Ethnicity and Participation in Higher Education

SUMMARY
Whilst the number of Black and minority ethnic (BME) students at university in the UK is broadly proportionate to their size in the young population, most BME students are more likely to attend less prestigious universities and achieve a lower class of degree.

Given that many of the universities with the highest BME populations have the lowest employment rates, this is likely to have an adverse effect on ethnic minority employment, which in 2010 stands at 12% less than White British employment.

Graduate under-employment and labour market disadvantages make the economic returns of studying for a degree for many BME people less than for their White counterparts.

CONTEXT

School achievement
- In England there are large differences in the percentage of pupils achieving 5+ good GCSEs including English and Maths between ethnic minority groups. A high proportion of Chinese (72%) and Indian (67%) pupils achieved 5+ good GCSEs in 2009. The proportion of Bangladeshi, Black African and White British pupils was close to the average (of 51%). Black Caribbean and Pakistani students fell below the average at 39% and 43% respectively. (EHRC Triennial Review, 2010)

Poverty
- One person in 5 lives in a household with less than 60% median income (after housing costs). This rises to nearly 1 in 3 for Bangladeshi-headed households (EHRC Triennial Review, 2010)
- Nearly three-quarters of Bangladeshi children, and half of Black African children in Britain grow up in poverty (EHRC Triennial Review, 2010)
- BME people are over-represented in the most deprived neighbourhoods in England. (EHRC Triennial Review, 2010)

Unemployment
- For any given qualification level, White British men and women are more likely to be employed than those of any other ethnic group (National Equality Panel, 2009)
- Latest figures released by the Department for Work and Pensions show an increase in the rate of ethnic minority unemployment across the country. The figures, from the Labour Force Survey, show that 12.8% of ethnic minorities are unemployed, compared with the national average of 8.3% (Labour Force Survey, 2010)
• Annual Population Survey figures also show that ethnic minority unemployment has been rising, increasing from 10.6 per cent in the 12 month period ending September 2008 to 12.4% in the period ending September 2009. Over the same period, unemployment increased for all ethnic groups apart from people of mixed ethnicity (Annual Population Survey 2010).

• The biggest increase was for Black/Black British people, where unemployment rose from 13.5% to 17.2% (Annual Population Survey, 2010).

RACE AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Participation in higher education

• The proportion of university places taken by BME students has increased from 13% of students in 1994/95 to 23% in 2008/09, a figure broadly proportionate to their size in the young population (EHRC Triennial Review, 2010).

• At least 44% of all Black, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian graduates attended post-1992 universities, or former polytechnics compared to 34% of other ethnic groups (National Equality Panel, 2009).

• All minority ethnic groups, with the exception of students from Chinese backgrounds, are more likely to be at ‘new’ institutions (Runnymede, 2007).

• There are more students of Black Caribbean origin at London Metropolitan University than at all the Russell Group universities put together (Runnymede, 2007).

• In 2009 only one Black Caribbean individual was accepted to study on a course at Oxford University (University of Oxford, 2010).

• BME students predominantly apply to and attend universities in close proximity to the family home. A third of Chinese and Indian applications, and over half of Bangladeshi applications are made to local universities while only a quarter of White UK students apply to local universities (Shiner and Modood, 2002).

Attainment at university

• 66.4% of White students studying first degrees received a first class or second class honours qualification, compared to 48.1% of BME students overall and only 37.7% of Black students (Equality Challenge Unit, 2009).

• A higher proportion of lower second class degrees were awarded to Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi graduates than upper seconds (National Equality Panel, 2010).

• Black British students, Asian British Pakistani students and ‘other’ British Asian students are significantly more likely to drop out of higher education. (N. Powdthavee and A. Vignoles, 2007).
• Even after controlling for the majority of factors which we would expect to have an impact on attainment, being from a minority ethnic community (except the “Other Black”, “Mixed” and “Other” groups) is still statistically significant in explaining final attainment (DFES Research Report RW92, S Broeke, T Nicholls, 2007)

Impact of attending less prestigious universities

• Studying at a Russell Group university can boost a graduate’s earnings by between 3 and 6 percent compared to studying at a ‘new’ university (Runnymede, 2007)

• In a survey of recruiters by The Guardian, just over a quarter of respondents felt that the ‘new’ universities produced lower quality graduates (Runnymede, 2007)

• BME graduates are more than twice as likely to be unemployed after graduation as compared to White UK and White Irish students (Runnymede, 2007)

• Many of the universities with the highest BME populations have the lowest employment rates, and given the currently poor prospects for graduates generally, this is likely to have an adverse effect on ethnic minority employment, which in 2010 stands at 12% less than white British employment (Runnymede, 2010)

• Attending a more prestigious university often results in the acquisition of better social networks by its graduates. Given that fewer BME students have parents in the salariat or managerial professions, creating networks among their peers and previous graduates is particularly important for them to get good jobs (Runnymede, 2010)

• Universities act as crucial arenas for students to meet people with different backgrounds and experiences from them. If the UK’s most prestigious universities are not ethnically diverse, there is less opportunity for “social mixing” (Runnymede, 2010)

• Black African and Chinese male graduates earn 25% less in gross weekly earnings than White male graduates (Y Li and A. Heath, EHRC, 2008)

Possible solutions

Improved careers advice

• There has been little research into effective independent careers advice and guidance that young people from BME communities need in order to access a wider range of universities or the labour market on graduation. The Report on Fair Access to the Professions (2009) highlighted the low levels of user satisfaction with current services. An Association of Colleges survey found that more than two-thirds of young people wanted improved careers guidance.
**Positive action**

The Equality Act 2010 clarified the actions that institutions could take to address persistent inequalities:

You can take positive action when three conditions are met:

1. You must reasonably think that a group of people who share a protected characteristic and who are, or who could be, using your services:
   - suffer a disadvantage linked to that characteristic
   - have a disproportionately low level of participation in this type of service or activity, or
   - need different things from this service from other groups.

2. The action you take is intended to:
   - meet the group’s different needs
   - enable or encourage the group to overcome or minimise that disadvantage, or
   - enable or encourage the group to participate in that activity.

3. The action you take is a proportionate way to increase participation, meet different needs or overcome disadvantage. This means that the action is appropriate to that aim and that other action would be less effective in achieving this aim or likely to cause greater disadvantage to other groups (Government Equalities Office 2010)

**Potential impact of the Browne review on BME students**

- The Browne Review recommends that students should pay no fees up-front, instead only making payments after graduation when earning above £21,000 per year. It also calls for the removal of the current £3,290 cap on fees and proposes a free market in fees, setting out models of charges up to £12,000 a year for a degree course.
- The Browne Review also proposes additional support for students from families with an income below £60,000 per year, recommending up to £3,250 in grants.
- The rising of tuition fees, and the potential for higher status universities and courses to request higher amounts than others, may serve to price those from lower socio-economic groups out of higher education (Ipsos Mori, 2010), and if not may certainly deter them from striving to access those more prestigious institutions (assuming they charge higher fees) once the decision to enter higher education is made (Sutton Trust, 2010).
- However, the proposals for additional support for students from families with an income below £60,000 per year would benefit BME students, who are more likely be represented in the lowest socio-economic groups.
- In addition, Browne’s proposals to evaluate universities on how well they are doing in providing access to all could benefit BME groups, but only if a specific ethnic diversity measure is included.