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FEBRUARY 2026

You Belong Here

SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

SAWHE NEWSLETTER



CONNECT SUPPORT CELEBRATE

Foreword from the founder



As we are well into this new year, this edition of the SAWHE newsletter feels less like a beginning and more like a **continuation** of a deep intention. The period from the last newsletter was a period of momentum for the SAWHE network.

We had wheels on our feet and fire in our (hands), and we launched not one but **four new platforms**- a website, a Instagram page, a YouTube channel and yes, our very own 'SAWHE Speaks' podcast series, extending our spaces for open conversations and discussions that matter!

We also successfully held our very **first virtual SAWHE Community Networking** session, completed on our SAWHE Power events series with 11 amazing episodes, and recently launched our **SAWHEResearcher series**, creating a platform where research excellence of SA women across the sector continues being celebrated. Finally, this edition comes on the heels of Race Equality Week, when the SAWHE inner circle leads pulled up our sleeves very spontaneously to pause and reflect to deliver our SAWHE- **one minute, one action**!

> "We must continue to move ahead with intention and momentum"

It is such a pleasure to see attendance at SAWHE events continues to grow, engagement is deepening, and our conversations are becoming richer and more connected. We have also now reached 200 network members now comprising of staff and students across U.K. Universities. That is the reflection of our SAWHE Inner circle team efforts. **These initiatives and numbers are not just milestones.** They are evidence of consistency, commitment, and collective growth.

Clearly the past few months have been very busy for the SAWHE Inner Circle leaders, many times I have wondered if all the efforts we put into creating this space is actually worthwhile. We are but a set of **passionate** volunteers investing our time, energy and limited resources to enable a positive change in the sector and beyond.

But when we see our community of South Asian women show up at our events and participate in our initiatives with their stories, their voices, their journeys and their authentic self, it is a powerful reminder of why we must not loose momentum. This signals to us that **community-led spaces matter** and we must continue to move ahead with intention to create a space of belonging and a platform for underrepresented voices!

Looking forward to the rest of this year.! And whether you joined us recently or have been here from the start:. *The energy you bring is what keeps SAWHE going.*

Dr Sayema Rahman Khan
Founder, South Asian Women in Higher Education (SAWHE)

What's been going on!

SAWHEPower Events: We Did It

We officially wrapped up our SAWHE Power Events series last year and what a journey it has been. **Eleven sessions.** Dozens of honest conversations. So many moments of *"that's exactly how I feel"* in the chat.



Click here to watch the Session titles

From confidence and leadership to wellbeing, boundaries and belonging, each session created a space where South Asian women in higher education could show up fully, speak openly and feel understood. There was laughter, reflection, practical tools, and the quiet power of knowing you are not navigating this journey alone.

Completing this series for is more than ticking off events. It represents a **joint effort** from the *SAWHE inner circle leaders* in hosting each session, the growth of a psychological safe space, trust from the *speakers* to offer their expertise and a *community* that keeps choosing to invest in itself.

To our brilliant speakers, Inner Circle leaders and every woman who logged in, contributed and held space for others, thank you!

The SAWHE Power Events was powerful because you made it powerful!

SAWHE Community Networking

Our First Virtual Gathering: Belonging, Leadership and Shared Strengths

In November 2025 , we hosted South Asian women from across higher education to connect, reflect and celebrate who we are. Staff, students, educators, researchers. *Different roles, different journeys, one shared space!*

One of the most powerful parts of the session was when everyone shared:

- *their name and the meaning behind it*
- *their background and expertise*
- *one interesting fact about themselves*



What followed was a tapestry of stories about heritage, identity and joy. Some of those "interesting facts" were impressive, some were unexpected, and a few made everyone smile. It was a reminder of how much richness sits in this community.

The feedback survey received afterwards reflected that same feeling. Many spoke about the value of connecting with other South Asian women in higher education and how the breakout conversations created space for openness without having to over explain identity or experience. Several attendees also shared thoughtful reflections on LinkedIn, describing the event as a space where **women felt seen and supported**. One comment captured it beautifully, highlighting the importance of spaces where **women uplift one another, collaborate and build futures together**.

You also shared what you would like to see next: *deeper conversations around barriers and microaggressions, more opportunities to spotlight members' work, and more career focused networking spaces.*

The SAWHE exists for the community so it was great to hear of what to focus efforts on!

