



## **Research Report**

# **The Employment of Members of Ethnic Minorities: An Employer's Perspective**

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## Summary

This is the third of three research reports resulting from a project funded by the European Social Fund and the University of Bolton which sought to contribute to an understanding of why ethnic minority graduates find it more difficult to obtain employment upon leaving UK higher education institutions. The first report dealt with the analysis of a large data set concerning differences in perceived difficulties in obtaining a job, occupational values and influences on type of job targeted. The second report concerned graduates' job-seeking behaviours and their outcomes and detailed how some of the factors considered in the first report related to these behaviours and outcomes. This final report considers matters from the perspective of the employer, reporting the findings of a qualitative investigation of recruitment and selection policies and practices, and employer perceptions of the advantages of, and barriers to, the employment of ethnic minority people in their organisation. The series of reports generally seeks to report data with a minimum of theory as a strategy of disseminating a wide range of findings to interested researchers prior to the submission of more theoretically-orientated reports focussing upon selected aspects of the data to relevant journals at a later date.

The aims of this part of the project were:

- (1) To investigate the extent to which employers' policies and procedures conform to Commission for Racial Equality guidelines on good practice with respect to: (a) recruitment and selection; and (b) managing the workplace environment.
- (2) To investigate employer perceptions of: (a) the advantages of, and barriers to, the employment of ethnic minority people in their organisation; and (b) why their company is either successful or unsuccessful in achieving a representative workforce
- (3) To investigate relationships between employers' equal opportunity policies and procedures, managers' perceptions of a representative workforce and their company's success in achieving it.

The data considered in the report took the form of a mixture of open-ended and closed-ended responses supplied by representatives of three companies who completed an online questionnaire asking about their company's strategies for attempting to ensure proportionate ethnic minority representation in their workforce. Among areas considered were practices for advertising vacancies, post-advertisement selection and recruitment procedures, pro-active activities to encourage ethnic minority applications, and record keeping procedures. The questionnaire also elicited data concerning difficulties encountered in employing members of ethnic minority groups, and barriers and advantages that employers perceived with respect to the employment of members of such groups.

All three companies are shown to espouse the ideal of having an equitable mix of ethnic groups as employees of their company, but are shown to implement procedures to achieve this goal to differing degrees. The example of one company shows that given sufficient corporate will and resources, and the channelling of these into recruitment strategies that are recommended by organisations such as the Commission for Racial Equality it is possible to achieve an ethnically balanced workforce. However, the example of another company (an alcoholic drinks producer)

shows that even though a company may have a desire to pursue a policy of equality, the nature of a company's business may make the company doubt the viability of achieving such a goal.

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## Section One: Introduction

Statistics published by the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2002) show more unemployment among ethnic minorities relative to the White majority six months after graduation from UK high education institutions (see Charlton, Taylor, Peterson, Taylor, Ranyard & Hewson, 2006). Members of some ethnic minority groups are also less likely to obtain employment at levels commensurate with their education, and have more difficulty accessing graduate-level jobs (Battu & Sloane, 2004; Connor, La Valle, Tackey & Perryman, 1996). While a portion of the disadvantage experienced by ethnic minority groups is attributable to educational factors such as institution, subject studied, entry qualifications and degree-level, even when such factors are taken into account, socio-economic background, age and ethnicity have an influence upon employment prospects (Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, 2002). In two previous reports we have sought to cast light upon the role of factors such as differences in graduates' perceptions of jobs and job-seeking behaviours in explaining ethnic differences in graduate job-seeking success. In this report we turn our attention to the employer's perspective, adopting a case study approach in considering issues such as recruitment methods, employers' perceptions of the barriers they face in attempting to achieve an equitable ethnic mix in their personnel and the advantages they see in employing members of ethnic minority groups.

