

## Ethnic Minorities

### Overview

Does the colour of your skin affect your ability to do a job well or give an indication of your level of intelligence or motivation? No, of course it doesn't. So why are ethnic minority students and graduates statistically more likely to be unemployed than their white counterparts? Does the colour of your skin really influence your employability prospects and, if that really is the case, how can you redress the balance?

This section provides information and advice on these issues and will help you understand your rights, as well as look at ways to deal with possible discrimination.

### Understanding the law

Over 25 years have passed since the Race Relations Act 1976 made it illegal to treat a person less favourably than others on racial grounds. Yet there are still significant discrepancies for ethnic groups in the workplace. According to Home Office research, ethnic minority workers receive less pay than their white counterparts, are less likely to have roles in the higher ranks of management and are more likely to be unemployed.

The act protects people from discrimination in the fields of employment, education, training, housing and the provision of goods, facilities and services. There have been two subsequent amendments to the act, intended to strengthen the existing version: the 2000 amendment prohibits racial discrimination in the carrying out of public functions; the 2003 amendment sets out regulations relating to discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnic/national origins.

It is the 2000 amendment that gives you the right to be able to make a complaint if you feel you have been discriminated against on racial grounds. However, proving you have been discriminated against can be problematic. Discrimination is not the same as prejudice; you need to demonstrate that you were treated less favourably as a result of the other party's actions.

In order to bring a case under the Race Relations Act you need to demonstrate (through evidence) that you have been discriminated against in one or more ways. The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) ([www.cre.gov.uk](http://www.cre.gov.uk)) identifies four main types of racial discrimination: direct; indirect; victimisation; and harassment (further information on these definitions can be found in the legal section of the CRE website).

Cases involving racial discrimination within employment are heard in employment tribunals (once formal internal complaint procedures have proved insufficient). Other racial discrimination cases are heard in county courts, or in sheriff courts in Scotland. There are varying but strict time limits for lodging complaints. A deadline for a tribunal relating to employment is normally three months beginning with the day employment ended. However, you should check the Department of Trade and Industry's

Employment Relations website (<http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/resolvingdisputes.htm>) for the latest news concerning time limits for resolving disputes as part of the Employment Act 2002 (Dispute Resolution) Regulations.

### **Finding positive employers**

One of the key elements of any job search is to find an employer that you feel comfortable working for. For many graduates, the knowledge that their employer shares the same ethos and values can be a crucial deciding factor when it comes to accepting a position.

Continuous support in the workplace is as important as the initial advertising and recruitment policy. If a company has an ongoing diversity programme or scheme, it demonstrates a committed approach to embracing a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic workforce.

Many graduate recruiters are now demonstrating that their organisation seeks out and welcomes applicants from all ethnic backgrounds. So, how can you find these positive employers and research their level of diversity commitment? Here are a few tips:

- Start your research early, before submitting an application. Study both the job advert and website of the company that you are interested in. Most positive employers will have some sort of equality statement – this is a good measure of how inclusive they are as an organisation. Look at staff profiles too. Is there a mixed ethnic workforce? Do they have a designated staff diversity representative who can communicate any issues or complaints to management?
- Does the organisation run its own internal graduate scheme aimed at students from ethnic backgrounds, as part of a larger initiative? Does the organisation offer sponsorship to students or graduates from ethnic groups in order to help them in their career choices? For example, Channel 4 has a policy that every two years they sponsor four people from ethnic backgrounds on the Film & Television Freelance Training's (FT2) New Entrant Scheme.
- Does the organisation advertise in specialist diversity magazines, for example, *Kal* ([www.kalmagazine.com](http://www.kalmagazine.com)) and *The Hobsons Guide for Ethnic Minorities*, as well as in the major newspapers and trade publications? Do they attend the specialist ethnic minority graduate recruitment fairs, eg the annual Ethnic Diversity Fair at the University of Manchester, as well as the larger, national recruitment fairs?
- Is the organisation a member of Business in the Community (BITC) ([www.bitc.org.uk](http://www.bitc.org.uk))? Race for Opportunity is a nationally recognised business network, run by BITC, which currently has over 180 UK members. This is a programme dedicated to ethnic minority issues and usually operates as a complementary support system to employers' own internal diversity agendas.
- Visit your careers service for details of specific schemes and organisations that apply to ethnic minority students and graduates. The Windsor Fellowship ([www.windsor-fellowship.org](http://www.windsor-fellowship.org)), for example, works to ensure that ethnic

minority students achieve their full potential by collaborating with employers, schools, universities and other agencies.

