

Network for Black Professionals

We had the opportunity to meet Chris Joseph, Head of business development from Westminster Adult Education Centre who told us about his actual duties and who also explained how he could reach this position. It has given us the opportunity to discover the Network for Black professionals. Learning the existence of such an organisation, in the further Education system, financed by public funds from the central government, that may also be sponsored by organisations and for which people pay membership seem to have created a strong impact among all participants. Even our colleagues from Denmark who are already implementing active measures to promote ethnic minorities to managing positions within companies found the idea very interesting and decided to undertake the process to organise such a network.

Created in 1998, it changed name from “Managers” to “Professionals”. Its purpose is to address the under-representation of Black staff in the FE sector, particularly the small numbers of managers, senior staff and principals. In 1998, there were only 2 black principals (0,2%) and now still they are only 7 (2%) while more than 14% of students in FE colleges are from Black and minority ethnic communities. We can quote the web site: “The Network exists to raise awareness of race equality issues in the learning and skills sector and seeks, through its activities, to develop and support measures that raise the numbers of Black staff at all levels in the sector, and positively influence the experience of all learners.

The Network is a membership organisation and over 100 colleges and other bodies in the learning and skills sector are currently affiliated. This represents an individual membership of over 800 black and minority ethnic tutors and managers working in the sector. The Network maintains significant channels of communication with its membership through its newsletters, mailing list, vacancy service, website and regional network groups.”

The Black Leadership Initiative was established in 2002 to introduce practical measures that would improve the career development opportunities for BME tutors and managers working in the sector. The government wants to increase the number of black senior managers in order to represent better the population of the area.

Trough this initiative, several programs are implemented:

- *The secondment programme* places applicants “in one-term to one-year secondments into middle or senior management posts (depending on their current level of responsibility/seniority) at a college, sector agency or related institution. This programme strengthens the professional portfolios of secondees and significantly increases opportunities for career progression.”
- *The work shadowing programme* gives the opportunity to undertake a placement at a college, up to 5 days. Shadows have the opportunity to be matched with a mentor after they have completed their placement, to receive one-to-one guidance and coaching support.
- Career development programme: they are workshops organised in addition to the secondment program and the shadowing to develop the skills and confidence of participants to achieve progression in their career. It includes including CV writing, interview, performing in assessment centres.
- *The mentoring program* matches participants with experienced senior managers and leaders from other institutions, who act as their mentor. Mentees receive one-to-one support over 12 months, which include face-to-face sessions with email and telephone access in between (up to 15 hours of support).
- *Managing now leading tomorrow* is a training program for junior manager that leads to the Level 3 Certificate (62 hours) in Leadership & Management with the opportunity to progress to the Diploma at Level 3 (150 hours). A lighter course (30 hours) leads to an Award. It gives “practising or aspiring middle managers the foundation for formal development in their role as Leaders of Tomorrow by developing basic leadership and management skills.”
- *Leaders of tomorrow* is a longer formal training program for practising or aspiring middle managers to develop basic leadership and management skills. It leads to a Level 5 Certificate in Leadership and Management Skills (90 guided learning hours) with the opportunity to progress to the Level 5 Diploma (177 hours).

The network is supporting and publishing several reports and guides to promote equality in further education institutions (<http://www.nbm.org.uk/publications/>). Among them we can mention: “Attracting people who want to get in”, a good practice guide for recruitment and selection. Even though it is very much inserted in the UK context, many of the recommendations can be transferred to other European countries. The transfer of the concept of the network in itself would also be useful for action in France in addition to delivering information regarding non-discriminating legislation

To know more: <http://www.nbm.org.uk>