

The Story of BALI

Three people designed the Black and Asian Leadership Initiative (BALI): Patrick Scott, from the predecessor organisation of The Staff College, he sadly passed away in 2021. Rosemary Campbell-Stephens MBE who is now a freelance international consultant and coach on leadership, following her role as Principal for the National College for Educational Leadership in the Ministry of Education, Jamaica and me (Meera). Without Patrick's support there may not have been a BALI, 'Leading in Colour: The Fierce Urgency of NOW' our publication was dedicated to Patrick, a white man, who helped everyone lead in colour' (1949 – 2021).

Rosemary was a former Headteacher, Ofsted Inspector and an associate with the National College for School Leadership in the UK. She had developed a leadership programme for University College London to get more Black and Asian leaders leading London schools as part of the London Challenge Initiative (2003-2011). I had, due to long term health issues, retired from my role as Director of Children's Services. I have over 35 years experience in local government and was an HMI in the London region.

We came together in 2012 as we recognised there were many barriers and obstacles facing aspiring Black and Asian leaders. We recognised there was a lack of training, development and learning spaces that were available for Black¹ groups only. We also realised that a narrow focus on diversifying leadership through simply increasing the numbers of Black leaders in systemically inequitable and racist spaces, would not prevent the attrition rate of Black professionals like us from the system. The nature of racism is such that at times, it is essential that Black staff have a safe space to discuss how racism affects their lives and careers. We also wanted to ensure that BALI came from a Black perspective which acknowledges the roots of some of the founding theories that still inform areas of policy, practice and recruitment. Combining value based and system-based leadership with practical real-world exercises to help individuals consider whether they were a Black Leader or a Leader who happened to be Black and importantly to empower them to use their collective agency as leaders.

We wanted to grow the confidence of aspiring leaders, enable them to see that they have additional skills that they can bring to organisations, supporting them to understand their values as a leader and using their authenticity to lead with self-assurance. We made an interesting ethnic combo, Patrick, white, Rosemary Jamaican, and me, Indian. Our first BALI, Cohort 1 was in 2012 and for Cohorts 1-4 this was the team who facilitated. Sadly, the funding that had been in place for the programme from the DfE ended (give the year if you can) and for a few years BALI was suspended.

After demand for the programme grew from Local Authorities, The Staff College were able to offer BALI again and myself and Roger Bushell from the College led BALI Cohort 5. Saj

¹ Black – political and inclusive definition adopted by BALI programme

Zafar, Director of the Institute for Change was in the audience, as by now Rosemary had built her dream house in Jamaica and we were looking for another Black facilitator. We have also continued to add other amazing Black leaders and coaches: Palvinder Kudhail, Gani Martins, Jennifer Williams, Nadine Boyne and Jeffrey Wotherspoon. With the wonders of technology Rosemary has been back in the fold virtually since 2017. The cadre of BALI facilitators is talented and strong.

I have had the true privilege of working with every single BALI cohort, it has been an honour to be with so many BALI participants on their journeys. I remember when Cohort 1 came into the room and were unused to being in an all-Black environment. They questioned us about it and of course it felt strange to them. But by lunch time they all got it. Many BALI participants find the days transformational, albeit at times, an emotional experience. We have laughed, we've cried, we've got angry as we move through difficult territory, we've been standing in the car park during fire alarms, I was stuck in a lift, we've been stared at as we arrive en-masse in dining rooms! Each time I read the evaluations it is always a humbling experience.

The events surrounding the murder of George Floyd galvanised many to re-look at their own values and question how they could become more anti-racist and inclusive. All BALI participants will know that I have repeatedly wanted two things, first to have the dialogue with those who are responsible for recruiting: Black leaders, Chief Executives, Directors and Politicians. Without it, organisations will not change or sustain change that allows for Black leaders to thrive and survive in senior leadership positions. [Leading in Colour: The Fierce Urgency of NOW](#) is aimed precisely at this group and across the public sector as a whole. Secondly, I have wanted to see a BALI network so that the power of those who have done BALI can be used to support, motivate and innovate. In the space of reflection, I am pleased to say some new connections are being made with those who are responsible for recruiting and many organisations are considering how Cultural Competence could be used to strengthen their inclusivity for the benefit of staff and their communities. The inequalities shown through COVID-19 are multi-dimensional and I hope to continue the conversations with them to seek to address those issues in partnership with others. To date we have completed 16 BALI programmes (national and bespoke) and have 351 Alumni.

Rosemary Campbell-Stephens MBE and I have during uncertain times, delivered BALI on-line, we are delighted with the response although we do want to be back in a room together as soon as we are able to. We are also looking at how we can bring our BALI Alumni together in person in 2022.

Rosemary also has been working on her book which is out now 'Educational Leadership and the Global Majority: Decolonising Narratives', published by Palgrave Macmillan, and on reminding the world of her definition coined 10 years ago of the [Global Majority](#).

We continue to hope we have prepared BALI participants for the challenges that will face them as they rightly use their talent to move into the most senior roles and add value to

them. I also hope through our continued work at the Staff College those white senior leaders, politicians, those with governance responsibilities will step up and play their part in tackling the racism that persistently stops our talented Black leaders from reaching up into the 'white peaks' in organisations. I hope it has given people the tools and skills to protect themselves along the way and to lead with authenticity when they get there. We will remain relentless in exposing the foundations that those 'white peaked organisations' are built on and work with the willing to irretrievably change those spaces, in the words of Professor George Dei, 'to create better spaces for everyone.' Our BALI network has gone from strength to strength we encourage white allies to join us and this year we hope they will be doing more with their knowledge boosted through the BALI network. We have worked with London as a region to support the action Directors of Children's Services want to achieve and supported their pan London Leadership in Colour Conference in December 2021.

I am still keen to write 'The Chronicles of BALI' capturing your individual journeys so that we can keep challenging, inspiring and motivating all to change. BALI participants deserve to be captured as part of the history of our collective fight for racial equality and equity.

In 2022 BALI Alumni will continue to 'Step into our Power' acknowledging that who we are, intellectually, culturally, spiritually and ancestrally is a legitimate part of our professional identity and the difference that we make.

Meera Spillett
Rosemary Campbell-Stephens MBE

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