



UNI Regional Conference Post Conference Report

Baylis House, Slough
12th March, 2008



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UNI Post Conference Report 2008

Conference Overview - Message from the Chair

The 2008 UNI conference was held at Baylis House, Slough on Wednesday 12th March. Around 145 delegates attended from across the region's voluntary/community sector (VCS). We also had good attendance and support from various regional agencies, such as health, and also local authorities.

The main aim of conference was to launch UNI, acknowledging that UNI is very much at the start of a journey and needs to promote awareness of its

existence but also to get vital feedback and engagement from delegates on the day.

During the conference we had some inspiring keynote speakers who gave their time and expertise on the subject of Regional black and minority ethnic (BME) Networks. During the day we wanted to inspire delegates and as such we had some motivational speakers who explored concepts such as:

- The value of BME Regional Networks;
- Who and what BME Regional Networks need to influence;
- How UNI can link and feed into both local and national structures.

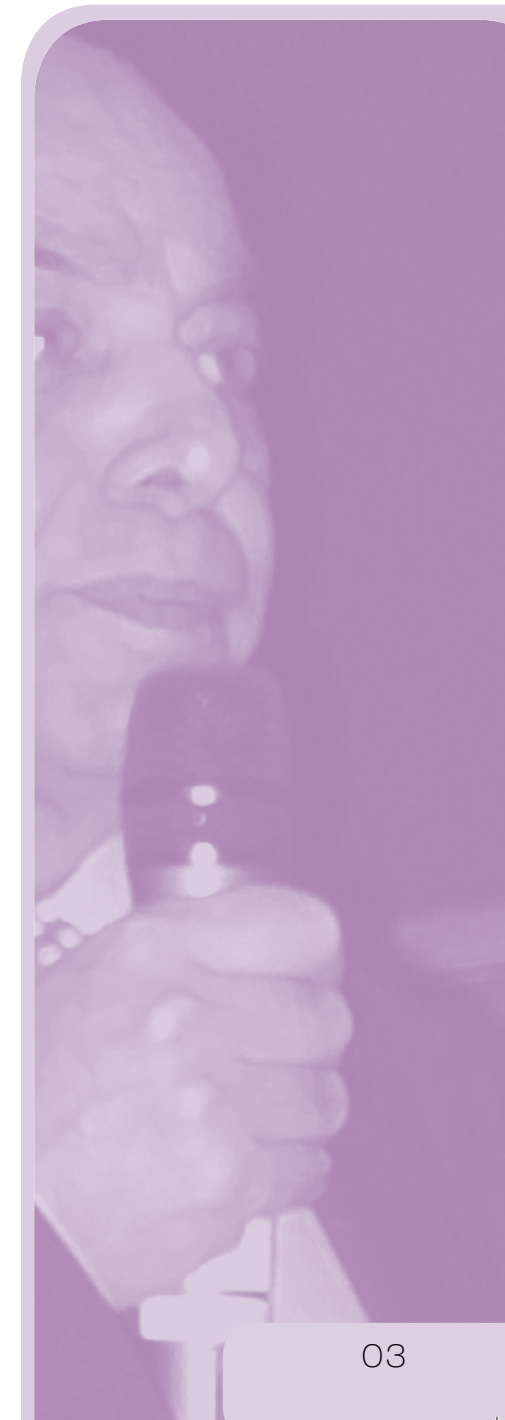
UNI has been greatly encouraged by the attendance and interest in the launch and the participation and passion displayed on the day.

UNI has a unique opportunity to raise the profile and the importance of appropriate infrastructure for BME organisations and groups and to ensure the BME voice is heard, and more importantly, listened to.

The conference was a great success; thank you to everyone who contributed to making it such a special event.

We very much look forward to seeing you at future events!