- Look at other sources of specific vacancies, including Black and Asian Grad ([www.blackandasiangrad.ac.uk](http://www.blackandasiangrad.ac.uk)), Ethnic Jobsite ([www.ethnicjobsite.co.uk](http://www.ethnicjobsite.co.uk)) and Asian Jobsite ([www.asianjobsite.co.uk](http://www.asianjobsite.co.uk)), all of which offer vacancies, advice on job hunting, applications and much more. Black and Asian Grad also have a list of employer profiles of companies that actively support them.

## **Marketing yourself and disclosure**

The principles of self-marketing remain the same regardless of your ethnic background; you have to demonstrate your range of skills and qualifications to their maximum potential. Having said that, some ethnic minority applicants may find themselves concerned about how to market their skills and, moreover, how to ensure that these skills are viewed without discrimination.

You may, for example, be reluctant to disclose information that may be an indicator of your ethnicity, eg presidency of a particular society. Disclosure is a personal choice and ultimately up to you. Being the president of a society is something to be proud of and demonstrates many transferable skills that employers are seeking. If you choose to disclose, market yourself in a way that shows the employer the highly desirable skills you have gained through such a position. You may also wish to convey how your experience as a student from a minority background has enabled you to develop skills such as determination, motivation and adaptability – all highly transferable. The key factor is to have a strong application or CV that matches the job requirements and specifications, thus making it far harder for an employer to arbitrarily reject the application on the grounds of race.

The importance of marketing yourself cannot be overstated. First impressions do count. Not only does effective personal marketing enhance your chances of getting to the next stage of selection, it can also challenge any negative stereotypes that may exist.

Pay a visit to your university careers service for help with creating an effective self-marketing strategy. There are often workshops available on job searching, application procedures and interviews. Black and Asian Grad has a useful section on CVs and covering letters.

## **Top tips**

- Show your enthusiasm and passion for the job and company to which you are applying. You need to be able to demonstrate why you have selected this company and role in particular.
- Establish the core competencies that the company is looking for and then relate your education, work experience and hobbies/interests to these.
- Target employers who are actively targeting you as an ethnic minority applicant and take advantage of any initiatives that may be available to assist you in your job search.
- Research and prepare each application thoroughly to ensure that you maximise your qualifications and skills and that each application is

relevant to the position for which you are applying. Visit your careers service to seek an objective, professional opinion.

- Believe in yourself! If you don't think you are good enough for the job, why should an employer think differently? Go in with a positive attitude about your ethnic background. If you are still concerned that this may affect your chances of success, speak to a careers adviser.

## Case study

Harry

'Prior to gaining my current position in the quality assurance sector, I attended an interview for a trainee manager job with a fresh/frozen produce manufacturer. The role was in their food division and I applied fairly confidently, as their advert stated that they required graduates in food science or microbiology (my subject).

'I had to take two trains to get to the interview, which was in a remote village outside a major city. I arrived on time and the recruitment manager called me into the interview room. For some reason, he did not have a list of fixed questions to ask – all he had was a notebook. He asked my age, religion and where I had travelled from. He said that some of the work would involve working in an abattoir and asked whether this would be a problem for me. I replied that I had no problem with this. He then thanked me for attending and said he would contact me once a decision had been made. The whole interview lasted less than ten minutes and he must only have asked me four questions. He didn't ask about my degree or my previous experience – in fact, he didn't refer to my CV at all.

'I met another candidate on the train returning home and she had had a similar strange experience at interview. In her case, she was a British-born Asian woman with an English name and, clearly, her ethnic origin was not apparent until she attended the interview. She had also had a rapid interview and had been asked the question about her religious beliefs in relation to abattoir work. Nowhere in the job description had it stated that that would be an element of the job.

'I received a reply a few days later saying that I had been unsuccessful.

