



Celebrating International Women's Day 2012

**A toolkit for Black women
to win equality and fight
cuts in education**

By **Samaira Anjum**
NUS Black Students' Committee
Vice President,
Manchester Met Uni Students' Union

Contents

- 1 Foreword
- 2 International Women's Day
- 3 How Cuts Affect Black women
- 4 How you can get involved
- 5 Useful websites and resources

Foreword

Women make up more than 50 per cent of humanity but our influence does not reflect this collective size and strength in numbers across a range of indicators that include: cultural, economic, health, social and political factors. This under-representation and inequality is heightened when the lives and experiences of Black, disabled, lesbian or bisexual women or those with caring responsibilities is factored in.



International Women's Day (IWD) began in 1911 and is celebrated annually on 8 March across the world to promote the importance of gender equality and the empowerment of all women. The theme for 2012 is: *Connecting Girls, Inspiring Futures*.

The need for positive initiatives to pursue the aims of equality, inspiration and empowerment have never been more important for women in Britain than today, when the government's austerity measures have led to unemployment reaching a 23-year high and record number of jobs being cut in the public sector. The significance of this is that women make up 65 per cent of the public sector workforce and the evidence strongly points to the fact that it is Black women who are hardest hit with a double-negative impact of racism and sexism.

At this time, Black women are being forced to give up work as cuts to childcare benefits, tax credits, and other support means their wages no longer cover nursery care costs, while health inequalities are growing as medical services are privatised, while access to justice is hindered by cuts to legal aid budgets. To change these statistics, all women and girls must come together to build unity, and extend our agenda to create a powerful alliance with the support of women and men in our student communities and wider society.

The challenges facing Black women are made harder to address when we continue to be under-represented in leadership roles within society. Nationally, Black women represent just

1.2 per cent out of 650 MPs, and the same low representation is recorded in the police, judiciary, business, education leadership and many other areas.

The NUS Black Students' and the NUS Women's Campaigns must provide opportunities for students to understand these issues and support them to make real changes in their college and university students' unions and communities. They have the opportunity to challenge the attitudes and systems which perpetuate gender inequality across the world. As a Black woman who has come through the student movement into a leadership position, I firmly believe that raising awareness of the issues facing women across the world among students is a first step towards achieving gender equality.

During the month of March, I am calling on all students' unions in colleges and universities to talk to other students about the issue of gender inequality locally and globally, as well as undertaking some of the activities in this toolkit within your college or university students' union or in your community. Through connecting girls and women we can inspire the future.

I encourage you to support this International Women's Day 2012 by holding a fundraising or information event to support Black women who might not have access to the resources and support. Do your bit to ensure the future for women and girls is safe, rewarding and equal. If you have any questions about this toolkit, how to use it, or would like more information and support, please contact me by emailing: samaira.anjum@nusbsc.org.uk

In unity and solidarity,

Samaira Anjum

Women's Rep, NUS Black Students' Committee
Vice President, Manchester Met University
Students' Union

International Women's Day

International Women's Day is a time to honour and celebrate the cultural, economic, social and political gains of women, while raising awareness about the unique obstacles we face around the world, as well as campaigning for further advancement and real equality.

On 8 March, thousands of events are held across the world to inspire women and celebrate achievements. A global web of rich and diverse local activity connects women through education events, political rallies, business conferences, government activities, networking opportunities, to local women's craft markets, performances, fashion parades and more.

With slowly increasing numbers of women in leadership roles at colleges and universities, and in boardroom; with greater equality in legislative rights, and helpful instances of women's visibility as impressive role models in all aspects of life, one could think that women have gained true equality. However, the fact is that women might out-perform male peers in education but remain more likely to be unemployed, paid less than male counterparts, and are still not present in equal numbers in business or politics. Globally women's health, education, and the violence against us is worse than that against men.

Clearly, women understand this inequality and we are determined to take action to redress it. The evidence of this determination is clear as women across the world are fighting against political and economic austerity with vigour and passion. From the Arab Spring to the mass protests in Greece, student protests against fees in Chile, and record breaking public sector strikes against pension cuts in Britain. As well as elsewhere around the world women have been active in challenging the system and using their voices against injustice.

