Be SMART:
Insights from running a BAME targeted employability programme.

NICEC Event, Jan 2021
Obi Oputa, St Mary's University.

Areas of focus:

1. Overview of Be SMART

2. The 'nuts and bolts'

3. Reaching and connecting

4. Impact evaluation

Overview of 'Be SMART':

A BAME targeted intervention that has **initiated** a call to action at our university (St Mary's) to the persistent inequalities (**progression**) experienced by our BAME students, and reflective of wider HE sector and labour market.

Be SMART was launched in **October 2019** by St Mary's Employability Services:

The THREE components of 'Be SMART:

1.   **Mentoring** delivered by industry professionals **(26 students participated)**

2.   30 hours paid **Micro-internships** professional experience **(28 students participated)**

3.   Targeted **leadership & professionalism** workshops **(10/15 students participated per session)**

42 students applied to join Be SMART, **17 employers** offered us internship positions and **22 professionals** across diverse industries both BAME and non BAME partnered with us as mentors.

The 'nuts and bolts':

- A **genuine** desire to make a difference, and **sustained** authenticity

  ✓ Almost anything is **better** than nothing

- **Grounding** the project in BAME experience (underpinned method and practice)

  ✓ Allows for relatability and connectedness

  ✓ Opportunities to collaborate with people emotionally invested

The 'nuts and bolts' cont.:

- **Data is key (statistics tell you trends, but people tell you lived experiences):**
  - ✓ National studies and research provided resources to frame and inform
  - ✓ Local specific data offer learning (and opportunity to adopt approach) unique to institution
  - ✓ Focus groups (and anecdotal evidence) provided personal and real insights

- **Champions** who can influence, advocate and support
  - ✓ Employers and industry professionals
  - ✓ Managers and leadership team
  - ✓ Colleagues within and outside your team

Reachin...

- **Leverage** e...
  - ✓ Student...
  - ✓ BAME S...

- Utilise **OUR**...

- Met BAME...
  - ✓ Physica...
  - ✓ Emotio...

- **Lead with**...

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leadership

Be SMA...
#investir...

Employers valu...

- 62% of employers wan... management and lead...
- Leadership ranks amor... graduates
- Management skills app...

Find out how to 'Be Smart'... through a **leadership** and p... Be Smart opportunities also... and **mentoring** from indust...

Apply now!

To be eligible, you must identify as... Please note that the mentoring pro...

Email obi.oputa@stmarys.ac.u...

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internships

Be SMAR...
#investiny...

Students who do i...

- are 12% more likely to be in...
- have a 58% chance of bein... after study, compared to 30... an internship
- get a boost to their earning... salaries

Find out how to 'Be Smart' and... paid, flexible **internships**. Other... **mentoring** from industry profess... professionalism programme.

Apply now!

To be eligible, you must identify as either... Please note that the mentoring program...

Email obi.oputa@stmarys.ac.uk to...

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mentoring

Be SMART
#investinyourfutu...

Students who take part in professional mentoring:

- See significant benefits in career progression and opportunities
- Develop valuable insights and confidence in their own abilities
- Gain industry and professional knowledge and con...

Find out how to '**Be Smart**' and enhance your career goals... through **mentoring** from industry professionals. Other **Be S**... opportunities include paid, flexible **internships** and a **leade**... and professionalism programme.

Apply now!

To be eligible, you must identify as either Black, Asian or an ethic minority... Please note that the mentoring programme is only open to level 5/6 stude...

Email obi.oputa@stmarys.ac.uk to find out more.

Impact evaluation:

Skills:
- Self-management and professionalism, career management (including developing their professional networks), and communication

Confidence:
- 73% of respondents also felt the programme had also increased in their confidence, which is embodied by a quote from the interviews: ***"being a BAME student… I can apply for anything… it's boosted my confidence."***

Positive self-identity:
- Student 6 related confidence specifically to their BAME identity: ***"In terms of being a BAME student…it's just my, like, my confidence and sense…I can apply for anything… it's boosted my confidence."***
- Student 4 referred to their self-worth, and positive influence of Be SMART on their belief in ***"going to the top".***
- Student 2 found legitimacy from their participation and said that this had enabled them to overcome a ***"kind of imposter syndrome type of thing".***
- The positive impact of the project was summarised succinctly by Student 4: ***"being a black [person] doesn't…prevent me from getting work experience"***

Connectedness and sense of belonging:
- 76% stated the programme had improved their relationship with the Careers Service and 66% agreed it strengthened their connection to the university, one student saying they felt more ***"accepted"*** and another stating ***"I feel like they only want to see me progress."***

Authenticity:
- The post-programme survey revealed the significance of the programme being led by BAME staff, with 79% stated that it was important. One student highlighted the "***authentic and genuine***" feeling they got from the BAME project leadership.
- Co-creating the project with BAME staff and mentors enhanced participants' sense of connection to the project, and increased the credibility of Be SMART through being able to speak authentically about the challenges BAME professionals face: ***"they themselves being BAME in…different industries…they understand the differences or pressures or, like, barriers that might be there".***

Key points:

- Recognise student effort and commitment through the lifecycle of the project *(Bryan et al, 2018 and Kuh, 2009)*

- Building in impact evaluations and assessments through the arch of the project

- Value of building meaningful relationships between BAME stakeholders (i.e. students, academics, representatives and professionals) and allies

- It's essential to 'make time' to listen and learn about students' personal circumstances and lived experiences, which research alone may not reveal, rather than make assumptions.

- We have greater autonomy in how we shape employer engagement and drives changes to practice.

- Sometimes companies with espoused commitment to diversity and inclusion aren't always diverse and inclusive.

Key points cont.:

- Significant factor of my race, how it **positioned me** within the project, especially in creating and driving the project. It gave me unique access, insights, authenticity and legitimacy.

- This is important made me think of how the project would work if I wasn't in it, if my race wasn't a factor.

  ✓ Test ideas and new ways of working (Employability Confident)

One last thing:

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Thank you.
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