



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Scottish BAME Writers Network and [EDI Scotland](#) publish landmark survey results on the perceptions and experiences of BAME* writers in and from Scotland.

“Actionable change is needed to address systemic barriers for BAME writers in Scotland.”

[Click here for the survey results \(PDF\).](#)

In spring 2020, Scottish BAME Writers Network (SBWN) partnered with EDI Scotland to gather the perceptions and experiences of BAME writers in and from Scotland. This survey aimed to assess gaps, absences, and barriers to participation in Scotland’s literary sector, and to help SBWN plan inclusive programming during their pilot programme and beyond. Following SBWN’s [Call to Action](#) to the literary sector in June, the SBWN survey results further highlight the need for lasting change

When we (Scottish BAME Writers Network) set out to conduct this survey report, neither EDI Scotland nor the Network was aware of any data currently available that spoke to BAME persons’ experiences of Scotland’s literary sector. We also wanted to ask: What are we, as a sector, doing to support and inspire current and future generations of Scottish and Scotland-based BAME writers?

Neither the network, nor this survey, claim to speak on behalf of the entire BAME writing sector in Scotland. As we are a new organisation, we ask readers to keep in mind that the dataset is small. We are a network of uniquely diverse and individual writers, performers, editors, readers, publishers, and book lovers. What we do share, and what this survey hopes to capture, is the experience of having our identities (including our bodies, histories, and narratives) racialised within the particular environment of the literary sector.

While being a member of the network – member here being a loose term, meaning people who access our Facebook group and programming activities – has: encouraged the production of new work, increased the visibility of BAME writers in Scotland, and provided both an online community and opportunities to share work, this survey highlights areas for improvement. Recommendations to the Network include hosting events outside of Edinburgh, reaching more people outside of academic contexts, collaborating with more longstanding BAME writing and arts organisations, and developing explicit mentorship opportunities.

This last point on mentorship was emphasised frequently in the data: **82.1% of respondents did not have a BAME mentor to support their work or practice.** Among those who had a

mentor, one respondent noted how “when you meet people who like your work or want to mentor you, you gain much more access into the literary sector.”

The report reveals numerous facets that make Scotland's literary sector vital and meaningful for underrepresented communities. However, the research also exposes challenges around event and programming access, career development, and publishing. These results challenge both our network and the wider sector to consider who we are and are not reaching and to make meaningful and lasting changes.

Key findings from respondents include:

- 62.5% felt that their ethnic identity or race had been a barrier to success in Scotland's literary sector (within the past 12 months).
- 26.7% had experienced a racist incident at a literary event or activity in the past 12 months.
- 68.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed that Scottish books, journals, and literary publications reflect the diversity of Scotland.
- 71.9% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, ‘I am aware of the diversity of BAME writers that exist in Scotland’.
- **84.8% overwhelmingly disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, ‘White Scottish audiences are aware of the diversity of BAME writers that exist in Scotland’.**
- 78.2% disagreed or strongly disagreed that BAME and white Scottish people have equal opportunities to succeed in Scotland's literary sector.

Several respondents commented on the issues of organisations excluding local BAME artists, saying it risked a “systemic erasure of this history in Scotland” and “institutions and festivals do not pay enough attention to BAME artists from working class communities in Scotland.”

For those who had experienced racist incidents and microaggressions at literary events, several respondents noted the failure of event chairs or facilitators to adequately address the situation when it occurred. Further comments highlighted the additional emotional labour often involved when performing or talking about their work.

Three respondents mentioned that literary opportunities were improving for BAME people. However, the results highlight there are still significant and systematic barriers in place.

The full survey report includes recommendations to the sector. [Click here to read it.](#) A few select responses are shown below.

- Provide more developmental support to emerging BAME writers.
- “Ensure a diversity of BAME writers, including local and working-class BAME writers, are represented through events and activities” and avoid recreating the “same cliques or gated spaces that BAME writers might experience in the wider literary sector”.
- “Challenge views that suggest diversity and quality are incompatible.”

- “Upskill literary event chairs and facilitators to challenge microaggressions, inappropriate questions and abuse directed at panellist and performers.”
- “For white senior figures in Scotland’s literary sector, take responsibility to address inequalities in the literary sector and do not place this onus on BAME people.”

The survey results may be read in tandem with the recent [Rethinking Diversity in Publishing](#) report (The Bookseller, Goldsmiths, University of London, Spread the Word), also published this month.

