Establishing a Reverse Mentoring Scheme for BAME colleagues

Harnessing BAME talent: A guide for UK employers
Establishing a Reverse Mentoring Scheme for BAME colleagues

ParliREACH is the workplace equality network for Race, Ethnicity and Cultural Heritage in the Houses of Parliament. Founded in 2013, it is run by staff, for staff.
Our initiative
Reverse mentoring is ParliREACH’s flagship programme, where an organiser from the network pairs members of ParliREACH with a senior manager from another department. It is called reverse mentoring because the BAME person (often more junior), mentors the senior person about what it is like to work in Parliament as a member of a BAME community.

ParliREACH launched its reverse mentoring programme four years ago. The programme has seen an increase in participation year on year. In the first year, 2014, there were six reverse mentoring pairs, in 2015 there were 12 pairs and in 2016, 18 new pairings began.

The objectives of the reverse mentoring programme are to:

- Increase commitment among senior managers to recruit, train and promote talented people from under-represented groups and specifically BAME colleagues
- Educate senior managers about the challenges BAME colleagues face within and outside the workplace
- Enhance leadership, conflict management and coaching skills of mentors and mentees
- Provide BAME colleagues with a greater understanding of the organisation and skills required for senior positions, as well as access to professional networks
- Develop strategies to improve the work environment in the House

Participants are asked to commit to the relationship for at least 6 months and agree to hold at least 6 meetings within this period.

Hints and tips
Publicise the programme early, setting out the objectives and expectations. Promote it to managers as a way for them to demonstrate their commitment to diversity and inclusion, and to BAME staff as an opportunity to have some one-to-one input from a senior manager with the potential to enhance their career prospects. Send out emails, put it on the web, have a launch party with invited speakers.

See the Reverse Mentoring guide for more pointers
The impact and reactions so far

“I had the opportunity to reverse mentor with the Managing Director of Corporate Services. We initially discussed our general duties to give each other a better understanding of our work context. I appreciated my mentee’s openness as this encouraged me to be more open about my daily work too. It resulted in productive discussions whereby we looked at solutions to problems rather than the problems themselves. It was interesting for me to see things from a Director’s perspective. It gave me a greater understanding of the organisation as a whole and the need for Managing Directors to ensure that departmental objectives align with the House Strategy.

I think my mentee and I would agree that the reverse mentoring process was a very positive experience and one that led to a mutual understanding and appreciation of each other’s roles in the organisation. And we’ve both been promoted as a result!”

Mentor participant

Taking part in the reverse mentoring scheme was an invaluable experience, fun and mutually beneficial. It gave me the chance to meet with a senior member of staff with a wealth of knowledge of Parliament. He gave me tips on how to progress professionally as well as in my personal life. My reverse mentor also made me aware of opportunities that I otherwise would not have been aware of. My mentee expressed that the experience had also been incredibly beneficial to him. I had exposed him to some of the issues surrounding staff representation, particularly those affect BAME colleagues, and the obstacles they commonly face. For example, we discussed the possibility of a dedicated fast-track scheme for BAME staff, or making the current one more accessible and welcoming to BAME staff. The latter evolved into a new Direct Recruitment programme targeting BAME staff.

“I would recommend that other members of staff take part in the scheme. It is a great opportunity to build connections across the house and understand the perspective of colleagues from different backgrounds.” Mentor participant

“Reverse mentoring has given me a tremendous opportunity to hear about the world – and our workplace – as seen from a different vantage point. I am always interested to explore how people’s different life experiences shape their views, and with my reverse mentor I’ve been able to do that with a specific focus on race, which isn’t a topic that is always easy to discuss. Reverse mentoring differs from other conversations because of the commitment on both sides to confidentiality, and the explicit commitment to be frank and challenging. I’ve found it instructive to discuss the value of diversity activities and networks, and how Parliament compares with other employers. I’ve also really enjoyed getting to know a colleague whose path I might not otherwise have crossed.” Mentee participant
“I can report back positively on my experience. We have met regularly and have established a routine of challenging each other with a single action point each time. It has encouraged me to maintain high expectations of what my colleagues can accomplish. My reverse mentor acts as a conscience whispering in my ear.”

Mentee participant