SAWHE x GuildHE Research



First Sector-Wide Collaboration

In November 2025, SAWHE collaborated with GuildHE Research at the Global Majority PGR Network Conference with SAWHE Inner Circle leaders, Dr. Sana Malik, Dr Rashmi Liyanage and Dr. Sayema Rahman Khan invited to co-lead on their event.

Our session, "**Towards an Inclusive Research Culture: Belonging and Identity for the Global Majority,**" introduced SAWHE's mission to amplify South Asian women's voices in higher education and create spaces rooted in belonging and shared strength. We facilitated an interactive workshop where participants co mapped the barriers and enablers shaping inclusion within research environments.



The conversation was thoughtful, honest and solutions focused. Postgraduate and early career researchers from across the UK shared reflections on identity, visibility and structural change, contributing to a rich dialogue about what inclusive research culture should look like in practice.

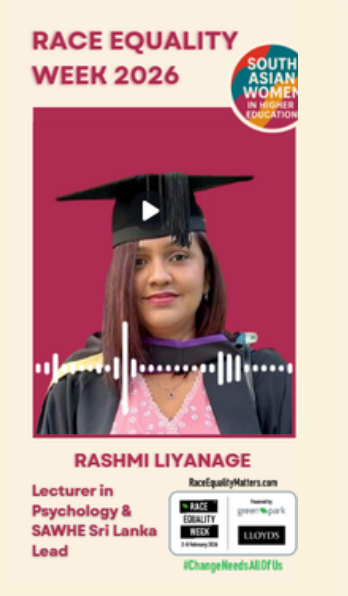
SAWHE is open to collaborations and welcomes invitations from *sponsors and institutions* who would like to help support this journey by funding our efforts to continue enabling positive change!

We look forward to connecting. Please contact hello@sawhe.org or drop us a DM on LinkedIn.

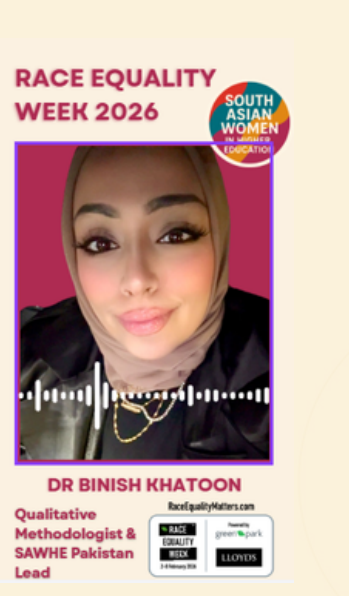
SAWHE One Min-One Voice-One action

RACE QUALITY WEEK 2026 with SAWHE















Click to hear our actions

The South Asian Women in Higher Education network stood together with Race Equality Matters, and thousands of organisations to tackle race inequality in the workplace. This year's theme, #ChangeNeedsAllOfUs, reminds us that real change happens when everyone gets involved.

Every day, SAWHE inner circle leaders shared 60-second reflection and meaningful action.

That was One Minute. One Voice. One Action!

SAWHE Voices-Our Stories continues..



Our SAWHE Voices Blog series is growing beautifully.

We have now published **eight** blogs since starting in July 2025, one each month, sharing the lived experiences, research, career journeys and reflections directly from South Asian women across UK HE

From personal stories of resilience and growth, to insights on leadership, wellbeing, identity and ambition, these blogs are powerful reminders that our stories deserve to be heard. Too often they are not visible. SAWHE Voices is changing that.

You can read the published blogs here: SAWHE VOICES

Whether you are a student, academic, researcher or professional services colleague, this space is for you. If you have a story, study or perspective to share, we would love to hear from you. Submit your blog or send any queries to **blog@sawhe.org**

Your voice matters!

SAWHE Member Spotlights continues..



Since July, we have been featuring one of our incredible members to celebrate their work, amplifying their voice, and showcasing the many routes and roles they undertook in higher education.

Follow all our Member spotlights on LinkedIn, we are so proud to have spotlighted many amazing women so far!



We aim to spotlight our members and to inspire others, build community, and open doors for the next generation of South Asian women in academia. If you would like to be spotlighted, please email us or send us a message on LinkedIn.