'I am still not sure what part my age or religion should have played in the selection process. I felt at the time, and still do, that the interviewer had made a judgement about my religious beliefs based solely on my skin colour – nowhere in my CV had I stated either ethnicity or religion. This was one of the first graduate interviews that I had attended and, at the time, I was unsure whether they would all be like this one. I thought that my personal details would have shown my ethnicity (my name is of Sri Lankan origin). I had hoped that, having got to the interview stage, I would have been treated on my merits.

'In hindsight, I would recommend ringing ahead and finding out a bit more about what the job entails, especially when an advert is general. I have learnt from the experience. From now on, I will only apply for positions where I know for certain I have the exact work experience and qualifications required and I would push for feedback if I were unsuccessful at interview. No feedback was given following the trainee manager interview and, because of the nature of the interview, I did not feel confident enough to press the issue further.'

## Sources of further advice and information

### Contacts

#### **African Caribbean Diversity (ACD)**

Suite 34  
Delta House  
175-177 Borough High St  
London SE1 1HR  
Tel: 020 7939 9925  
[www.acdiversity.org](http://www.acdiversity.org)

Promotes and facilitates the recruitment, development and advancement of black people in all sectors.

#### **Commission for Racial Equality (CRE)**

St Dunstan's House  
201-211 Borough High St  
London SE1 1GZ  
Tel: 020 7939 0000  
[www.cre.gov.uk](http://www.cre.gov.uk)

Works towards the elimination of racial discrimination and promotes equality of opportunity. It encourages good relations between people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. It also monitors the way that the Race Relations Act is working and recommends ways in which it can be improved.

#### **Home Office**

Direct Communications Unit  
2 Marsham St  
London SW1P 4DF  
Tel: 0870 000 1585  
[www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk)

Information on the Race Relations Act and other related statistics.

#### **Impact Project**

Career Development Service  
Communal Building  
University of Bradford  
Bradford BD7 1DP  
Tel: 01274 235509  
[www.careers.brad.ac.uk/impact/](http://www.careers.brad.ac.uk/impact/)

A collaborative project between universities in Yorkshire and part of the Aimhigher initiative. The project works to enhance the employability and opportunities for groups under-represented in higher education.

## **The National Mentoring Consortium**

University of East London

Mentor Unit

Romford Rd

London E15 4LZ

Tel: 020 8223 4343

[www.uel.ac.uk/nmc/](http://www.uel.ac.uk/nmc/)

A six-month scheme in which ethnic minority undergraduates are linked with mentors (professionals from the world of work), in order to gain support and experience.

## **Websites**

### **Black Britain**

[www.blackbritain.co.uk](http://www.blackbritain.co.uk)

Launched in July 1998 to deliver immediate and regular news and information services to the Black and ethnic minority communities and to address the shortcomings of mainstream media.

### **Citizens Advice Bureau**

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

Helps people resolve legal, money and other problems by providing free information and advice.

### **Diversity Mentoring HE - Interface**

[www.diversitymentoringhe.com](http://www.diversitymentoringhe.com)

A mentoring programme supporting UK Black and Asian students and postgraduates at the University of Manchester, which matches student mentees with employer mentors in their career areas.

### **Race for Opportunity**

[http://www.bitc.org.uk/programmes/programme\\_directory/race\\_for\\_opportunity/](http://www.bitc.org.uk/programmes/programme_directory/race_for_opportunity/)

### **Chances Events**

<http://www.chancesevents.com/>

Unique experiences tailored for female, ethnic minority and LGBT students interested in a wide range of sectors, including investment banking, professional services, City law, technology, civil service and real estate.

## **Publications**

**The Hobsons Guide for Ethnic Minorities** (CRAC/Hobsons Publishing, Annual)

**Talent** (Smaart Publishing, in association with The Windsor Fellowship, 3 times a year).

## ***Acts/Regulations***

### **Race Relations Act 1976**

[www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs/racerel1.html](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs/racerel1.html)

### **Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000**

<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/20000034.htm>

### **Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2003**

[www.homeoffice.gov.uk/comrace/race/raceact/raceregs.html](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/comrace/race/raceact/raceregs.html)