2011

“What we have to do... is to find a way to celebrate our diversity and debate our differences without fracturing our communities.”

Hillary Clinton

Post World War II, Commonwealth citizens were encouraged to come to Britain to help rebuild the British economy, often taking up low paid, low skilled jobs. In 1948, Ss Empire Windrush arrived, bringing the first wave of West Indians to Britain to start a new life. The majority were ex-service men who had served with the allied forces during the war. Windrush came to symbolise the start of modern multicultural relations.

A wave of Chinese immigrants, mainly male agricultural workers, arrived from Hong Kong during the 1950s and continued until the 1970s. Cypriots also came to the UK as a result of the 1974 invasion of Cyprus by Turkey. As a result Greek residents were expelled and over 20,000 Greek Cypriots fled to London to avoid Turkish rule.

After the end of the British Raj and partition of India, many immigrants arrived from India and Pakistan throughout the 1950s and 1960s. European immigration was encouraged bringing Poles, Hungarians, Irish and Italians. Immigrants were valued for their hard work; but different cultures also brought social problems, with pressures placed on public health, housing and schools.

With the formation of Bangladesh in 1971, a number of economic migrants arrived and the numbers steadily increased during the 1980s. In May 2004, eight new countries known as the ‘Accession Eight’ were admitted to the European Union. Membership of the EU gave these nationals the right to live and work freely in the newly enlarged EU. This prompted a large number of economic migrants subscribing to the UK Workers Registration scheme to fill the gap in the labour market; particularly in agriculture, hospitality, catering and food processing industries.

London has evolved as a city based on ‘centuries of development dating back to the sixteenth century, when the city was barely larger than it had been in the Roman times’. The city has always attracted immigrants who come to find work and decide to settle here. The result is a city with a highly diverse range of people, cultures and religions. London is one of the most visited cities in the world today. It has a population of over 7 million people who speak more than 300 different languages, one in three Londoners belongs to an ethnic group. The rich diversity of skills and cultures has made an enormous economic contribution to London and enriched its cultural, social and community life.

We need look no further than the quintessential icon of British food; fish and chips. Fried fish was brought over from Eastern Europe by the Jews and chips by the Huguenots from France; the British put them together as an innovation; fish n’ chips. Ketchup comes via the Cantonese as Kher-Chap, while chutney feels British but is Indian in origin, as are important ingredients in Worcestershire sauce or Branston pickle.”

Sir Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Diversity

This can be described as variety, multiplicity, assortment or quite simply difference within difference. Diversity brings with it different faiths, languages, ways of life, and a range of thoughts, beliefs and cultures.

Culture

This can be described as the collective behaviour of a group of people or, ‘the whole range of human activities which are learned and not instinctive and which are transmitted from generation to generation through various learning processes’.

London City
Birkbeck embraces the diversity of all its students, staff and visitors. This is in line with the College’s founding beliefs and ethos of equity and access for all. Over the years it has successfully reflected the rich diversity of London within its community. Birkbeck Bloomsbury is located in Camden, a diverse borough with over 47% residents from minority ethnic backgrounds. Birkbeck Stratford, situated in the Borough of Newham, has been described as ‘a huge strength, bringing vibrancy and excitement to the borough’. The rich diversity of the campuses is reflected in the student body. Birkbeck is committed to raising awareness; fostering inter-cultural understanding through a range of events and activities that take place throughout the academic year. These events engage with the College community in order to promote and celebrate diversity.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Nelson Mandela

Faith and Belief

The influx of these diverse groups has brought a vibrant mix of different cultures and faiths to Britain and enriched its cultural life. The rich faith diversity of these communities has seen different observances ranging from performing acts of worship, prayer or celebration to the wearing of religious symbols or dress. The Greater London Assembly (GLA) states that over three quarters of all Londoners consider themselves to have a religious belief or faith, and perform an act of worship or visit a religious building at least once a week. Five out of the six world faiths, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Judaism and Buddhism have over 3.4 million followers in London. The largest religious community however is Christian with over 4.4 million followers in London. The GLA also notes that there are significant numbers of Bahai, Jain and Zoroastrian communities and a range of faith festivals are celebrated each year including Christmas, Diwali, Eid, Vaisakhi and Chanukah.

We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color.

Maya Angelou

Birkbeck Community

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At Birkbeck we believe diversity is about valuing the differences between people, recognising the strengths and benefits of a diverse, inclusive society, workforce and student body. On its own, diversity does not ensure equal opportunity but valuing diversity, promoting inclusiveness and tolerance of difference will help us to achieve this. Birkbeck is committed to promoting diversity through the development of fair and equitable policies, sensible provision and working practices. We encourage and promote an inclusive approach that treats colleagues, students and other service users with respect.

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