This year, as a women's representative on the NUS Black Students' Campaign Committee, I have continued to push to integrate our International Women's Day work with the national campaign around education, access to services, and employability. The aim is to highlight and campaign against government austerity measures and the way these disproportionately impact on Black women, especially young Black women.

This briefing outlines some of the key issues and the impact cuts will have on women, especially Black women. It will be followed by a national conference on Black women to be held at the University of London Union on Sunday 4 March in London. For details of this event contact me. I encourage everyone – women and men – to challenge the orthodoxy of cuts that are increasing inequality and could take women's equality back generations.



So, whether you have three minutes or a few hours to give to this important annual event, your help will raise the volume of our collective voice is absolutely critical.

Get involved, make a stand, and demand full gender equality.

Together we can make this happen.

How cuts affect Black women

The NUS Black Students' Committee and the NUS Women's Committee both campaign for fair pay, equality and jobs. Achieving this would help to boost the economy and cut the deficit. Crucially, it would also stop the attack on Black women's equality that threatens to take back women's independence by several generations and force women out of education and employment, and back into the home.

This section contains information relating specifically to Black women in both further and higher institutions about education, access to services, jobs and pay.

Education

Higher tuition fees

There is a strong correlation between education and achieving success in life. This lesson has been understood by generations of Black people, specifically Black women, and explains the increase in Black students' participation in education. However, being a Black woman can expose us to greater inequality in education. Left unaddressed, these barriers will continue to escalate, especially with ideologically driven cuts that the coalition government is imposing on education budgets over the last year – the biggest in a generation.

The government's failure has forced a commercialisation of higher education, draconian cuts to educational budgets, the abolition of Education Maintenance Allowances (EMA) and massive hikes in course fees. These policies have a detrimental and disproportionate impact on access to opportunities for Black women, amongst others. This will only make it much harder for working class people, especially young Black women, to go to university and achieve a good quality education in the hope of improving their prospects of a decent life. Even when Black women do manage to get a college or university qualification, the dire employment situation means that many will be forced into temporary, low paid work and risk a life of insecurity and exploitation.

The recent budget announcements will have a greatly magnified and disproportionate impact on Black women in further and higher education. Women and Black learners are over-represented

in further education, which means we are disproportionately affected by the overall cut of 25 per cent in adult provision over the next four years. The requirement for many learners over the age of 24 to pay their own fees, and for ESOL learners to co-fund their learning, will affect lower-paid women while many women or those from disadvantaged backgrounds could be put off taking higher programmes because they simply can't afford the education costs.

Demonised by the government, Black women, among others, are priced out of education as education becomes only accessible if you are rich, while ending investment in jobs simply condemns whole sections of the population to hardship and marginalisation. This is no way to help. Moreover, Black graduates, like women, take longer to pay off their student debts. If cuts result in students contributing more, the toll is only bound to increase.

Now more than ever, it is time to make a stand and stop the systematic marginalisation of Black perspectives in education. We must close the barriers that restrict gifted Black students from fulfilling their potential.

The more research intensive universities, who have the ability to generate private income, will be less affected by cuts to HEFCE funding. However, these universities have the worst record when it comes to increasing participation from non traditional backgrounds. A university like London Metropolitan has more Black students than in the entire Russell Group put together, yet it is being hardest hit by cuts in education funding. To counter the effects of the lack of funding, HE institutions such as London Metropolitan and the University of East London will have option but to increase tuition fees or close down. Either of these two choices will have a profound impact on Black students who will be less likely to enter into higher education.

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)

Black people live in the poorest communities and receive the lowest incomes – twice as many black children live in poverty in comparison with their white counterparts. Receiving the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) has been a vital source of additional income. Research into the impact of EMA on participation, retention and attainment has consistently shown the strongest

effect is on Black learners, with Black females in particular more likely to stay in education post-16 with receipt of EMA and much more likely to achieve full Level 3 qualifications.