Dev Sharma MBE
Uni Chair



keynote speaker summaries

Keynote Speaker: **Jacqueline McFarlane-Fraser**

The Value of BME Regional Networks

Keynote Speaker:

Jacqueline
McFarlane-Fraser:

Chair

Black Practitioners and
Learners' Network (BPLN)
London and the South East

Jacqueline is a management consultant who is a community and education practitioner. She has many years of experience working with the voluntary sector mainly, though not exclusively, in the BME community in the UK, Caribbean and more recently South Africa. Additionally, Jacqueline has held managerial positions in the voluntary sector that have encompassed all aspects of developing and running a community organisation.



Jacqui discussed the value of BME Regional Networks by referring to her experience with the BPLN which she felt had parallels with UNI. She began by encouraging UNI to think about what being 'POSITIVE' means in establishing its role:

- P**osition - agree role/purpose of the organisation
- O**pportunity - make the best of
- S**ustainability - ensure organisation is relevant/flexible
- I**nformation - accessibility
- T**argets - realistic
- I**nclusive
- V**erity - reality of experiences
- E**mpowerment

Jacqui then identified the key elements which bring value to regional networks, highlighted some aspects of the BPLN experience which she felt could inform the development and growth of UNI, and recommended specific actions for UNI.

These included detailed examples on the following concepts: collaboration; participation and influence; access to resources; beneficiaries needs and priorities; risk; governance and network benefits. The latter includes points around networking with experienced groups who can help with the above issues.

Other groups/practitioners (not BME) can benefit from using the network - they will be able to:

- access resources not otherwise available;
- improve credibility and offer joined up approach for partners;
- which will lead to improved performance.

Keynote Speaker: **Jeremy Crook OBE, BTEG Director**

Who and What BME Regional Networks Need to Influence

Jeremy opened by commending the management group and stakeholders who have already made so much progress with establishing UNI. He felt there was a real need for such an organisation at a time when, with the demise of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), there was a feeling that the issue of race equality was slipping down the political agenda.

He considered race to still be a big barrier, particularly in the areas of health, housing and education, although the picture in education was mixed with some children from some ethnic backgrounds outperforming, for example, some white children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Nevertheless it is still the case that most decision making and resource nationally is controlled by the white majority.

UNI is operating in a difficult context, and it is good that this initiative has been supported by RAISE, Big Lottery Fund (BASIS), Government Office for the South East (GOSE) and other organisations. There are still major inequalities, for instance 28% women and 25% men in the prison population are BME.

There is the potential to play a major role around cohesion issues. RAISE, GOSE, and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) need to acknowledge inequalities and be honest and realistic about who can make a difference. If an Asian or African group is doing good work, why not support it? There is a danger that the Cohesion Guidance for Funders, which is currently out for consultation, will make Local Authorities think twice before funding single community groups, which might in certain circumstances be more appropriate. Support bonding where appropriate, but if, for example, a new migrant might be best assisted by his own community, that should be recognised. It is important to channel resources to the most deprived areas and with a 'recession' heading our way, life will be harder for poorer groups.

In summary Jeremy argued that UNI needs support to succeed, UNI must set its priorities and be a voice for cohesion and respect. Young people should be encouraged and social enterprise prioritised. Jeremy ended by congratulating everyone involved who had given up their time to make a difference.



Keynote Speaker:
Jeremy Crook OBE
BTEG Director

keynote speaker summaries

Keynote Speaker: Vandna Gohil - Director, Voice4Change England The Work of Voice4Change - Exploring Partnership Working with UNI

Keynote Speaker:
Vandna Gohil -
Director, Voice4Change
England

Vandna opened by commending the work of UNI and thanking those who organised the event, and those who attended.

She set the background for her presentation by describing the context in which UNI will be operating. She stressed the importance of appropriate infrastructure and channels to ensure the BME voice is heard, and explained that Voice4Change England is working to ensure that support was available for BME organisations to influence public policy to ensure better outcomes for the BME communities.