While it is likely that overt discrimination motivated by racism still exists on the part of some (perhaps generally smaller) employers, legislation (e.g. the 1976 Race Relations Act and subsequent amendments) and the creation of bodies to champion ethnic minority rights (e.g. the Commission for Racial Equality, CRE) has resulted in the diminution of flagrantly discriminatory employment practices. Indeed, Connor, Tyers, Modood and Hillage (2004) note that in recent times many organisations have shown a strong commitment to employing an ethnically diverse graduate workforce. The extent to which this is because of compulsion is unclear, however, it is likely that compulsion has had a large effect since Purcell, Morley and Rowley (2002) note that while employers in their study were making great efforts to reach targets for ethnic minority and female representation in their organisations, attempts to ensure a fair representation with respect to age were not a priority since ageism had not yet been made illegal.

However, more subtle influences have proved more difficult to counter. For example, in the report of their recent study which mixed literature reviews, a review of national statistics and new empirical work in the form of surveys and interviews, Connors *et al.*, (2004) observe that while many employers genuinely seek an ethnically diverse workforce and wish to recruit graduates purely on their merits, achieving this goal can be difficult because '...the need to match graduates to particular skills/person needs of jobs, means that it is more likely that traditional types of graduates (e.g. young, with high 'A' levels, middle class) continue to be recruited, often because it is easier to achieve within limited recruitment budgets, and also when there are pressures to achieve annual intake targets' (Connors *et al.*, 2004, p.107). These authors also observed that companies with certain needs, such as the need to recruit technical graduates, often have to prioritise their need to recruit employees with skills which are in short supply over the desirability of having an ethnically diverse workforce.

Connors *et al.*, (2004) concluded that a major employer-related factor responsible for ethnic inequalities in the make-up of organizations' workforces was

indirect discrimination during selection. Practices at issue were said to include the use of number of A' level points, the use of testing, procedures used in assessment centres and group exercises, and interviewees attitudes. Interestingly, it was also concluded that, while targeting graduates of highly prestigious HE institutions (in which ethnic minorities are under-represented) was also implicated, the increasing use of the Internet as a recruitment medium was likely to be a development which should alleviate this to some extent. This observation is consistent with our recent finding that ethnic minority graduates were just as likely, if not more likely, to use the Internet as a means of applying for jobs (Charlton *et al.*, 2006).

In addition to the above, it is also likely that other indirectly discriminatory practices such as advertising vacancies without regard to the ethnic mix of people who are likely to see advertisements, carrying out selection procedures using exclusively members of the White ethnic majority, racial stereotyping, the enforcement of certain dress codes, timing of interviews and the acknowledgement of the importance of some religious festivals but not others may, among a multitude of other factors, result in an organisation failing to recruit an equitable number of ethnic minority employees. Thus, indirect discrimination may be present within structures and processes of organisations.

The amended Race Relations Act (2000) places a significant responsibility on all employers, and especially public sector organisations, to ensure that their policies and procedures for the recruitment and selection of employees, as well as for their subsequent working environment, do not discriminate, either directly or indirectly, on the basis of race. The first aim of this study was: *To investigate the extent to which the policies and procedures of private sector employers conform to CRE guidelines on good practice with respect to: (a) recruitment and selection; and (b) managing the workplace environment.* We expected that smaller and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) would have less formal procedures, as recognised by the CRE in their publication *Racial Equality and the Smaller Business – a Practical Guide* (2005a).

The extent to which employers embrace their legal responsibility to foster racial equality will depend at least in part on their attitude towards it, in particular their understanding of its advantages to their enterprise and perceptions of how it can be achieved. Therefore, the second aim of the study was: *To investigate employer and manager perceptions of: (a) the advantages of, and barriers to, the employment of ethnic minority people in their organisation; and (b) why their company is either successful or unsuccessful in achieving a representative workforce.* We expected that employers' and manager's perceptions of the advantages of a racially diverse workforce would depend on the nature of their business to some extent, and that SMEs would perceive the barriers to achieving such a workforce to be greater.

