

Dear Members

As I start to write this message to you all, I cannot help but feel slightly overwhelmed with emotion, recalling my time spent building and developing the vision of LSE's BME staff network. I became the Chair of EmbRace in June 2016, to represent and promote the BME community at a School wide level.

Prior to my arrival at LSE, I had worked on a number of projects for the Mayor of London that was Black and Asian related and have always been motivated, driven and completely impassioned by this particular protected group, as I recognised the lack of opportunities that is always present. It is for this reason that when presented with opening to lead EmbRace I seized the prospect with determination.

As a Chair, you get to express your ideas and beliefs, but more importantly influence policy around culture and diversity. From the onset debate was never enough for me I wanted to make real change by organising people and resources so ideas, discussion and experiments was turned into a reality, but more importantly to achieve objectives, influence policy and raise awareness. I have always sought to be meticulous and consistent in raising the bar within this group despite any problems that may have arose, the focus was always action driven.

Black History month is an essential part of all history and something that I prioritised in my position as Chair, by ensuring that this important calendar slot was a prominent feature at LSE and which would later become a School wide initiative. A month however does not equate for the plethora of culture and experience of a lifetime of black history. All this achieves is the diminishing of a whole experience, and perpetuate othering. History is everything, from black to white and never subjected to a sole period. It allows the counteraction of myths and deep-rotted stereotypes, and in addition stops the greater truths from being erased. EmbRace's main goal has always been to seize every opportunity to highlight and celebrate Black and Asian initiatives throughout the year.

I survived the endless administrative duties associated with the role and to be honest, the minor administrative headaches are buried in a mountain of memories of wonderful experiences and relationships. It has been a pleasure being part of this network and I am proud of all we have accomplished in the last four years. I have truly enjoyed getting to know so many of you over the years as the committee worked together to raise awareness, promote and celebrate the BME community.

Handpicking and choosing the current committee has been one of my proudest achievements, a wonderful team of dedicated members of staff who facilitate the design and delivery of the network objectives. This group does not just represent a broad range of staff who work across campus in academic, divisional and institutes, they also represent a broad range of characteristics. This I believe has aided the network in developing collaborations and partnerships, both internally, with students and external contacts with ease.

We set out to develop a clear set of strategic priorities that would raise the profile not just for the members but also the LSE community and this was positively achieved as a strong structured committee was formed and in addition so many of EmbRaces objectives were accomplished.

I would like to thank Maryane, Daniel, Anouska, Sonia, Laura-Ann, Yvonne, Nadia, Ade, Sam, Yoshi, Nikita, Fatima and Hafeez for their hard work and commitment to the network and I would

also like to thank them for trusting me with the responsibility of serving in what was sometimes a challenging, but rewarding position. More importantly, I want to thank them for taking the difficult and courageous steps together to form EmbRace and to continue making it strong.

My experience has been that of a well-functioning committee, being supportive and collective, and not afraid to challenge. My whole-hearted appreciation for making my job as Chair easier. I have never enjoyed myself as much as when I was working with the great people listed above. From these roots, great fruits have been harvested. I am confident that under Maryane's leadership she will continue to nurture the network's growth.

It is now clear that Covid-19 hit BME people the hardest, coupled with the death of George Floyd and the global series of protests regarding racism has provided a platform. In the words of Valerie Amos, 'It shouldn't have taken a nine-minute film of the breath being squeezed from a man in Minneapolis for us to take a serious look at where Britain is in 2020. The scorecard is seriously lacking'. She further states, 'It is indeed tough to explain the pernicious and debilitating impact of day-to-day racism and the macroaggressions, we all experience and deal with differently, but just because we don't talk about it doesn't mean it's not there'.

The Black Lives Matter movement has turned up the pressure on all areas in UK society to confront its colonial legacy and this movement has included people of all different ages, races, and sexual orientations. It does feel like there is representation from every section of society fighting for the same cause. That said, sharing and discussing these issues with your peers, relatives, and colleagues can be a powerful place to begin – changes start at home.

Looking ahead, EmbRace progress can be measured, by the health of their membership and an active community, their challenge is to keep moving the agenda forward with integrity, being relevant, practical and valuable for members and stakeholders alike. I would therefore encourage every member to reach out and become involved in the professional development and cultural activities of EmbRace.

As your outgoing Chair, I would like to thank each one of you and leave with memories that will stay with me for a lifetime. Working in this network has been enjoyable, rewarding and a matter of honour and pride to promote and discuss BME activities. It has been a true privilege to represent you for the past four years.

I wish Maryane, the Committee and you all every success. Let the next chapter begin, members may now march to the beat of a different drum, the rhythm may vary, however the direction is universal.

Marlene Worrell
Outgoing Chair of EmbRace Staff Network