

Case Study

Private Screening of "Blacks Can't Swim REWIND" Documentary for the University of East London



**University of
East London**



Introduction

The screening of "Blacks Can't Swim: Rewind" at the University of East London (UEL) was initiated in response to the alarming statistics surrounding swimming participation among Black and Asian communities in the UK. This event is part of a broader conversation regarding the stigma faced by young Black individuals, contributing to the disproportionate number who feel that swimming is not for them. Ed Accura, the producer of the film and co-founder of the Black Swimming Association (BSA), has created a trilogy aimed at addressing these cultural barriers. UEL lecturer Mo Jafar featured in the "Blacks Can't Swim: Rewind" documentary, further underscoring the significance of this initiative. As a former head of physical education and a current lecturer in PE, sport, and development, Jafar's insights are pivotal in shaping conversations around inclusivity in swimming education.

Mo Jafar articulated the importance of acknowledging how race impacts participation in swimming, asserting, "Having an acute awareness of the impact race has on an activity like swimming could encourage PE subject leads to be creative and ensure swimming for Black pupils is a necessity and not a luxury." This perspective is crucial for bridging the existing gap in physical education, as Jafar expressed frustrations about the lack of support to implement necessary changes within the curriculum. He advocates for storytelling as a powerful tool in addressing these disparities, which aligns perfectly with the mission of the "Blacks Can't Swim" films.

The screening also served as a platform for the Making Waves Project, which involved young people from School 21 in Stratford. These students engaged with the film and used it as a springboard to research, produce, and showcase their own swimming stories and the narratives within their local communities. The initiative, alongside East London Sport and the applied sports and sciences department, aimed to raise awareness of swimming as a critical life skill while educating the community on essential aquatic safety skills. This collaborative effort reinforces UEL's commitment to social responsibility, youth engagement, and the promotion of healthier lifestyles through community-oriented initiatives. By shining a light on these important discussions, UEL not only facilitates dialogue but also actively contributes to a cultural shift that encourages greater engagement in aquatic activities among underrepresented groups.

The Shocking Facts (Current Key Statistics)

According to a survey conducted in 2024 by **Sport England**, **97% of Black adults and 82% of Black children in England do not swim. 96% of Asian adults and 79% of Asian children in England do not swim.** (Sports England Active Lives Survey 2024)

Black Children are seven times more likely to die from drowning than their White peers, prompting experts to encourage them to learn how to swim. Children from African and Caribbean backgrounds have been held back from learning the life skill because of fears about water, hair protection and financial means which has left them at a greater risk.

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that, on average, 236,000 people drown globally every year, with 90% of these deaths occurring in low- to middle-income countries. Africa has the highest drowning rate, while Asia experiences the highest number of drowning incidents.

The screening aimed to challenge these barriers, providing a platform for discussion around the cultural narratives that influence swimming participation. The event coincided with the arrival of a pop-up swimming pool at the Docklands campus, reinforcing UEL's commitment to promoting aquatic activities and health.

Benefits to the University and Sector

For a higher education establishment like UEL, hosting screenings such as this aligns closely with its social responsibility and educational mission. By addressing disparities in swimming participation and promoting water safety, UEL enhances its reputation as an inclusive institution committed to the welfare of its diverse student body. The event serves as a significant opportunity for community engagement, as it fosters dialogue around water safety and swimming, ultimately strengthening the university's relationships with prospective students, local community members and partners. This initiative encourages a shared commitment to health and safety, showcasing UEL's dedication to the community it serves.

In addition to community engagement, the screening provides enhanced educational opportunities by raising awareness of important social issues relevant to public health, cultural studies, and physical education. This educational platform supports curriculum development while promoting diversity and inclusion. By focusing on underrepresented communities, UEL demonstrates a proactive stance on these issues, making it a more attractive choice for students from varied backgrounds and further solidifying its commitment to inclusivity.

Additionally, this initiative perfectly aligns with UEL's social responsibility goals, showcasing the university's dedication to addressing societal challenges and fostering a culture of openness regarding crucial health and safety discussions. Increased awareness and participation in swimming activities can lead to a cultural shift where more students and community members, especially from underrepresented backgrounds, engage in aquatic activities. The screening was part of a broader initiative encouraging organisations to take responsibility for addressing swimming participation issues within their communities.

The discussions provoked by the screening highlighted the crucial nature of addressing fears and misconceptions about swimming and water safety, especially within communities where such views are prevalent. By facilitating conversations around personal and cultural histories related to swimming, organisations like UEL can play a pivotal role in changing the narrative and encouraging a new generation to embrace aquatic activities. This initiative not only serves the university's objectives but also contributes to a healthier, more inclusive society.

Audience Impact, Key Takeaways, and Personal Testimonial

The screening of "Blacks Can't Swim: Rewind" was followed by an interactive Q&A session led by Ed Accura, who candidly shared his own experiences and barriers to learning how to swim. He discussed a significant challenge he faced, which he recognised in his fifties: a fear factor that stemmed not from personal capabilities but from larger cultural barriers. This sentiment resonated deeply with the audience, particularly parents. Tyrone Cassius, chair of the NEEDSs group, articulated this connection, stating, "If we are uncomfortable around water, we don't want our

children around water, because we can't help them, so no-one swims. Our fear of something negative happening stops us letting the next generation learn how to swim, and that came up a lot."