Vandna stressed that the role of BME Third Sector organisations to reach BME communities and ensure their voices are heard has been recognised by Government, through the Home Office Active Community Unit (ACU) 1999 funding for BME networks, and by other stakeholders, such as National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) in their 'Compact BME' 2000. These documents are significant in enshrining the right to self organise and will underpin UNI's future activity.

She went on to discuss the current and future challenges for the BME Third Sector. These included funding issues such as limited targeted investment for infrastructure support from Big Lottery Fund (BASIS) and Capacitybuilders (Improving Reach), the lack of strategic funding for establishing networks or partnerships and the focus on contracts for public service delivery rather than grants.

These factors can be particularly challenging for BME organisations who don't have the capacity for partnership working, which can be time consuming and difficult, or for the complexity of bidding for contracts. A further challenge which can affect the success of funding bids is around the provision of evidence - data is fragmented and out of date. The single equalities agenda focusing on mainstreaming could adversely affect BME organisations, as could the increased diversity of the groups themselves (for instance, new migrant groups) which could lead to competition for limited funding.

A tension between local service delivery (funded) and under resourced local, sub regional and regional groups could result in a reduction of activity around advocacy, lobbying and research, although the role of the regional network in providing guidance is critical. It is important for the BME Third Sector to argue the case that it can play a positive role in building cohesive communities.





Vandna talked about Voice4Change England and its role. It was formed following a conference in October 2005 which brought together 60 national and regional BME organisations to provide a national voice to represent the BME Third Sector. Voice4Change aims to serve as a voice at local, regional and national levels, to facilitate dialogue between the BME Third Sector and Government and to support and strengthen the BME sector particularly at regional level. Overall it aims to provide a generic voice for the BME Third Sector.

Voice4Change has four strategic goals:

- to improve BME influence by improving access to decision-makers and influencers;
- enhancing the BME Third Sector, by strengthening performance and using more robust evaluation and demonstration of its achievements;
- resourcing the BME Third Sector, by securing appropriate funding, skills and other inputs;
- shaping the BME Third Sector debate, by providing the BME perspective.

There is a need to provide a stronger evidence base for the contribution made by BME Third Sector organisations to social and economic wellbeing, so Voice4Change is focusing on mapping the sector. Nationally there is an

absence of a common data set. NCVO does not have data on BME VCOs. In the South East region there are gaps in data because there has not been a regional organisation in place.

Vandna went on to list the activities of Voice4Change, which include: publications; policy response; campaigns; dialogue with government departments; representation at policy forums; some programme delivery; events and meetings. It has responded to national consultations on Single Group Funding, on Cohesion Guidance for Funders - Annex D, where it has opposed the idea that the default position is to mainstream. It will develop a Briefing Note on Race and Cohesion Impact Assessments.

Voice4Change has set up a website - www.voice4change-england.co.uk.

Vandna ended by reminding UNI of the three 'I's:

- Invisible** - need evidence and measurement of impact;
- Inequity** - need to achieve equality of resource;
- Inadequate** - address inadequate support.



workshop overview

Workshop 1

Good Practice with
BME Communities

Workshop 2

Representation and
Accountability

Workshop 1: Good Practice with BME Communities

Gurvinder Sandher gave an overview of his experience with the Kent BME Network and what has worked.

Key points were:

- listen to and learn from stakeholders;
- work in partnership across communities and sectors;
- the importance of engaging with young people and women;
- good communication with stakeholders, partners and funders;
- ensure that you are not reliant on one funder.

There was a general discussion of what makes 'good practice'. Holding events in places known to people and where they feel comfortable such as schools or places of worship was recommended. The need for culturally sensitive staff was discussed, along with a strong message that communication comes in different forms and often the best communication is taking messages out to people i.e. outreach workers. The experience of engagement and communication across the Voluntary/ Community Sector (VCS) is paramount.