New SAWHE Initiatives Launched

SAWHE Researcher Series



Celebrating Scholarship and Connection Across the UK

Building on the success of last year's Power event series, SAWHE launched the Researcher Series in January 2026. Led by Dr Gulshanara (Rumy) Begum, the series celebrates cross disciplinary research done by South Asian heritage women across UK universities.

With three sessions complete, these virtual fortnightly sessions each spotlight a different researcher and their academic journey.

The sessions are recorded and you can catch up from the SAWHE Youtube channel.

With many more sessions to come through to June 2026, the SAWHE Researcher Series will continue to provide a vital space for sharing research, learning, and collective empowerment for researchers in HE.

SAWHE Speaks-Our New Podcast Series



Elevating Voices, experiences and Insights

Launched in December 2025, produced by Sumaiya Motara, SAWHE Speaks invites key South Asian change makers to discuss topics affecting South Asian women. With two episodes so far, one on 'Faith, belonging and representation' and another on 'Why EDI Matters'.

You can find out more and listen to episodes here: SAWHE SPEAKS

we release one episode every month. Stay tuned for our February episode about adjusting to higher education as an international student...

Let's get Speaking!

Article Space



Dr. Sukvinder Kaur Bhamra

Healing Herbs from my mum's Indian Kitchen

Growing up in an Indian household, healthcare started in my mum's kitchen where she firmly believed food was the best medicine. My earliest memories of being unwell involved the smells of ginger simmering on the stove for colds and fever, haldi (turmeric) stirred into warm milk for boosting immunity, or ajwain seeds being offered to ease stomach pain. Then, I would have preferred a dose of Calpol® (paracetamol) over these herbs and spices, but today I realise the value of their profound effects.

Today, I continue my passion for exploring the benefits of traditional herbs, an example many will be familiar with is ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera L.*). Native to India and parts of South Asia, it is sometimes called "Indian ginseng". Traditionally, it has been used as an adaptogen, a substance which helps the body manage stress and restore balance.



Ayurvedic texts have documented the use of ashwagandha for a range of conditions including: reducing stress, anxiety, boosting energy and stamina, supporting immunity, strength and vitality, improving sleep, and general wellbeing. Ashwagandha should be taken with fats such as milk as this improves the absorption of the active compounds (withanolides).

In recent years, ashwagandha has gained popularity in the UK, particularly during the winter months when many people experience low mood, fatigue, and lack of motivation. Shorter days, colder weather, and the pressures of returning to routine after the festive period can all contribute to increased stress and tiredness. Ashwagandha is now commonly being used to support mental wellbeing during this time, with studies suggesting it may help reduce stress levels, improve sleep quality, and support energy.

Today, ashwagandha is widely available in UK health food shops, pharmacies, and online, and is increasingly recognised within mainstream wellness and healthcare conversations. For many South Asians in Britain, this growing acceptance feels familiar rather than new. What is now labelled a "supplement" or "super herb" was once simply part of our everyday life. Its rise in popularity serves as a reminder of how traditional Indian knowledge continues to influence modern approaches to wellbeing, connecting heritage, culture, and health across generations.

Three ‘New’ SAWHE Platforms

NEW WEBSITE, NEW HOME!

We have a new digital home. The SAWHE website is now live, giving our community one shared space to explore events, blogs, updates and opportunities. It feels fresh, intentional and rooted in who we are becoming. Take a look and make yourself at home:



WE ARE ON INSTAGRAM AND YOUTUBE

SAWHE has officially joined Instagram. Expect snapshots from our events, member highlights, reflections and moments of joy from across the community. Come follow along and help us grow the space:



Our YouTube channel is now live, making it easier to revisit event recordings and catch up on conversations you may have missed. It is another way we are keeping our stories visible and accessible. Subscribe and stay connected:

YouTube

LETS CONTINUE TO

CONNECT | SUPPORT | CELEBRATE

Creative Spotlight



Sayema Rahman Khan

I am right here; can you see me?