Both the extent to which employers adopt racial equality policies and procedures, and their attitudes towards racial equality are likely to determine to some extent their success in achieving it. The final aim of the study, therefore, was: *To investigate the relationship between employer equal opportunity policies and procedures, managers' perceptions of a representative workforce and their company's success in achieving it.*

## Section Two: The Questionnaire and Data Collection Procedure

A paper-based version of the questionnaire was first constructed and evaluated empirically in a pilot study. Human Resource managers from two public organisations (the University of Bolton and a local authority) and the director of a local SME completed the questionnaire and gave feedback. Following this a web-based version was developed and placed on the Internet. The final online version contained 52 closed-ended and open-ended questions grouped into five sections. The structure and rationale for the questionnaire was as follows. Section A asked for some basic information about the person completing the questionnaire on the employer's behalf. Section B acquired information relevant to the first aim of the study about strategies employers used to try to ensure that a proportionate number of ethnic minority personnel were employed by their organisation. These questions were mainly based on the procedures for good practice described in the *Statutory Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Employment* published by the CRE (2005b). As well as a final open question, specific questions concerned procedures for: (a) advertising vacancies (e.g. *Does your company notify vacancies to minority press/media and other organisations?*); (b) selection and recruitment (e.g. *Does your company ensure that all people involved in the selection interview and recruitment process have received training in equal opportunities?*); taking positive action (e.g. *Does your company allow people to pray during the working day?*); keeping personal records and other matters (e.g. *Does your company ensure that complaints of racial discrimination are dealt with confidentially?*). Sections C and D addressed the second aim of the study, mainly using open questions. Section C centred upon perceptions of advantages and barriers regarding the employment of ethnic minority personnel, whereas Section D asked about current ethnic minority personnel in the organisation and why it was thought that recruitment of ethnic minorities had been relatively successful or unsuccessful. Finally, Section E asked for information about the nature of the employer's business, the geographical location they recruited personnel from, the nature of their workforce, selection methods used, etc. In order to address the third aim of the study, Section E also asked for information concerning proportion of ethnic minority employees in the workforce and in the locality. A paper version of the questionnaire has been provided in an appendix to this document. It is hoped that this questionnaire will be of use to future researchers in this area of study.

The questionnaire was publicised to employers through the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR). The AGR used their e-bulletin to publicise the study to their members. The e-bulletin contained a Web link to the online questionnaire. After completion, the questionnaire was submitted electronically, with responses appearing in an XML file. Three companies provided data using the online questionnaire<sup>1</sup>. In the sections that follow these businesses will be referred to as Company A, Company B and Company C.

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<sup>1</sup> Because the number of responses to the Web-based questionnaire was disappointing, this data collection method was supplemented with a method in which a paper version of the questionnaire was used as a basis for conducting telephone and face-to-face interviews. Although this method yielded another 50 sets of responses, and would have therefore enabled a quantitative approach to have been adopted in addition to the present qualitative approach, concerns about the provenance of much of the interview data (which was supplied by a person specifically hired for the task) have necessitated the production of a smaller case study report focussing upon the three companies providing data via the Internet.

## Section Three: Findings

### 3.1 Case Study 1: A large London-based legal services company

Company A was a provider of legal services based in London which employed around 2000 full-time staff. The company both recruited for posts requiring a degree-level education and took on graduates for posts not requiring a degree. With regards to methods of employee selection, application forms were required from prospective business service staff and trainee solicitors, and CVs from qualified solicitors. Interviews were held for all positions, with trainee solicitors being assigned written and analytical tests. The respondent, a senior figure in graduate recruitment, stated a belief that the proportion of people from ethnic minorities in the local population was 6% - 10%. It was also stated that 6% -10% was the proportion of people from ethnic minority backgrounds in the workplace itself. Thus, although it was claimed that the company sometimes had difficulty recruiting ethnic minority applicants for skilled and professional posts, it was thought that ethnic minorities were not under-represented in the organisation. Representativeness was thought to have been achieved by virtue of the company's active attempts to promote itself to graduates and undergraduates from ethnic minorities, as is evident in the following quote:

*'We are involved with a number of diversity organisations and run events designed to appeal to particular under-represented groups at undergraduate and graduate level in order to ensure our intake of trainees is suitably diverse.'*