Carol Gosal gave an example of good practice with BME communities by presenting the work of Rethink Sahayak. This project helps people from Asian communities who suffer with mental health illness by providing information and support, a mental health helpline, carers support service and an Asian Counselling service. The importance of improving access for Asian communities was highlighted by the poor experience of a mental health care system for BME communities and the lack of cultural sensitivity shown.

Rethink Sahayak maintains an active presence among local Asian communities, by building confidence and encouraging and guiding them in accessing other, more mainstream services such as the police, social services and education.

Workshop 2: Representation and Accountability

Jacqui Burnett used the RAISE Representation toolkit to explore 'The four key components of representation' to stimulate discussion and comment. The workshop explored the various components of representation looking at examples of weak, medium and strong accountability/representation systems:

- Weak** - diffused community engagement
- Medium** - voting system e.g. AGM
- Strong** - employed person with clear lines of control. It was pointed out that this would not always be strong if the trustees are not representative or relevant to client group.





Workshop 3: Voice and Campaigning

Helen Kerridge, from NCVO's Campaigning Effectiveness Programme, ran a lively workshop on Voice and Campaigning. The workshop explored what is meant by the key concepts such as: campaign; campaigning; voice; advocacy; lobbying; influencing and awareness raising. The definition of Campaigning: "the mobilising of forces by organisations to influence others in order to effect an identified social, economic, environmental or political change"

A fundamental principle: Campaigning is about Change.

Helen outlined the key principles of campaigning and advocacy, which included selecting an issue that's right for you or your organisation, considering the external environment and also being able to see the issue from your target's perspective. Important questions were centred on getting delegates to think about:

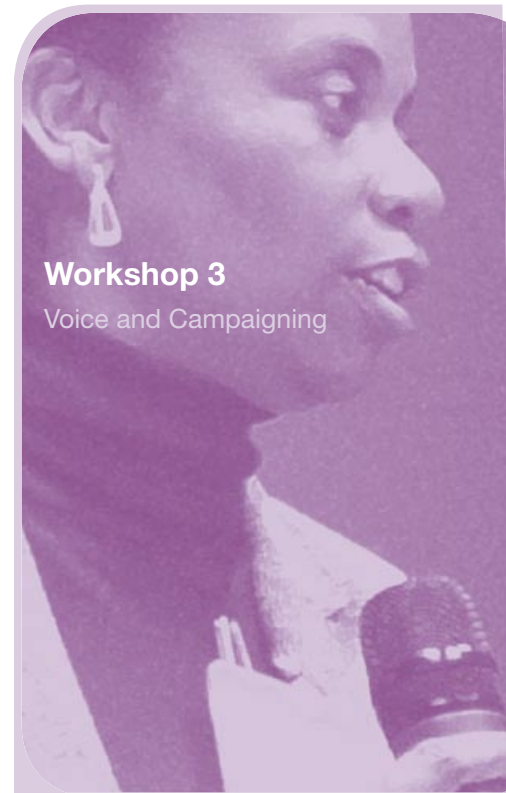
Rajinder Sohpal from Reading CRE gave an example of applying a test of accountability to a list of BME VCOs used for consultations:

- Organisation membership more than 10;
- Has accountability processes;
- Any activity (i.e. meetings, surgeries etc) - not just a paper organisation.

This enabled Reading CRE to start with a list of 85 organisations and reduce it to a more meaningful 35!

The workshop moved on to explore the barriers to representation including the following points:

- * Time;
- * Past experiences of not being included;
- * Being empowered and able to articulate concerns, needs;
- * Lack of clarity and scope of representation - does a group or person have a clear mandate;
- * Some claim to represent community but actually do not



Workshop 4 Funding

- Would it make a significant difference to your beneficiaries?
- Is it winnable?
- Why should you campaign on this; what do you hope to achieve?
- What evidence is there?
- What is the political dynamic and who are the allies and opponents on this issue?

