME pools to deliver talks, training etc. Where community groups can facilitate training to upskill or develop talent in the BAME population, the specialist knowledge needed to deliver this is often lacking. People are further disconnected when events and opportunities are only marketed through channels that are not in their frame of reference. As SSQ does not advertise or market its service, many communities never hear about it, and its support is likely to go to those who already have SSQ on their radar. While this may have worked in the past, the Tech Nation 2018 report recommends that businesses in the United Kingdom widen their local networks to better benefit from the talent at home.

The power and the problem with using role models

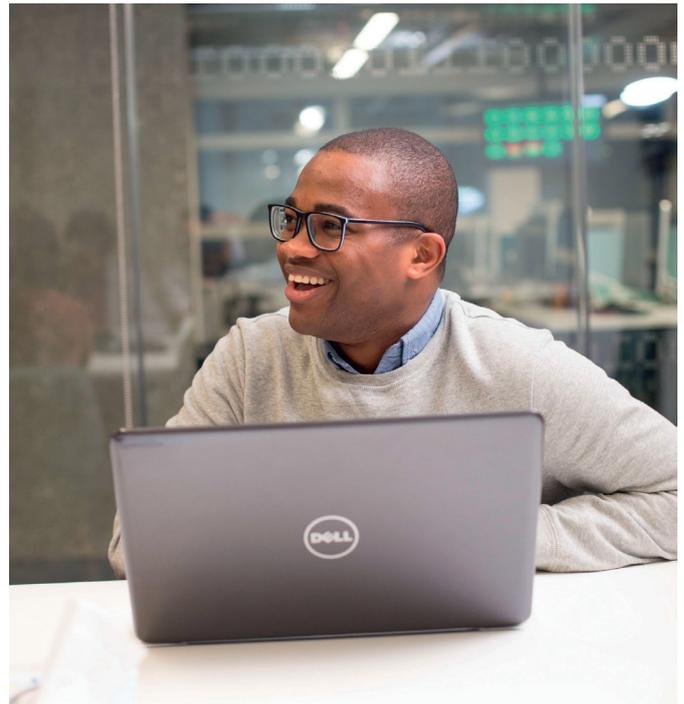
All participants agreed that it would be useful to see more BAME tech entrepreneurs touted as role models; but they warned that it was easy for the few involved to become 'tokens' within the science and tech networks. One female participant chimed in:

“It’s the same with the women’s conversation; because if you’re the only woman working in engineering and suddenly you are to represent all women rather than just doing the job you love. There should be specialists to do that because you cannot be placed with responsibility just because you happen to be BAME and an expert in your field.” – P9

Unequal access to resources and training

As discussed in Section 2 above, there are proportionately fewer BAME students across England completing degrees in tech, engineering and similar fields.

Whether because of lack of funding, lack of relevant guidance or personal choice, BAME Bristolians working in tech-enabled businesses are less likely to have postgraduate training. A 20-year old self-taught



coder and network developer was unsure about attending university and felt that people with similar outlooks to his should be encouraged to learn more tech related subjects through hands-on experience.

Similarly, another participant spoke from her point of view:

“The world moves faster than universities can teach. So actually, you can’t learn most of these skills at university any longer, you have to be learning it on the job, at meet-ups, doing all that stuff and women, if they take time out for a career break, drop away in terms of their skills. Then they come back and are out of date, the language is completely different, it moves so fast.” – P9

Complications around right to work and starting a business in the UK

Formal education presents its own set of complications when completed outside the UK. Working within Easton, Lawrence Hill and Ashley wards, the Up Our Street and ACH research teams often meet highly degreed individuals who are



underemployed in the UK. For an engineering undergraduate, working in the country after finishing their course would rely on a company sponsoring an employment visa, allowing their right to remain. This problem may be compounded by the lack of certainty over the UK's future immigration policy after Brexit, both with regards to non-EU and EU nationals (of whom around 11% are BAME, which is a greater proportion than amongst UK nationals).

One participant, a refugee, also felt that work regulations were not helpful in starting a tech-enabled business. Others highlighted the red tape and bureaucratic processes needed to transfer credentials from outside the UK.