It was seen as advantageous to the company to employ members of ethnic minorities because an ethnically diverse workplace would reflect the company's diverse client base and that staff with different backgrounds and life experiences would be beneficial to the company owing, it seemed to be implied, to the range of perspectives they will bring. These ideas are evident in the following quote:

*'We need to reflect an internationally diverse client base. Our staff are attracted to the firm because of the diverse population here; and this in turn encourages other applicants from non-traditional backgrounds – a virtuous circle. Ensuring that those with widely varying backgrounds and life experiences work together ensures the best outcomes as staff learn from each other.'*

As far as potential barriers to employing members of ethnic minorities were concerned, a possible lack of suitable candidates from certain ethnic backgrounds, owing to inequalities in educational opportunities, was mentioned:

*'...We are conscious that access to educational opportunities are not equal among certain groups; but it is an economic and commercial and client service imperative for us that we can only take those who are able to demonstrate intellectual abilities... There are no universities we will not recruit from; but any candidate must demonstrate excellent written and oral communication skills – and these skills can be adversely affected by lack of access to good educational opportunities.'*

In response to questions regarding the advertisement of vacancies it was stated that the company always simultaneously advertised all vacancies internally and externally, ensured that knowledge of vacancies reached under-represented ethnic groups internally and externally, notified vacancies to Job Centres, careers offices, and schools, colleges and universities with significant minority group rolls, and included an appropriate short statement on equal opportunities in all vacancy

advertisements. However notification of vacancies to minority press/media and other organisations about vacancies was only done sometimes, and printing leaflets detailing job vacancies in languages used by under-represented groups was never done (this was unsurprising given that a high level of proficiency at reading English would be required from employees working in this sector). These responses would seem to be consistent with the assertion that the company actively encouraged applications from people from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

The company's pro-active approach to the employment of ethnic minorities was also reflected in its selection procedures. The respondent stated that the following strategies were either always or sometimes implemented: keeping selection criteria under constant review to ensure that they are justifiable on non-discriminatory grounds as well as being essential for the effective performance of the job; detaching personal details (including ethnicity information) from completed application forms before the start of the selection process; involving more than one person in the selection interview and recruitment process; ensuring that all people involved in the selection interview and recruitment process have received training in equal opportunities; involving women and members of ethnic minority groups in the shortlisting and interviewing processes; ensuring that the content of tests used in selection is completely relevant to the job specification; recording reasons for selection and rejection of applicants for vacancies; ensuring that interview dates do not coincide with important days for ethnic groups

All but four of the positive action steps listed on the questionnaire were taken by the company. Some of these could be classified as pertaining to the promotion of the company to under-represented groups, for example, using outreach schemes to encourage under-represented ethnic groups to apply for employment and taking steps to ensure that the company's racial equality policy has a high public profile. Other positive action steps were related to meeting the needs of employees, for example, allowing time/a location for prayer and providing appropriate facilities and conditions of service to meet the special needs of under-represented ethnic groups. Positive action steps that were marked as not being taken appear to be those that could be perceived to be providing an 'unfair advantage' to ethnic minority applicants, such as providing special training for under-represented ethnic groups to prepare them to compete on genuinely equal terms for jobs and promotion, and providing mentoring schemes to develop the potential of staff from under-represented ethnic groups. Though it is, of course, impossible to state with any confidence the employer's reason for not implementing these steps, such policies would seem consistent with the assertion that only individuals meeting the high entry standards were employed, thus suggesting that it was considered that all new employees, be they members of an ethnic minority or not, would already have the ability to compete for promotion on an equal level.

With regard to record keeping, it was stated that records were kept of all employees' and applicants' gender, racial origins and disabilities to ensure the effective operation of the equal opportunities policy and that this data was regularly analysed for this purpose.

When asked about the company's anti-discrimination policies it was stated that the company had a written racial equality policy and ensured that complaints of racial discrimination were dealt with confidentially, but that there was not universal knowledge of the procedures and penalties vis-à-vis racial discrimination within the company.