Tyrone also highlighted the critical issue of representation in swimming, remarking, "We talk about the things we see and hear about. We don't see Black people swimming and competing at a high level. We do see footballers and athletes and musicians, so we go towards them." This emphasises the essential need for role models in swimming to inspire communities and dismantle existing stereotypes. The Black Swimming Association (BSA) is actively addressing this by forging strong links with organisations such as the RNLI, Swim England, schools, communities, and local councils to raise awareness, and enlisting ambassadors like Alice Dearing, one of GB's leading open water swimmers, to foster a greater appreciation for swimming.

For Tyrone, being a father of three young daughters motivated him to confront his fears and learn to swim. He expressed, "If I can't swim and my child then gets into issues in the water, I can't save them. It's important to learn and not to say I can't swim, so that no-one swims. We have to change the narrative." This highlights the necessity of targeting encouragement towards both parents and children to foster a culture of swimming within communities.

Tyrone further stressed, "It sounds obvious, but if more communities swim, more people get involved in it, and more opportunities come from it. It's about not being afraid to have the conversation." This personal testimony underscores the collective responsibility of communities to confront their histories and fears surrounding water. He concluded that by changing the narrative around swimming in their communities, they could create "opportunities for health, safety, and a more integrated society." This highlights the challenges and the potential for transformation within communities, illustrating how educational events like these can empower individuals to take ownership of their relationship with water and swimming.

Conclusion

The screening of "Blacks Can't Swim: Rewind" at the University of East London (UEL) served as a powerful catalyst for dialogue and awareness surrounding the pressing issue of swimming participation among Black and Asian communities. By highlighting the stigma faced by young Black and Asian individuals and addressing significant statistics about the widespread lack of swimming proficiency, UEL reaffirmed its commitment to inclusivity and social responsibility. The event was strategically aligned with UEL's educational mission and featured contributions from key figures, including Ed Accura, lecturer Mo Jafar and Hilary Lissenden among others, who shared essential insights on how race impacts swimming participation and the importance of representation in fostering a supportive environment.

The discussions prompted by the screening illuminated the detrimental cycle of fear that inhibits both individual participation and the ability to pass swimming skills to future generations. Jafar's and other speakers' encouraging words reinforced the need for systemic change within communities. Moreover, the event initiated a call to action by fostering a culture of safety and well-being through swimming, emphasising the role of families in overcoming fears and embracing aquatic activities.

The impact of the screening extends beyond mere awareness; it aims to inspire a cultural shift towards valuing swimming as an accessible life skill for all. By engaging with organisations like the Black Swimming Association, UEL actively works to dismantle stereotypes and instil confidence in underrepresented communities. The event was made possible through the efforts of Mo Jafar and Hilary Lissenden from Sport & Active Campus at UEL, demonstrating the university's commitment to promoting health and safety in the community. Together with the engaged students from School 21, UEL contributes to reshaping the narrative around swimming, making it more accessible and attractive to future generations.

In conclusion, initiatives like this screening reflect UEL's dedication to addressing significant societal issues and enhancing the welfare of its diverse student body and local communities. By promoting inclusivity and engaging in constructive dialogue, UEL not only fosters a more integrated society but also empowers individuals to take ownership of their relationship with water. Ultimately, this event paves the way for increased participation in swimming and improved community health. The broad impact of such initiatives demonstrates the potential for educational institutions to lead meaningful change, challenge cultural perceptions, and invite all to become active participants in aquatic pursuits.

About the Documentaries

The **Blacks Can't Swim** and **Changing the Narrative** documentaries have provided crucial insights into why a disproportionate number of people of African, Caribbean, and Asian heritage do not swim. These documentaries offer valuable perspectives through the lived experiences shared in the films.

These documentaries are essential for anyone who would like to better understand how a lack of diversity and inclusion in aquatics has impacted individuals within ethnically diverse communities. By participating in these screenings, viewers will gain insight into the complex barriers to aquatic engagement, the opportunities and benefits that being able to swim can provide, and how participation can be promoted within African, Caribbean, and Asian communities.

The screenings offer a comfortable and safe environment for individuals to reflect on their views and address these issues. Additionally, the documentaries delve into important topics beyond swimming, exploring mental health, physical health, dietary choices, and other areas that can benefit from aquatic activities.

For organisations or communities aiming to align with their strategic priorities and focus on reducing inequalities, especially those with a diverse workforce, these screenings offer an opportunity to engage with important societal issues and encourage positive change. By fostering discussions around inclusivity and water safety, organisations can contribute to enhancing community well-being and collectively work towards changing the narrative surrounding swimming participation.

If you are interested in hosting your screening, private packages including a Q&A session are available via the details below, furthering the documentary's mission to raise awareness and advocate for inclusion in aquatics regardless of ethnicity.

Contact info@changingthenarrative.film to initiate change in your workplace and community.

Together, we can foster a culture of understanding, safety, and empowerment for all.

For more information, interested parties can visit www.changingthenarrative.film