The workshop was followed by an interactive session in which participants were asked to think about a campaign and work out the various components of action using the 'campaign cycle', a process that starts with setting out clear objectives, being strategic, having an action plan, delivering on the objectives and evaluating the steps along the way.



Workshop 4: Funding

Tunde Bright Davies gave a comprehensive presentation of the key essentials of funding based around the aims of:

- Understanding the funder's language;
- Identifying the basis for your funding application
- Writing a funding application;
- Challenging the funders.

Tunde explored one of the key barriers, particularly for frontline organisations in applying for funding, of being confident in understanding the key terminology of funders such as project beneficiaries, objectives, milestones, outputs. Another key point is the ability of organisations to identify the funders most appropriate for them and their organisations and understanding what the funders' priorities are.

Key messages:

1. Consult your beneficiaries - doing surveys that can demonstrate needs;
2. Get to know your Stakeholders;
3. Learn about your local priorities;
4. Research your funders - the types of organisations and projects they fund;
5. ALWAYS read the guidelines;
6. Talk to the funder and ask for advice;

The group were given a sample funding form and guidance and asked to complete the application in an interactive workshop where others were on hand to debate and discuss the best possible answers.

The Way Forward:

The launch of the UNI Strategic Plan

Dev Sharma, UNI Chair outlined the history of ChangeUp/ASP (Additional Support Programme) and talked through UNI's Strategic Plan, dated Feb 2008, a copy of which was included in the conference delegate pack.

The 19 partners were introduced as lead organisations in their local areas, able to act as a conduit of information and representation for all of the BME Voluntary/ Community Organisations (VCOs) in that local area. RAISE championed and supported the network. With the end of ASP the network was renamed UNI.

The Regional Strategic Framework (2008-2011) introduces UNI's mission, vision, values and strategic aims. The 19 local networks support the needs of local people, and also act as a voice to influence regional decision making.

Dev described the UNI vision and listed the core values, explaining that they were aspirations at present. He mentioned the management structure of the organisation, explaining UNI's management comprises the 19 ASP lead bodies who meet every six weeks with the meeting open to GOSE, RAISE, SEEDA, Capacitybuilders and other regional stakeholders.

UNI is currently recruiting community development workers who will encourage the development of local groups and enable the local voice to be heard regionally, and work to increase representation on local stakeholder groups e.g. in local government and health. The main strategic aims are:

- To be the established informed regional voice of the BME Voluntary/ Community Sector (VCS);
- To actively build the capacity of sub-regional and local BME VCS organisations.

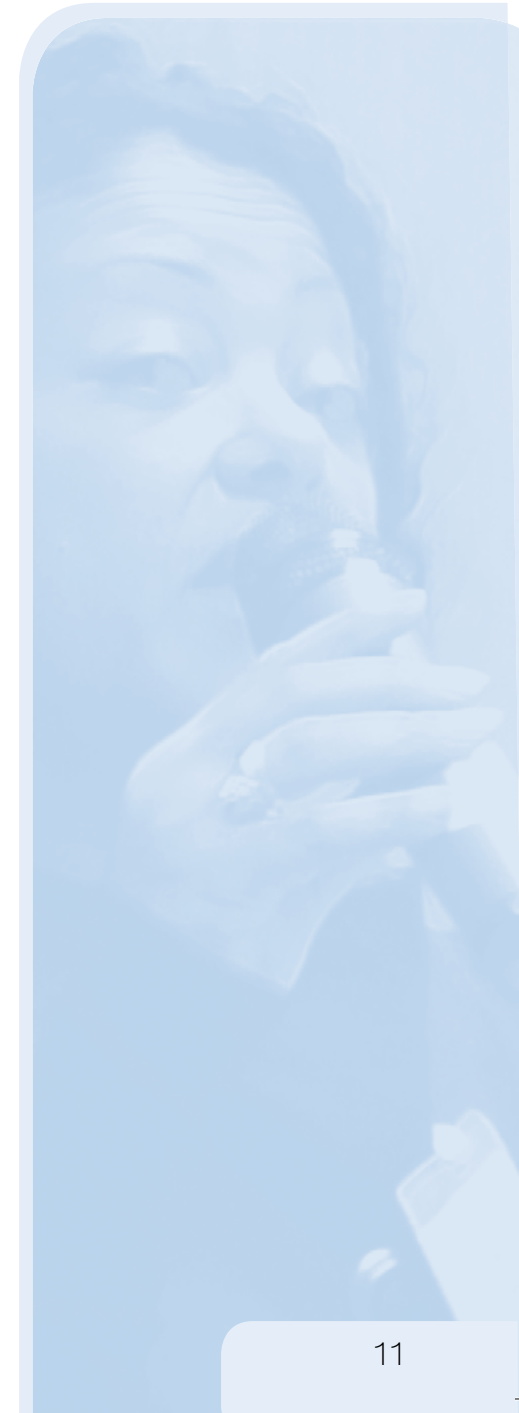
Some of the barriers and outstanding issues were raised, which include the loss of the CRE, funding difficulties, the need to increase membership, the need to progress the campaigning role and the need to strengthen the organisation's accountability to local BME groups.