London as the UK tech centre lures Bristol's BAME entrepreneurs away

Many of the top talents are lured away to London where they find tech networks are more likely to interact with them. Attributed to its long history of multiculturalism, advanced tech infrastructure and global outreach, the capital city is the obvious hub for those wanting to launch into the field. Some participants travel to London regularly for events and meetups. For example,

“Once a month I go to London, it's all mixed. I make sure I try to arrange a meeting during the day and then I go to a networking [event] in the evening” – P7

Recognising the easy pull of London, some local entrepreneurs consciously try to enter the Bristol scene by forgoing trips to London and instead relying on monthly searches of Eventbrite and Facebook for activities in Bristol. Although they found this did yield some results, it required a lot of input on their part to hunt out the opportunities as they are not 'plugged in' to what is happening in the city.

“I've put myself on a travel ban. Last year I didn't leave Bristol for the first time in six years. So, I can say there's a lot happening in Bristol. There's a lot of help out there but you have to search for it” – P6

The discussion in one focus group turned to successful BAME leaders such as Mayor Marvin Rees having spent significant time outside the city before coming back. They also saw the missed opportunities for BAME founders of tech-enabled businesses and are not encouraged by their experiences. One African participant who had worked at a tech company in another part of Europe found that the UK job sector was exclusionary and hard to break into. He saw his future in the fate of African Caribbean Bristolians who arrived before him but were slow to rise in business. He responded to the discussion:

“I don't know your name, you said you're Jamaican. [Jamaicans] came before us and you're saying this. So, what do we feel, as we came later, when I see people [like him] working hard, doing whatever he can and there are always barriers?” – P2

At the heart of the matter are the “perceived” barriers as they prevent engagement in the first place. It is the duty of organisations such as SSQ to reach out and invite people to take part instead of waiting for them to come in.

3. Recommendations

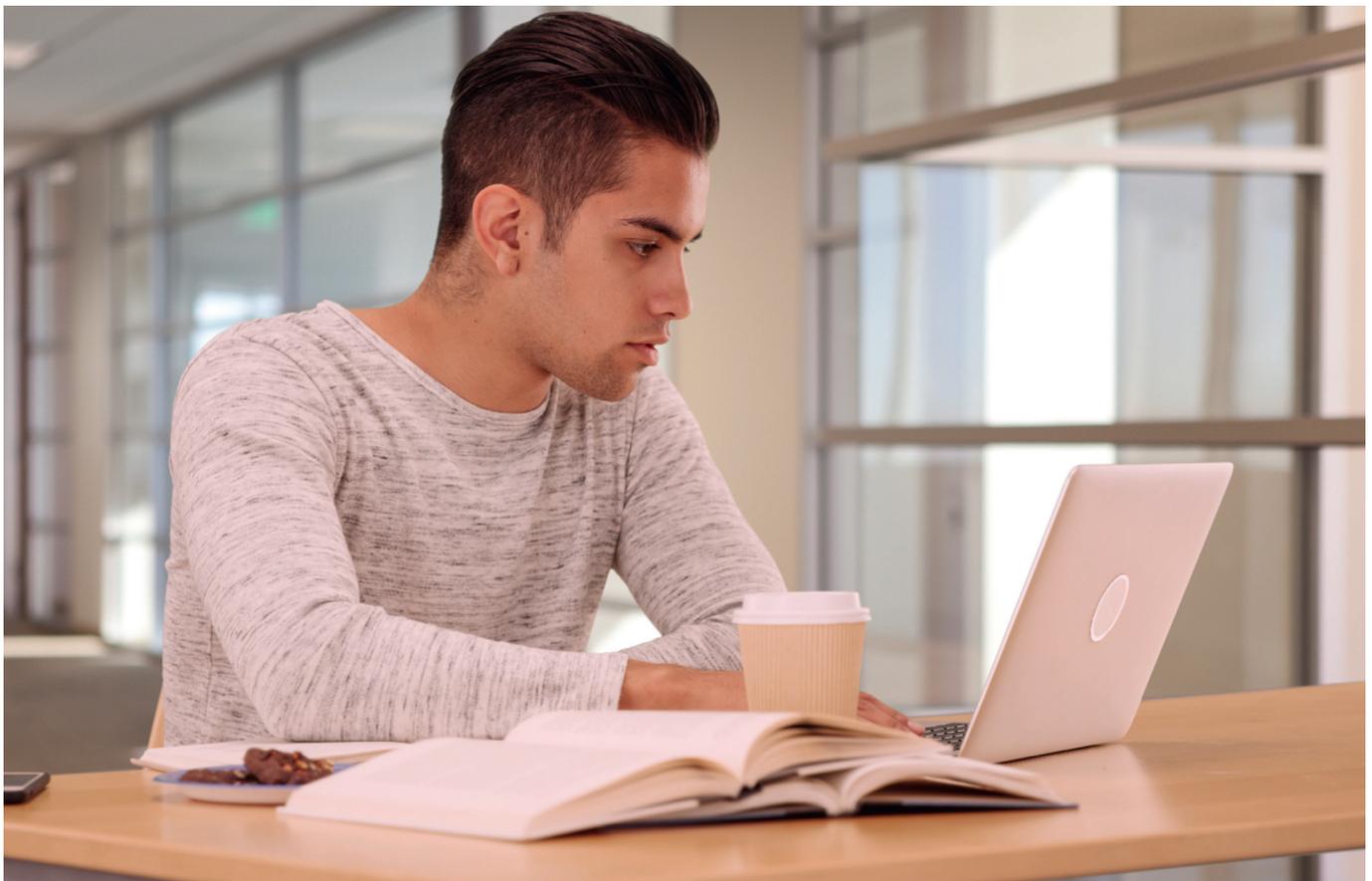
Considering the evidence collected in the source of this research, ACHOUS put forward the following recommendations:

3.1. Get uncomfortable

Step outside the corporate and academic space and meet new people where they are. This means inviting diverse peoples into SSQ space and returning the favour. It is also important to reciprocate and not always rely on people coming to you. Setting partnerships with community groups and media, small businesses and key influencers will help to widen SSQ's reach. Go to a bilingual event or somewhere where English is not the common language. Somali migrants are the most populous Black population in Bristol now, and translating key information into the Somali language would be a relatively small task but would open SSQ to thousands of people who may otherwise not take note. Spreading out from the city centre and using new locations for events and meetups might be a culture shock at first but it would challenge the organisation to deliver in a new way. Ask people

questions about their culture; genuine interest is likely to be met with genuine responses and willingness to share. Learn about business culture in China, Southeast Asia, West Africa and other places potential candidates might come from. Look to go beyond your normal scope of view to learn about how other people in the city live. There are lessons to be learned in how other people operate and being immersed in the lived experience is the best way to soak up this information, even if it initially means being uncomfortable.

- Get out into the neighbourhoods and meet people. Speak to people face to face.
- Go to community events to better understand the concerns of BAME Bristolians.
- Implement diversity training to sensitise SSQ staff and members to appropriate ways to treat people of different backgrounds. This will also help to promote positive group interaction, and make



SSQ's application and interviewing process fairer and more inclusive.

3.2. Making SSQ more visible to BAME applicants

SSQ should seek to build a recognisable brand in tech innovation within BAME business networks. Breaking this barrier is crucial to getting people to understand that the different assets of the city (such as SSQ) are there for everyone to make use of. This translates into who uses facilities like The Engine Shed or other co-working spaces in the city centre.

BAME communities need to be seen as people with skills and talent that can contribute to SSQ's success if given the opportunity. Profile SSQ's BAME founders in different media and meet other tech entrepreneurs in Bristol. Invite BAME techies from Bristol and beyond to talk about their expertise at SSQ and Engine Shed events. Demystify tech and high-tech through presence at community events. Have targeted open-days for BAME communities. Collaborate with charities, social enterprises and faith groups to widen the reach of SSQ and to integrate with the local life that sustains the city. Exhibit at different local festivals such as the St Pauls Carnival or the Islamic Fayre.

- Have a presence at events with high BAME attendance.
- Support a long established BAME led tech-enabled organisation such as Ujima Radio.
- Employ BAME tech experts to lead workshops, talks, interactive sessions etc.
- Be present at ongoing conversations around race and opportunity (e.g. citywide conversation around segregation), using it as an opportunity to make connections, go a little outside comfort zone, listen, and share ideas.
- When sending invitations to events, encourage people to bring a 'plus one' - someone who isn't already connected to the network.

3.3. Adapting SSQ's selection process

It is imperative that SSQ monitors for protected characteristics of applicants, founders, employees and staff. SSQ should keep demographic data on applicants, and also on those who express interest in its services to build a database of BAME contacts that may support SSQ in different ways if they do not qualify as residents for incubation.

