

SHEDDING LIGHT ON POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

We worked with the London College of Fashion to understand what factors might be preventing them from recruiting a more diverse workforce and advising on how to start addressing them.

The London College of Fashion, part of the University of the Arts London (UAL), wanted to increase the number of its employees from BAME backgrounds. Specifically, they were finding it challenging to attract applications from ethnic minority candidates in sufficient numbers. As part of their journey to addressing this issue, they commissioned TMP to help them understand the experience they offered to existing ethnic minority employees and to advise on whether the insight gained could shed any light on potential barriers to engagement amongst external BAME audiences.

SOLUTION HIGHLIGHTS

- COLLEGE-WIDE RESEARCH REPRESENTING ALL AUDIENCES.
- IDENTIFYING DIFFERENCES IN EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE.
- INSIGHT INTO FACTORS CAUSING POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO RECRUITMENT.
- ADVISING ON ADDRESSING THOSE FACTORS.

SCOPE AND SCALE

We conducted research amongst a sample of people from both BAME and non-BAME backgrounds, to identify any differences in how they experienced the College as an employer. Our research took the form of 1-1- interviews and involved academic and non-academic staff, as well as a selection of alumni to provide somewhat of an external perspective.

SITUATION

While the initial focus was on ethnicity, it turned out that this was not the key challenge.

Where differences appeared to exist in the employment experience, they were not between BAME and non-BAME colleagues. They appeared to be related to socio-economics or 'class', with non-BAME members of staff who (unprompted) identified themselves as working class sharing very similar perceptions of senior management to

their BAME counterparts. The common perception was that to do well at the College you had to have a certain background and set of social experiences. Without these, there was a sense that the top of the organisation was unattainable. This sense appeared to be reinforced by the comparatively optimistic perspectives of those BAME staff members who had achieved senior positions in the organisation. The challenge was not therefore about ethnicity, it was about addressing seemingly class-based factors.

SOLUTION

IDENTIFYING AND BREAKING DOWN PERCEIVED BARRIERS

Following completion of the research, we advised the College that, from a communications perspective, they needed to focus on breaking down any perceived barriers between senior management and the wider staff body. We recommended using, if possible, personal stories to position the latter group as more relatable and their level within the organisation as achievable with hard work. We also recommended that the College check its internal promotion processes for any signs of unconscious bias.

CHALLENGING MISPERCEPTIONS

During the research staff suggested that the College's challenge around attracting BAME candidates might to some degree be caused by a sense that the organisation only wanted a certain 'type' of person - i.e. that the external perception might mirror the internal one.

TAKING A PERSONAL STORY-TELLING APPROACH

We therefore advised the College to extend the personal story-telling approach beyond internal communications into its recruitment communications; and to review the channels through which these stories are disseminated.

RESULTS

We advised that the key to success was to position the College as more accessible to people from all walks of life, including those with BAME backgrounds.

The College is now taking this approach for their attraction and engagement activity.