With Black students the most likely to take advantage of EMA, the cuts to it, and the tripling of tuition fees has meant that Black students cannot afford to gain and benefit from further education which in turn has a knock on impact on their future career prospects and their standard of living.

Courses

There are gender divisions, in terms of the types of courses women and men choose to take. For example, caring and education degrees are more likely to be taken by women, while STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) degrees are more likely to be taken by men. If you take into account the different types of courses that women are likely to take up, it would seem that the courses dominated by women are those that will suffer from the most cuts and see a decrease in the funding allocated. In contrast, STEM courses, which are dominated by men, have had their funding better protected and will therefore not suffer as badly.

A higher majority of part-time and mature student learners are also women. The issue with this is that closures of part-time courses and changes to the funding for adult learners (those over 25) could lead to those women who are trying to access education to further their skills and open up better job opportunities after an education or career break may find harder. Women are more likely to take these breaks due to caring responsibilities and often being the primary carer of a family at home.

Careers advice

Enormous cuts to funding for further and higher education will almost certainly impact on student services, including areas vital to Black students such as careers advice.

Black students are well represented in higher education with approximately 20 per cent taking a first degree, compared to being 9 per cent of the working population.

Unemployment amongst Black graduates is uniformly higher than their white counterparts, so good careers advice is essential if they are to have the same opportunities.

Employability

Our communities already suffer the highest rates of poverty and unemployment in the UK. However, racism in the labour market has resulted in a large majority of Black people and Black women in particular, working in the public or voluntary sectors because of the discrimination in the private sector meaning we don't even get a foot in the door. Both the public and voluntary sector provides key services to vulnerable members of our communities. A quarter of working women are employed in the public sector and women make up 65 per cent of public sector workers. Therefore, changes in pay policies inevitably impact more on Black and women than men.

One area that is hugely affected by cuts is the public sector. The government's Office for Budget Responsibility has predicted that 710,000 public sector jobs will be axed in the coming years. It is further estimated that twice as many women as men will lose their jobs in the public sector because of their over-representation in lower grades in many workplaces.

Figures from the Office of National Statistics also show that women make up 65 per cent of public sector workers and about 50 per cent of women in employment work for the state. This means that Black women, amongst others will be hardest hit by these cuts. This does not just reflect on Black women currently in employment, it also reflects on Black women graduates and Black women seeking employment, as it narrows their opportunities to find employment in a desirable job, if at all. We also need to consider that a high proportion of jobs that will be cut, both in the public sector and other sectors affected by the cuts, will be backroom and part-time roles, of which the majority are filled by women. As well as making many Black women unemployed and struggling to find work, this may result in further gender divisions, in terms of the roles women will have in the workplace. It may even see an increase in the gender pay gap.

It is the public sector where Black women are highly concentrated, that concentration is in the lowest grades with the lowest salaries because of the discrimination we face in appraisal, promotion and progression. It is these lower grade jobs that will bear the brunt of the cuts.

The cuts to the public sector have a knock on effect on the voluntary sector with cuts to funding

meaning that organisations providing specialised services that Black people rely on in their local communities will no longer be available.

Cuts to services

Under the government's austerity measures, many cuts will affect women's liberation in enormous ways. This ranges from cuts and reforms to benefits (single parents, mostly women, stand to lose the most – 18 per cent of their total income); to cuts in nursery and nursing home provision (the burden of this care will mostly fall on women); and the 100 per cent cuts to humanities teaching budget in higher education (these are subjects mostly taught by women).

Twice as many Black children live in poverty in comparison with their white counterparts; therefore, it is clear that cuts to social security benefits for children will have a disproportionate effect on Black people.

The benefits and services that Black women rely on most are being slashed by around £18 billion through tax and benefit changes that will come out of women's pockets.

Black women's support services to combat sexual and domestic violence are being attacked by government cuts. Meanwhile, with women still tending to do the bulk of unpaid caring for children and elderly family members, it is also they who are being expected to plug the gaps as services are rolled back. Cuts to student support and changes to the national Violence Against Women Strategy for Women and Girls will see even less service provision than there is already which means that even fewer women will be able to access help or support when they most need it.

