

Policy into practice seminars:

(4) Employment

Chair: Naina Patel, Director, Policy & Research Institute on Ageing and Ethnicity
Presentations:
Professor Shamit Saggur, Policial Science, University of Sussex
Annmarie Dixon-Barrow, CEO, Fullemplay and Minority Matters Recruitment
Colin Meah, Sainsbury's Store Manager (Bolton New) & Member of Oldham United

Note takers: Zohra Moosa and Baljinder Virk

Presentations

1. Shamit Saggur led off the discussion with an exposition of how the disadvantage still suffered by some BME groups in employment might be less about active discrimination and more about coming to the workplace 'human capital poor' as a result of substandard education or the social drawbacks of one's community. So the divisions persist. And are augmented by circumstantial factors to do with mobility, child care, housing – which continue to impact on the areas of education and employment.

Half the growth in the working age population in this decade will be from minority ethnic groups, so a strong rationale for focusing on this is the younger profiles of minority ethnic populations, particularly south Asians and, to a lesser extent, Black Africans. Thus far, Indian and Chinese populations are mirroring or surpassing the overall trends of white groups while African Caribbean and Bangladeshi groups are not, and boys are the ones falling seriously behind. As minority ethnic groups are not yet showing much mobility in employment, the cluster effect of economic disadvantage can be maintained from education into employment – or unemployment.

Being employed does not always mean earning at a level that matches qualifications. Shamit Saggur points to figures that show an ethnic penalty (the improvement you get for better qualifications is not that much) in operation for Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black men in the 'blue-collar' sector and for Indian men in 'white-collar' employment. Institutional racism and discrimination are only part of the problem, he says. The need for broader social networks across ethnic groups (more bridging social capital needed) and more incentives for schools to close the educational attainment gaps are very much indicated.

2. Annmarie Dixon-Barrow talked about how Project Fullemplay developed a 'job opportunities programme' to broker between skilled minority ethnic workers and the jobs market. Having started as the bridge to the informal networks, they decided to act as the informal networks themselves: (a) with the graduate MBA programme for minority ethnic job candidates, which counteracts the disadvantage of using mainstream recruitment agencies that rely on white informal networks; (b) acting as an employment agency for secondment candidates lacking a current employment status. ADB wants to make the workforce 'understand the communities that we're coming from', and for

the corporate world to see that their visibility in mentoring small Black businesses, for example, will get Black people applying for jobs and helping them meet diversity targets.

3. Colin Meah's presentation dealt primarily with Sainsbury's involvement in the Oldham United campaign, in which the CRE worked with local organisations in the private sector to help them engage more with the local community. Stores, local businesses, professional associations and the local newspaper came together in order to make their activities more Oldham community-focused. In the case of Sainsbury's, the imperative was to improve the service from its Oldham store to its local customer catchments, project positive images of Oldham to external communities, and thereby improve the bottom line from the community business angle.

Colin Meah manages a store whose staff is 35% minority ethnic in makeup. His store's contribution to the campaign, which ran from mid-2003 to 2004, made use of networks, advertising and competitions to launch new products and promote activities with brochures, special offers and badges in local languages to make new shoppers feel welcome. His provision of a Halal food range was judged a success – and provoked some discussion in the question and answer session around ethical purchasing (see below).

Discussion points

1. Where broad agreement seemed to lie

- Institutional racism is still a problem, contributes to the 'ethnic pay penalty', and is still not picked up adequately by inspectorates.
- Employers need tools to challenge institutional racism and accommodate the varying needs of different communities.
- Accreditation of qualifications processes for newcomers is necessary, but should be accelerated.

2. Where disagreement seemed to lie

- The degree to which and the way in which institutional racism impacts on employment earnings, and its influence on the 'ethnic pay penalty'.
- Different people in communities may be differentially impacted by supposed 'pro-ethnic' initiatives, e.g. the introduction of halal meat into mainstream supermarkets as in the case of Sainsbury's (above). A national chain in catering for the local consumer may be penalising if not cutting out altogether the existing local BME supplier.

3. Questions and Challenges

- (a) Is it time to stop using the equal opportunities mechanism to counteract discrimination as it's not changing anything? Do we need something different?
- (b) Is the option of self-employment for African-Caribbean groups a good one?
- (c) What are the practical ways of addressing institutional racism?
- (d) What is the one thing that employers should be doing?
- (e) As different people in communities may be differentially impacted by supposed 'pro-ethnic' initiatives, in this instance the introduction of halal meat into mainstream supermarkets, did Colin Meah work with local communities and existing suppliers when introducing it to Sainsbury's?
- (f) No-one at the conference so far has been directly addressing the demographic changes that are due to affect Britain in the coming decades as a result of continuing migration. How should we be preparing for these changes?

4. Solutions and Further Challenges

- (a) If the equal ops mechanism is really not changing anything, then translate the learning that we have from those who have successfully implemented equal opportunities work to others who are interested and able to do similar work. To make progress on equal ops it's the middle-ground 'fence-sitter' employers that need to be targeted; the leaders will always do well for themselves and for their employees, and the 'die-hards' may be implacable. The 'fence-sitters' need to be turned into 'leaders'. (SS)
- (b) Help those who would like to be in self-employment become better at it by learning from the experience of successful businesses, small and large. Develop programmes specifically to counteract negative social conditioning or lack of networks. (ADB)
- (c) Monitor more closely how well institutions are, or are not, meeting their obligations under the RR(A)A in order to tackle institutional racism better.
- (d) (i) Employers should stop using mainstream recruitment agencies, and should instead use the smaller, slightly more diverse ones.

(ii) Employers need to consider more seriously the ways that informal/social networks inhibit and enhance access to employment opportunities. For example, we can access 'hidden' communities better, and encourage them into the labour market, if we pay attention to how networks mediate access to opportunities.

(e) Supplies of specific product for a specific local market should continue to be sourced locally when big(ger) business tries to supply the market.

(f) (i) Active management of migration could ensure that everyone is doing well at the end of it (we shouldn't be as laissez-faire as we were in the past). Try and anticipate problems, not just fix them after they've occurred and a 'lost generation', or several, has been allowed to waste its capacities. (SS)

(ii) The research we have on settled communities can enlighten us on how to manage demographic change and new migration patterns.

(iii) Use this conference to promote the acceleration of accreditation – processes that are driven by the Home Office. There is good practice already [in Leicester for example] that could be rolled out. □



**COHESION,
DIVERSITY,
EQUALITY
CONFERENCE
SEMINARS**

**(L–R opposite)
Shamit Saggur,
alongside
co-panelists
Annmarie Dixon-
Barrow and Colin
Meah, and with
Naina Patel in the
chair, addresses
the audience for
the Employment
Seminar**