Dev then invited questions: The main questions centred on the membership of UNI.

Clarification was given regarding the use of 19. UNI signifies the 19 sub regions of the South East. Local networks decide membership, and it is these local networks that have a responsibility to include all minority ethnic groups. The 19 BME networks are coming together with a shared objective, to take local voices to a regional level.

The UNI logo

As the conference was about a launch it was important that UNI began to have a visual identity and brand. An approach was made to Guildford College to see if their art and design students would take on the project. They did superbly. Four designs were displayed at the conference and delegates had the opportunity to vote for which logo they felt best represented what UNI was all about. The winning logo is displayed on the front cover; it was designed by Sam Cannings. UNI and RAISE are very grateful to Guildford College and the Students for embracing this project.



the panel session

Question Time! The Panel Session

Chair

Dev Sharma MBE

Panel

Anita Luthra-Suri

Alexis Wright

Sajid Butt

Mohammed Mossadaq

Dr Yvonne Arthurs

David Wylie

The panel session provided a unique opportunity for BME groups and organisations to question key regional stakeholders about what they are doing for the BME VCS regionally and locally in the South East.

The Panel session was chaired by

Dev Sharma MBE,

(UNI Chair: North West Kent Racial Equality Council Director)

The Panel:

Anita Luthra-Suri: Place, Partnerships and Performance, GOSE

Alexis Wright: Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

Sajid Butt: South East England Development Agency (SEEDA)

Mohammed Mossadaq: Chief Executive's Policy Unit, Hants County Council

Dr Yvonne Arthurs: Public Health South East

David Wylie: Learning and Skills Council (LSC)

Each of the panel introduced themselves and their organisations. The session was then opened up to the floor for questions. The questions focused on the issue of mainstreaming and whether such a focus will lead to a loss of funding for BME groups. Government consultations and their often inaccessibility; how regional networks can support local work and how prejudice particularly in the local press, can be challenged.

Question: It is important to respond to Government consultations, but they can be long and full of jargon. What can you do to feed back to Government that consultation documents should be lay person friendly?

"There is a difference between consultation and engagement. Access is a wider issue than written language. It is also important to consider disabilities such as hearing and sight impairments especially at conferences. The EHRC is committed to full accessibility" Alexis Wright

"The use of complex language and unfriendly formats should be discussed more widely and there is a role for UNI to play in challenging this and ensuring its own language is accessible" Sajid Butt

Question: BME communities and groups seem to be invisible, even when invited to participate. How are regional agencies able to get invisibility reduced and enhance community profiling at GOSE level?

