

Setting the standard

BECTU, in collaboration with Equity, has produced a practical solution to address a longstanding issue faced by BAME actors reports Editor and BECTU diversity officer **Janice Turner**

A groundbreaking initiative for hair and makeup artists and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) actors, organised by BECTU in collaboration with Equity, has been widely praised.

The initiative, a series of training courses on BAME hair and makeup for professional artists, was organised following a discussion held a year ago between BECTU's media hair and makeup branch and BAME members of Equity, along with BECTU diversity officer Janice Turner, BECTU learning organiser Lezli Everitt, and reps from BECTU's black members' committee.

The aim was to work out why so many BAME actors have problems getting their hair and makeup done to a high professional standard.

Hair and makeup is crucial to the look of a production, whether film, television or stage, and for the actor. But too often BAME actors have found there were no appropriate makeup products or there was no-one with the skills to style their hair.

The discussion revealed a key factor behind this: that it is often missing from the core curriculum of professional makeup and hair courses. Consequently many newly qualified professionals have begun their careers without the skills appropriate for BAME actors.

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We're supporting the narrative through the actor's character and through their creativity. It's not just a salon

The meeting resolved that BECTU, via its training department, would lobby to revise the national curriculum on hair and makeup to ensure that in future all trainees would learn these skills. But in the meantime makeup and hair professionals should be assisted to gain these skills or brush up on them.

The course was part of the BECTU Union Learning Fund project *Progress for Success* and so it was partly funded by ULF, but the entertainment unions underwrote the rest as they were determined to address this issue. BECTU and Equity, whose members were directly involved, contributed 25% each and the Federation of Entertainment Unions 50%.



Lezli Everitt devised the course liaising with the media hair and makeup branch. Everitt thought of every detail: it was split into three separate two-day courses to enable freelancers to find the time to attend. There was hairdressing (women), barbering (men) and makeup. She selected models found via Equity to ensure the widest range of hair types and complexions for the courses.

AMAZING

Joy Djadi, the trainer for the hair courses, commented: "It's amazing. I'm so excited to get this off the ground. It's nice that something is now being done to meet the needs of the industry. The delegates need to have this experience behind them, to give them the confidence to work with the actors and models. They need to learn about the techniques and the products. It's good to learn the different styling techniques."

When Djadi had attempted to address the core curriculum issue she would be countered with: 'When are we going to need it?' "100% there's a need for it", she says.

Everitt commented: "Everyone was very excited, talking about their experiences, passing on advice - it is very give and take, in a very lighthearted, non-pressurised environment."

During last year's discussion the



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welcoming environment. It was all about learning – a desire to learn from engaging in dialogue, each side giving each other permission to ask all the questions they want.

“I’ve learned techniques which I now feel more confident to try at home by myself in preparation for a casting, I’ve increased my technical vocabulary so I can communicate better with the artist how my hair can be handled. I’ve also learned about current products.

“Plus it’s finding out about the attitude in the industry and the UK creative houses and that they were instigating change from the inside.”

Another actor added that the artist should “let me know you’ve done ethnic – it automatically gives me confidence to believe in your talent and professionalism. It’s about trying to build a relationship of trust. I don’t know what I’m going to look like on stage and I need the confidence to know it’ll be OK.”

INSPIRED

BECTU, and the actors, congratulated the Royal National Theatre for taking advantage of the initiative to send five members of their hair and makeup department to learn or brush up on skills. Helen Casey, deputy head of wigs, hair and makeup at the RNT, said: “We were inspired when we came to the hair and makeup branch AGM and heard about this course.

“After the branch meeting I came back and spoke to my head of dept. It had come at a great time when there is a push for diversity in the theatre.” They had held an open forum for performers and hair and makeup people to discuss Afro hair and makeup. “They all discussed their good and bad experiences and how we could address it from our point of view. We found that people didn’t want to have the discussion. People were scared. They didn’t want to offend people. We’ve been working on finding



opportunities to upskill our team, so we took advantage of the course.”

She added: “My boss and I feel that we’re in a very lucky position in that we have a permanent job and we have to set an example.”

Serena Grace, a freelance hair and makeup artist working in film and television, said she found the course intuitive and constructive, helping her to become more confident.

Another artist added: “I thought the training was brilliant. It was really well structured.” She valued the technical side, but she too added: “To talk to people and that they feel listened to, it’s a great start and a great way to start to change attitudes.

“In an on-set environment you are always under such time pressure you can’t have those conversations with people. Stuff like this is great. Being able to have these conversations. We were talking about people feeling comfortable describing their hair type – for example “Asian” – what does Asian mean? It was shocking for us to hear what other people have said to them.

“We’re supporting the narrative through the actor’s character and through their creativity. It’s not just a salon, it’s so much more important.”

BECTU training officer Kate Elliott sums up: “For BECTU this is more than a training course, this is about demonstrating that unions are at the forefront of developing meaningful relationships and bringing together key stakeholders to provide bespoke, cutting edge solutions to challenging issues and providing ground-breaking opportunities for our members. We want this training to have a real impact and to be a game changer for the way the industry delivers hair and make-up solutions for BAME performers.” ●



Support from Equity members: trainer Joy Djadi (above) discusses the finer points of barbering with Jacqueline Rathore for Kace Monney; trainer Kamanza Amihyia (far left) talks through colour palettes for Rachel Addo; actor Irene Ng (facing page), Nana St Bartholemew Brown (top right), Peggy-Ann Fraser (below)

BAME actors proposed that Equity would find actors to be models for the course. This turned out to be a masterstroke from which everyone benefitted. Artists had the time and space to ask the questions they would never have been able to ask in the middle of a busy department, and might have been shy of asking. The actors were able to highlight some of their previous experiences. It was far more than a training course.

Equity member Irene Ng, who had participated in the original discussion and offered to be one of the models, said: “I was very encouraged to have met with fellow practitioners, those working in the hair and makeup dept. They get a raw deal from further up the foodchain. It was a very open and

