



Short Guide to Understanding Race and Ethnicity Language and Terminology

**Race Equality Action Group –
Queen Mary University of London**

Introduction

The Strategy 2030 sets our vision to ‘open the doors of opportunity’; we seek to realise our mission and become the most inclusive university of our kind, anywhere. Our People, Culture & Inclusion Enabling Plan (PCIEP) identifies Race Equality as a key priority for this journey.

This guide was created by colleagues in the Understanding and Celebrating Race and Ethnicity working group, a sub-committee within our Race Equality Action Group.

At QMUL, The Race Equality Action Group (REAG) brings together colleagues and students from across the institution to reinforce and recognise the University’s on-going commitment to address race equality issues. REAG acts as an advisory, implementation and consultative forum in relation to all aspects of race equality at Queen Mary and identifies activities to progress the agenda around race equality issues.

This document aims to provide some context and information around different terminology and language relating to race and ethnicity. We know that the wide range of different terms can be confusing or overwhelming. A fear of saying the wrong thing can get in the way of having thoughtful, productive and honest conversations about race and race equality at Queen Mary.

Language and terminology relating to race and identity is personal and always evolving, there are no universal terms that everyone agrees upon. Our guide aims to provide staff with an understanding of the context and meaning of some commonly used terms, including why some people/groups use them, while others may find them limiting or problematic. The key thing to note is that there is no one term, which is agreed upon by everyone involved, but this document will enable you to keep updated about terms currently in use.

It’s also imperative to remember that individuals will have their own preferences as to how they describe themselves, and how they wish to be described. Identity is extremely personal and important, so one of the best ways to develop your understanding is to listen, educate yourself, learn, and politely ask about preferences, if in doubt.

Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) or Black and Minority Ethnic (BME)

These terms are very commonly used across the UK, by the media, businesses and organisations, including within higher education. However, they have been criticised as acronyms that inappropriately homogenise diverse identities and backgrounds. Many people feel that reducing large and complex groups to an acronym can be dehumanising or just unhelpful. They also note that these terms involve a confusing combination of race, ethnicity and nationality whilst ignoring individual identity and experiences. They also make 'White' the standard and class everyone else as 'other'.

Some people feel that using the 'long' form of the term: 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' can be useful at times, especially as it does draw out some specific identities (unlike 'people of colour'), but that it is more problematic and reductive when used/said as the catch all acronym 'BAME', without giving thought to which groups you are referring.

Please note that at Queen Mary we currently use the term 'BAME', as this reflects the way we collect and store staff and student data and it aligns with our reporting obligations and usage within the majority of other Higher Education institutions. However, as we are aware that this term is considered by some to be problematic, we will continue to review our use of language around race and ethnicity, through our [Race Equality Action Group](#).

Ethnic Minority Groups

In the UK, a term used to refer to all ethnic groups except the White British group. This includes White minorities, such as Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller groups. Some organisations (like [AdvanceHE](#)) avoid this term, as they feel that 'ethnic minority' places the emphasis on ethnicity as the main issue, especially as the term 'ethnic' is often incorrectly seen as synonymous with non-white in the UK. However, the UK Government has recently moved from using BAME to people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Minority Ethnic Groups

This term is used by some people to place the emphasis on the minority (or minoritised) status as opposed to the ethnicity. It also arguably makes it clearer that everyone has an ethnicity (including White British people), not just those who are minoritised.

These terms are felt by some to have negative connotations relating to being marginal, or less important. Some people prefer to use the verb 'minoritised' to reflect that people are minoritised against their will: that this is a process involving power and domination (see 'racially minoritised groups/communities' below).

Global Majority (or ‘People of the Global Majority’)

This is a collective term that encourages those of African, Asian, Latin American, and Arab descent to recognise that although ‘people of colour’ are often referred to as ethnic minorities, on a global scale they represent around 80% of the world’s population. However, it is not always as useful in the UK context where the use of the term majority could lead to confusion and lack of understanding.

People/ Communities of Colour

This is a term that is mostly used in a US context but is becoming a more common term among some groups in the UK, to refer to groups of people who are not White or of European heritage.

However, this term is felt by some to inaccurately suggest that skin colour is the only issue or common factor between people who experience racism. Like other terms listed here, it also homogenises all people who are not White, and arguably centres whiteness as the default norm, with all others ‘of colour’. This term also excludes some groups who may be (or be perceived to be) White, such as Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller groups, and those of Eastern European or Jewish descent. It is also sometimes confused with ‘coloured’, an offensive and outdated term in the UK.

Racially minoritized groups/communities

This is a term that aims to recognise that individuals have been actively minoritised through social processes of power and domination, rather than just existing in distinct statistical minorities. This term speaks to an understanding that some groups have been treated differently and subjugated (minoritised) because of their racial identities, within a context of a racial hierarchy. This term is less well used in the mainstream but is increasingly preferred by some who wish to capture the importance of power when talking about race.

We hope this summary will help you to feel more informed, and confident in engaging in open, reflective conversations, when using different terminology to talk about race at Queen Mary. We would welcome any feedback about the guide via email to the EDI team (hr-equality@qmul.ac.uk).