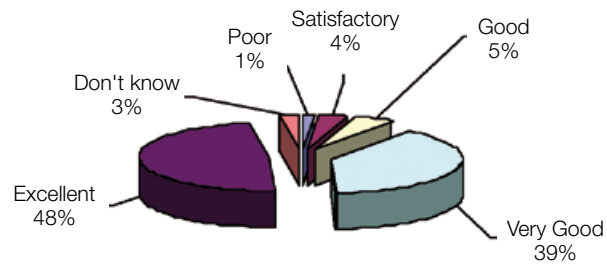
"BME groups sometimes experience tokenism, so need to be strategic in their approach. The Black Learner Network hit a ceiling and can't get through it but it is important not to give up. You need to make the right challenge in each area. The Local Authority, for instance, is accountable to you. Lobby, approach MPs and Ombudsmen and use networks such as UNI."

Anita Luthra-Suri

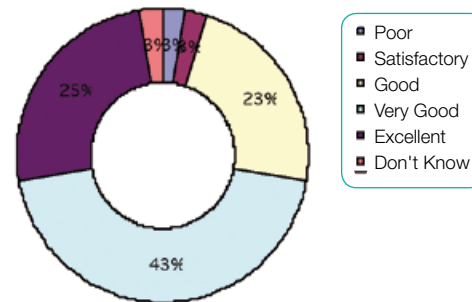
“Very interesting conference. Pleased to see so many groups of people who have turned out ... well done”

Feedback from the event

The Organisation of the Conference

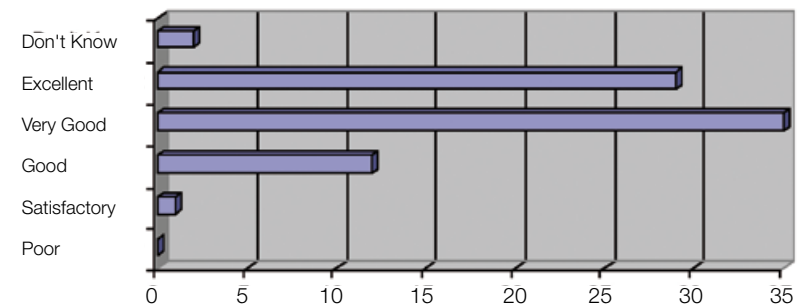


Did you have your say?

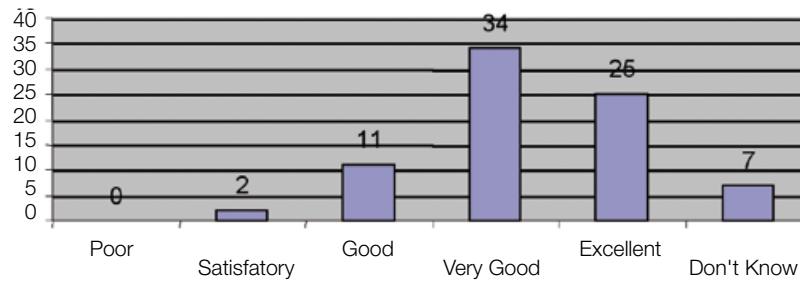


- Poor
- Satisfactory
- Good
- Very Good
- Excellent
- Don't Know

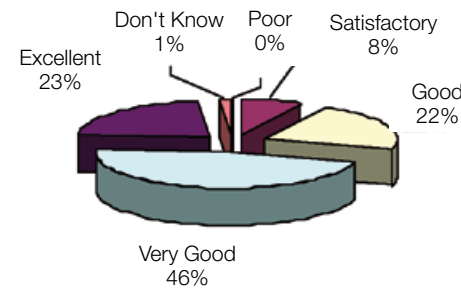
Was it a good networking event?



Did you enjoy the event?



Did the event meet expectations?



“A great start and a good way forward for UNI”

“Well done UNI, for getting this far and good luck at developing further. Thanks for the day”

“It has made clear my understanding of UNI and what they stand for”



UNI is supported by



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