To summarise, perhaps because of the nature of its business and its location in a hugely ethnically diverse city, this company saw a competitive advantage in having an ethnically diverse workforce. Consistent with this, the company engaged in a multitude of good practices recommended by bodies such as the CRE. This was true with respect to recruitment, selection, monitoring of the composition of the workforce and grievance procedures. It was considered that poorer educational opportunities might act as a barrier to members of some ethnic groups obtaining employment with the company, but the company was not prepared to compromise on the intellectual and academic standards it required. However, this unwillingness to compromise did not prevent the company from achieving its goal of recruiting a representative number of ethnic minority employees.

### 3.2 Case Study 2: A large nationwide manufacturer of alcoholic beverages

Company B was a manufacturer of alcoholic beverages employing 15,000 people full-time and recruiting UK wide. The company both recruited employees for positions that require a degree-level qualification and employed graduates for positions not requiring a degree. The company used psychometric tests, competency-based interviewing, assessment centres and individual and group exercises as methods of employee selection. The person responding on behalf of the company was unable to state whether ethnic minorities were under-represented in the company since the company operated nationwide and an estimate of the proportion of the population from ethnic minorities would have been impossible to calculate.

The respondent did not indicate that they perceived any advantages to employing people from ethnic minorities. As far as barriers were concerned, the respondent stated that it was possible that the nature of the product produced by the company (i.e. alcoholic beverages) may deter people from certain ethnic backgrounds from applying for jobs with the company, owing to what are presumably religious prohibitions against alcohol:

*“We brew alcoholic beverages which may prevent some ethnic minorities from wanting to work for us; although we do not discriminate against any backgrounds....”*

Of the advertising strategies listed (see questions 4 to 9 in Section B of the questionnaire in the appendix), the only one that was marked as always being undertaken was that regarding the inclusion of a statement of equal opportunities in all vacancy advertisements. The response ‘not very often’ was given to the items regarding suggested dissemination practises (i.e. advertising in the ethnic minority press, advertising all posts internally an external, etc.). Posts were never advertised in languages used by under-represented ethnic minorities. With regard to the selection procedure the majority of the protocols were stated as being undertaken ‘sometimes’ or ‘not very often’. It was stated that more than one person was always involved in the interview and recruitment process. Women were ‘sometimes’ involved in the shortlisting and selection procedure, while the frequency with which members of ethnic minorities were involved was listed as ‘not very often’. This may suggest that there are relatively few members of ethnic minorities in managerial positions within the company. However, as the respondent did not know how ethnically representative the workforce was at any level this must remain speculation.

One of the positive action steps listed was marked as being taken, which was that regarding time being allowed off for non-Christian religious holidays. The

company provided catering facilities, but these did not take into account special dietary requirements of ethnic minority employees. If, as the respondent speculated, people from certain ethnic backgrounds – in this case presumably those from groups where Islam is the predominant religion – were prevented from applying for jobs with the company due to religious/cultural prohibitions with regard to alcohol, then it may have been that there was no demand for the provision of prayer rooms, time to pray and catering facilities that met religiously-based dietary requirements. Alternatively, this could reflect an assumption that these things are not required; as it may have been expected by the employer that those people willing to work for the company would not strictly adhere to any religious practises requiring such provisions.

Of the items pertaining to policies and practises regarding racial discrimination, only ‘ensure that complaints of racial discrimination are dealt with confidentially’ was marked as being undertaken.

At the time the questionnaire was completed, records of the gender and ethnicity of successful and unsuccessful applicants were not used for equal opportunities monitoring, but the respondent stated that the company was about to begin collecting such data:

*“We have not yet started to measure our own ethnic minority community nor that of our applicants however this will change this year with systematic recording and analysis of personal details.”*

In brief, this company did not see any great advantages in employing members of ethnic minority groups. This may be because, given that the company was a manufacturer, the bulk of its workforce would never come into contact with end-users. Perhaps because there were no perceived advantages in employing people from ethnic minorities, while the company seemed to conform to the law, it engaged in few pro-active practices to encourage the recruitment of ethnic minority employees. With respect to barriers, it was recognised that the nature of the product produced may deter members of some ethnic minority groups from joining the company on religious grounds.