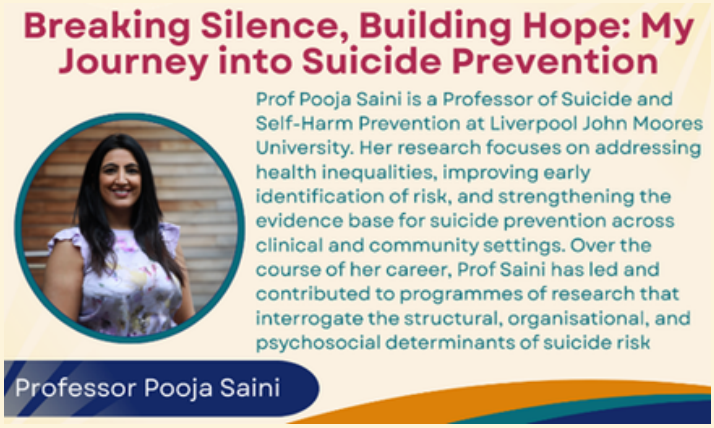
Are we seeing this 'lack' of diverse leadership because, we have not been given the chance to lead... not handed the room, the seat, the space, the light.. the invitation to step forward and rise?
Or is it because somewhere,.. someone silently decided, that we were not 'worthy' of leading... that leadership lives only in certain faces, moves in certain spaces, speaks in certain voices, certain accents, certain attire, and comes in tones they find familiar enough to trust?

Is leadership a birthright of the system...???? a mould cast only for some to fit in it, so our 'difference' is mistaken for deficit, and our potential keeps knocking at the door, without being called in?
Is this why we have to work harder to be seen?
Our confidence is misunderstood? Our ability questioned before it is recognised?
Our assertiveness often mistaken for aggression? Our opinion must wait for others approval?
Is this why our ambitions are questioned and our dreams not trusted for what they hold?
Can leaders actually rise.. if no one believes in them?
If their brilliance is unseen, their courage not recognised, their voice unheard?

But leaders are not born from permission... they are born from..... persistence.
from... refusing to shrink, from... refusing to accept the norm, from... daring to step into spaces that were never designed with them in mind.
Growing in the shadows,
dreaming, wishing, hoping, yearning, pleading, knocking, screaming silently.....
long before they reach the spotlight.
Leadership can rise from those who weren't expected to lead...but want to lead anyway.
So, every time a new voice is trusted, a different face is welcomed, someone chooses to believe.. and 'equity' is an intention, The definition of leadership expands.
Perhaps the question is actually not... 'Where are the global majority leaders?' But insetad 'When.. will.. the.. world.. be ready to see them?'

Upcoming Events





Follow us on LinkedIn or become a SAWHE member to register for the sessions once thy go live!

We look forward to your continued engagement and welcoming you at the upcoming sessions!

Connect with the Inner Circle



Dr. Sayema Rahman Khan
Founder and Strategy Lead



Dr Gulshanara Begum
Events Lead



Zaineb Al Sadiq
Membership Lead



Sumaiya Motara
Digital Comms Lead



Shivali Bhatara
Blogs Lead



Dr. Sana Malik
Spotlight Lead



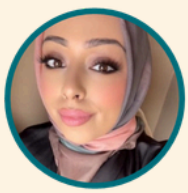
Rashmi Liyanage
Country Lead, Sri Lanka



Dr. Jahanara Miah
Country Lead, Bangladesh



Dr. Sukvinder Bhamra
Country Lead, India



Dr. Binish Khatoon
Country Lead, Pakistan



Dr. Sangita Pokhrel
Country Lead, Nepal



Dr. Priya Srivastava
Country Lead, India



Join Us, this is your space!

At SAWHE, we are committed to creating a space where South Asian women in higher education feel empowered, connected and valued. Our network is built on community, shared experience and collective growth — a place where your journey is understood and your voice carries weight. Whether you are an academic, professional staff member, student or ally, there is a place for you here.

Becoming a member means joining a supportive community that uplifts one another, celebrates achievements and opens doors to new opportunities. Members gain access to exclusive events, professional development opportunities and dedicated networking spaces. You will also be the first to hear about upcoming activities, initiatives and ways to get involved. Most importantly, SAWHE grows with you — your ideas and feedback directly shape what we do next.

Together, we continue to strengthen the presence, leadership and impact of South Asian women across higher education and beyond.

👉 Membership is FREE — join by completing our Membership Form or scan the QR code.

Connect, Sponsor, Collaborate

Sign Up

YouTube