These results are meant to be a guide; they are only the beginning of a very important conversation. It is our hope that this survey, and our future survey work, will promote real, actionable change that addresses systemic barriers for writers within our network.

[Click here for the survey results \(PDF\).](#)

Learn More About SBWN

Website: <http://scottishbamewritersnetwork.org/>

Call to Action: <https://scottishbamewritersnetwork.org/call-to-action/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ScotBAMEwriters>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pg/ScotBAMEWriters/>

* BAME stands for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic. **Survey respondents who identified as white were filtered out of these results.** Our aim was to gather responses from people within the Scottish literary sector who are racialised and who identify as a Black person or a person of colour. As an organisation, while we use the term BAME, we acknowledge the limitations of this terminology. At the core of our network, we address and overcome systemic barriers that our members face directly or indirectly based on their ethnic or national identities, race or perceived racial identities, or the colour of their skin as per the Equality Act of 2010.

NOTES

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About EDI Scotland

EDI Scotland provides research and data consultancy on issues related to equality, diversity and inclusion in Scotland. Data, research and evidence-based solutions are powerful tools in the fight against injustice and inequality. EDI Scotland promotes robust research with a radical edge and works with organisations (big and small) to make Scotland a fairer place for everyone. EDI Scotland is directed by Dr Kevin Guyan, a mixed methods researcher based in Edinburgh with over a decade of research experience across academia, higher education and the voluntary sector. Find out more: [@EDIScotland](#); <https://kevinguyan.com/EDIScotland/>

About Scottish BAME Writers Network (SBWN)

Scottish BAME Writers Network provides advocacy, literary events and development opportunities for BAME writers based in or from Scotland. Run part-time by writers of colour, SBWN was co-founded by Alycia Pirmohamed and Jay G Ying in 2018, who were joined in 2019 by Andrés Nicolás Ordorica and Jeda Pearl Lewis. Read more about the team.

In June 2020, SBWN published a [Call to Action](#) to the literary sector in Scotland.

For more information, refer to the SBWN website, where you can read their Mission Statement and Values, articles on their blog, and find out about upcoming events: <https://scottishbamewritersnetwork.org/> Find them on Facebook and Twitter [@ScotBAMEwriters](#).

SBWN Team bios

Director: Alycia Pirmohamed is a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh, where she is studying poetry written by second-generation immigrants. She is the author of two pamphlets: *Faces that Fled the Wind* (BOAAT Press) and *Hinge* (ignitionpress). Her poetry has been published widely and won several awards. In 2019, Alycia curated and edited [Ceremony](#), an anthology of Scottish BAME Writing (Tapsalteerie). [@a_pirmohamed](#); alycia-pirmohamed.com

Programme Manager (Festivals & Partnerships): Jay G Ying is a Chinese-Scottish poet, fiction writer, critic and translator based in Edinburgh. He is a Contributing Editor for The White Review and Assistant Poetry Editor at Asymptote. Recently he was selected by Mary Jean Chan as a winner of the 2019 New Poets Prize. He is the author of *Wedding Beasts* (Bitter Melon 苦瓜, 2019) and *Katabasis* (2020). He is a winner of the Poetry Book Society Student Poetry Prize (2017), shortlisted for The White Review Poet's Prize (2018) and the Desperate Literature Short Fiction Prize (2018, 2019). [@jaygying](#); jaygying.com

Programme Manager (Writer Development & Communications): Jeda Pearl Lewis is a Scottish-Jamaican writer & poet. In 2019, she was awarded Cove Park's Scottish Emerging Writer Residency and shortlisted for the Moniak Mohr Bridge Awards. She is a contributing editor for The Selkie, and a Cambridge Short Story, Momaya Press, Yellow Room, and Words with Jam short story finalist. Jeda's poems and short stories appear or are upcoming in anthologies published by New Writing Scotland, TSS Publishing, Tapsalteerie and Shoreline of Infinity. [@jedapearl](#); jedapearl.com

Programme Manager (Community Development & Events): Andrés N. Ordorica is a Queer Latinx writer and educator based in Edinburgh, Scotland. He creates worlds filled with characters who are from neither here nor there (ni de aquí, ni de allá). His fiction has been featured in Confluence Medway, The Acentos Review, 404 ink Magazine. His work has been anthologised in *Ceremony* published by Tapsalteerie Press, *We Were Always Here* published by 404 ink, and *The Colour of Madness* published by Stirling Publishing. His non-fiction has been published by The Skinny, Bella Caledonia, Medium and The Irish Independent. [@AndresNOrdorica](#); andresordorica.com.