### 3.3 Case Study 3: A medium-sized regional manufacturer of automotive components

Company C was a manufacturer of automotive components recruiting employees from the Midlands and South Wales and employing 350 full-time staff. The company both recruited employees for positions that require a degree-level qualification and employed graduates for positions not requiring a degree. The methods of employee selection used by the company were CV reviews, interviews and aptitude/psychometric tests appropriate to a job’s level. The estimated proportion of people from ethnic minorities in the geographic area in which the company operated was 1 - 5%, whilst the proportion of people from ethnic minorities in the workplace was given as less than 1%. It was therefore recognised that ethnic minorities were under-represented in the workforce. The reason given for this was that the company’s workforce was very stable as shown in the following quote:

*“We have 1% BEM in full-time employment at the moment. We have a very stable workforce; and when a vacancy does arise it is filled on the basis of merit...”*

However, further responses revealed that it was not very often that the company found it difficult to recruit unskilled, skilled and clerical staff from ethnic minorities and only sometimes found it difficult to recruit managerial and professional staff from ethnic minorities. This suggests that when a position became available with the company there was not always a lack of ethnic minority applicants. The respondent went on to state that the company ran student placements, and of those students participating 50% came from ethnic minority backgrounds. This perhaps indicates that over time the workforce will become more representative as positions become free and there are a greater number of qualified ethnic minority applicants. The respondent stated that they did not feel that there was anything that either the company or government could or should do to redress the under-representation of ethnic minorities in their workforce. With regard to things that members of ethnic minorities could themselves do 'apply for jobs' was the only step listed.

Throughout the questionnaire the respondent emphasised the company's policy of being meritocratic and 'colour-blind' with regard to recruitment. When asked whether they felt that there were any advantages to employing people from ethnic minorities they stated that:

*"We have a completely open employment policy based solely on the ability and attitude of the individual to do the job."*

The respondent similarly asserted that they saw no barriers to employing people from ethnic minorities, but had no policy of positive discrimination.

Responses to questions regarding the implementation of the strategies suggested to ensure proportionate minority representation seemed to reflect the notion that ethnicity should not be a consideration when recruiting staff. With respect to the advertising of available positions, the respondent stated that information about vacancies was always disseminated both internally and externally in such a manner as to reach under-represented groups, but that they never specifically targeted publications aimed at ethnic minorities or printed leaflets advertising posts in languages used by under-represented ethnic minorities. In response to the questions regarding selection strategies, it was stated that all strategies with the exception of removing personal details from application forms prior to selection were employed either 'always' or 'sometimes'. Of the positive action strategies listed the respondent stated that the company: allowed time off for religious events other than Christian holidays, ensured that all people in management or any other supervisory positions had knowledge of ethnic minority customs and cultural differences, and provided catering facilities that took into account the dietary requirements of ethnic minority employees.

All of the procedures mentioned in the questionnaire about policies and practises regarding racial discrimination, barring that regarding having a working group responsible for the implementation of the racial equality policy, were marked as being undertaken. Issues pertaining to racial discrimination were covered through the company's grievance procedure, which additionally covered bullying and other types of inappropriate behaviour. This may indicate that the company's corporate view was that forms of discrimination and bullying are equally wrong whether based on ethnicity or not and therefore should be dealt with using the same procedure; a position that would appear to be consistent with the emphasis placed by the respondent on equality and colour-blindness.

Summarising, this company did not see any particular advantages in, or barriers to, employing members of ethnic groups. The company seemed keen to ensure that it followed the law and tried to operate on a 'colour blind' basis during recruitment and selection. To a great extent, this agenda was also followed once people had obtained employment, although the company did take account of the fact that members of ethnic minority groups might need to follow different customs.

#### **Section Four: Discussion and Conclusions**

Although the present study has considered the cases of only three employers, the foregoing case studies illustrate the fact that employers can differ widely in their approaches to the employment of members of ethnic minority groups: some companies adopting an essentially fair but legally minimalist approach while others put a high degree of effort into pursuing an equal opportunities agenda.