While it might not be possible to provide individual feedback to all unsuccessful candidates, a short resource list or guide can help them find their next step in tech. Consult with experts to adapt the application and interview process. Diversify interview panels. Invite candidates to mixers, meetups and talks to help them understand SSQ culture. Encourage existing founders to engage expertise from local communities where possible. Place a high value on diversity and communicate this to potential candidates so that they in turn think about the implications of a multicultural workforce for their business.



To take advantage of BAME talent in Bristol, the incubator can also source founders by scouting and targeted recruitment. For example, it could research potential candidates through networking sites such as LinkedIn as well as blogs and social media, and approach them directly. It could also target individuals from both Bristol universities and companies such as Airbus and use the 'snowball technique' to find suitable candidates. Often potential founders are not connected to an existing network but know other techies socially. Consistent trawling of news, blogs and social media can also point in the right direction.

- Hire BAME personnel to SSQ staff.
- Consider adopting an organisational commitment (e.g. www.kaporcapital.com/founders-commitment/) to create an inclusive culture which founders can then have instilled in them.
- Monitor and record applicant data.
- Headhunt Bristol's talent.
- Signpost and offer careers advice.
- Write inclusion and diversity training into SSQ's programme for founders.
- Encourage founders to start thinking about how a growing multicultural workforce might impact their business.

3.4. Investing in the future: long-term recommendations for inclusion at SSQ

Many of the solutions mentioned above are easily applied but SSQ must look to naturally improve the number of BAME entrepreneurs learning from and being supported by its incubation scheme. As seen throughout this project, BAME people are less likely to have attended university to study STEM subjects. SSQ must think about its future candidates and the long-term benefits of expanding its Bristol pipeline. This will require strategic planning for sustained transfer of skills from SSQ experts into lesser represented Bristol communities.

SSQ should consider starting an after-school club in primary or secondary schools in parts of the city that are high BAME but low higher education participation areas. It should also consider funding a bursary for a local BAME student to complete a tech engineering degree, as this could significantly improve its visibility in BAME communities. Further, collaborate on an undergraduate or postgraduate studentship that has SSQ residency at the heart. Consider introducing new levels of entry and SSQ offerings – such as internships, work placements and work experience. Partner with community groups to lead science and tech projects, exhibitions and interactive days. Align with the Bristol One City Plan strategy and hardwire diversifying participation in tech start-ups into it to secure future investment and support from the Council, Cabinet, and Mayor.

- Offer internships, work placements etc. for BAME students.
- Create a bursary for a BAME student from an inner-city school.
- Partner with a primary or secondary school with majority BAME students over long term.
- Establish BAME Entrepreneur In Residence.
- Hire BAME staff.

3.5 Consulting with groups and organisations

Community partners, while in some cases under-resourced, are vital for creating networks and connections among Bristol’s different communities. They should be seen as a potential asset for SSQ since people often learn about opportunities through community and grassroots organisations.

Some of the suitable groups to collaborate with

Bristol	Rest of UK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACH • Babbasa • BSWN • Phoenix Social Enterprise • St Paul’s Learning Centre • Malcolm X • Full Circle • Creative Youth Network • BCFM • Black Girls Tech • BRAVE • City Academy • Cognitive Paths • Digilocal • Growing Futures • Ujima Radio • Green and Black Initiative • Rife Magazine at the Watershed (VR Lab) • University of Bristol African Caribbean Society • UoB Asian Students Society • University of Bristol BME Network • University of the West of England BME Network • Up Our Street • Women’s Tech Network • Silas Adekunle <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mekamon Robotics • Mohammed Siddiq <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – GENeco • Dotun Olowoporoku <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Starta • Tanniemola Liverpool <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – University of Bristol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colour In Tech • UK Black tech • Stemettes • 20/20 Shift • Ann-Marie Imafidon • Fumbi Chima

3.6 Dissemination

ACHUOS recommends two dissemination events, one geared towards the community and another aimed at tech and business to raise awareness of this subject.

Conclusion



Responsibility to integrate lies on both sides of the divide, however, organisations like SSQ must recognise their agency and the power of their position and extend a hand to help BAME tech entrepreneurs up the ladder. By fostering a more inclusive and welcoming organisational framework, SSQ (with its position at the centre of cutting-edge science and technology) can bolster Bristol's identity and further present itself as the obvious alternative to London for high tech advancement and sector inclusivity.

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