The future for women's liberation looks very bleak; hundreds of women will now be subject to violence and not have anywhere to turn. DV service availability will drastically drop due to cuts, hoards of jobs will go in this area too, and the quality of the service will suffer.

Black people, women and disabled people stand to bear the brunt of the cuts whilst our employers and government are failing to pay due regard to race, gender and disability law when making decisions about cuts. We all need to act, with one voice, to resist against this attack.

Useful websites and resources

International Women's Day

On the official website for International Women's Day you can register events you might be holding and download the official logo and materials at: www.internationalwomensday.com

Black Activists Rising Against the Cuts (BARAC)

www.blackactivistsrisingagainstcuts.blogspot.com

Fawcett Society

The Fawcett Society has campaigned for equality between women and men since 1866. It is a fantastic source of useful statistics and facts are available at: www.fawcettsociety.org.uk

Feminista

A movement of ordinary women and men campaigning for gender equality.
<http://ukfeminista.org.uk/>

NUS Black Students Campaign

www.nus.org.uk/en/campaigns/blackstudents

NUS Black Students' Campaign Handbook

www.weebly.com/uploads/1/0/5/2/10526755/bsc_handbook_2010-11.pdf

NUS Disabled Students' Campaign

www.nus.org.uk/en/campaigns/disability

NUS Women's Campaign

www.nus.org.uk/en/campaigns/womens

PCS International Women's Day

Dedicated pages with lobby events, downloads, detailed briefings on campaigning issues, women workers' stories and much more can be found at: www.pcs.org.uk/iwd2012

Southall Black Sisters

www.southallblacksisters.org.uk

TUC

An invaluable, comprehensive and detailed toolkit from the TUC covering all aspects of the impact of cuts on women: www.tuc.org.uk/tucfiles/138/WOMENANDCUTSToolkit.pdf

UNISON Women's Campaign

www.unison.org.uk/women/campaigns.asp

UK Black Pride

For lesbian and bisexual women.
www.ukblackpride.org.uk

How you can get involved

How you can get involved and what you can do to make a difference.

Actions for the campaign: whether you have three minutes or a couple of hours to dedicate, there are many things you can do to support this international campaign.

Organise an event

Speak to your students' union entertainments or societies' officer and encourage them to set up a fundraising night at your college or university with all proceeds going to the Southall Black Sisters group and the Fawcett Society who are working on closing the inequality gap between women and men, visit: www.southallblacksisters.org.uk and www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=1263

Take action in the media

Do you have a student newspaper or website? If so, offer a ready-made article and image about the need for an IWD campaign and local women's issues to get students talking and thinking about how these issues also affect them. If you have a students' union radio station, why not encourage it to cover this issue?

If you're organising an event be sure to invite the media to preview, participate and review it.

Join or create a campaigning group

Get involved with the NUS Black Students' and NUS Women's Campaign to engage students on these issues. Take action to continue the fight to extend and maintain equal rights for women in education, employment and in wider society. From campaigning on equal pay, to challenging violence against women, to making sure that student parents have a voice and place in education, to women's representation in students' unions, get involved to ensure that the voice of women is heard loudly and clearly.

Contact your students' union, a local trade union council, or a women's advocacy group, to check if there are any active campaigning groups looking at women's equality. If there aren't any,

start one! Get some enthusiastic people to contact all potentially interested individuals and organisations. Once you've formed the group, work out your key priorities, agree a strategy, pool knowledge and resources and have regular campaign meetings to keep the momentum going throughout the year.

Mobilise students to act

The fight to stop the government selling off our education goes on. Join NUS' 'Come Clean week of action' and national walkout against changes in fees, education cuts and debt regime from 12–16 March. Involve students in your institution and local area to keep up the pressure against this Tory government's plans. Visit: <http://t.co/841fqrze>

Join the International Women's Day march against the cuts. Sunday 4 March, 1pm, All Saints Park, Oxford Rd, Manchester. Visit: www.facebook.com/events/240681882683954



black students' campaign