Of the three companies surveyed it is clear that one, Company A, could be classified as having an agenda that actively pursues ethnic diversity. The individual responding on behalf of Company A indicated that, to attract a diverse intake of trainees, the organisation utilised strategies such as advertising in media aimed at ethnic minorities, using outreach schemes to encourage under-represented groups to apply for positions in the company and running events designed to attract under-represented groups at graduate and non-graduate level. The frequency and manner in which records were evaluated by the company for equal opportunities purposes also reflected this agenda. Two tangible advantages to a diverse workforce were apparent in the respondent from Company A's response to the question regarding the advantages of employing members of ethnic minorities: the idea that a diverse workforce will attract a diverse client base; and the belief that people from different backgrounds will bring different perspectives to the workplace. These comments supported the assertion that employers are increasingly valuing ethnic minority applicants in their attempts to recruit from as wide a pool of talent as possible, and because of their needs to deal with customers and clients that are increasingly diverse in their ethnicity (Connor, Tyers, Modood & Hillage, 2004).

Company B and Company C, on the other hand, did not actively pursue diversity. The respondents for both companies explicitly stated that the businesses were non-discriminatory when it came to ethnicity; with the respondent for Company C placing emphasis on meritocracy and equality when it came to recruitment. In contrast to Company A, neither the respondent for Company B nor the respondent for Company C stated that they felt that there are any clear advantages to employing members of ethnic minorities. While it is not possible to generalise from the responses of three companies, the aforementioned pattern of observations seems logical in that organisations that perceive that there are tangible benefits to a diverse workforce may be more likely to implement vigorously a range of practises for ensuring proportionate representation as they have a clear motivation for doing so. The actions taken by Company A with regards to promoting itself to under-represented groups would after all require the outlay of resources. Nevertheless, cost-effective ways for smaller companies to implement an equal opportunities employment policy are available (CRE, 2005a).

Differences in the function of the companies and the manner in which they operate may also have been partly responsible for differences in the frequency with which certain strategies for ensuring representativeness were undertaken. It could be

that the nature of work in the legal sector is such that the different perspectives brought to tasks by people from different backgrounds is more useful than it might be in a manufacturing company where there is perhaps less emphasis on innovative thinking in many sections of the workforce. Also, compared with the manufacturing sector, in the legal sector there will be a greater amount of contact between a company's employees and the (ethnically diverse) end-users of its services, this making it more important for the company to have a multi-ethnic employee profile. Along with the obvious point that a legal company will be more aware of employment laws and want to be seen to be conforming to these laws, such factors may help to explain why Company A was the most active pursuer of diversity out of the three companies.

Since the aim of the wider project of which the data reviewed in the present report was part, had the aim of helping to address ethnic inequalities in post-higher education job-seeking outcomes, the part of the questionnaire asking about perceptions of barriers to employing people from ethnic minorities was considered to be a particularly important part of the questionnaire. However this was also perhaps the part of the questionnaire where the highest level of socially desirable responding might be expected, owing to what might be the perceived undesirability of making statements that may appear critical of people from different ethnic backgrounds (this is particularly true since all three people making responses on behalf of companies were White females). While this does not, of course, mean that responses were contaminated by social desirability considerations, this possibility should be borne in mind. The individual representing Company C stated that there were no barriers to employing people from ethnic backgrounds, apart from the fact that vacancies did not frequently arise in the company owing to the stable workforce. The respondent representing Company B stated that members of some ethnic minority groups may have been put off applying for positions with the company owing to the fact that they produced alcoholic beverages. In such cases it would appear difficult for a company manufacturing a product which the predominant religion of some ethnic groups prohibits contact with to achieve proportionate representation of the relevant ethnic groups in its workforce. As Company B did not at the time of the study have any data regarding the demographic makeup of their workforce it is impossible to comment on the representativeness or otherwise of the proportion of people from ethnic minorities employed by the firm.

Company A suggested that unequal access to education amongst some ethnic groups may be a barrier to many members of such groups reaching the standards of academic attainment required by the company. Like Company C, Company A stressed the importance of merit in the recruitment process, emphasising that, although inequalities in educational provision may exist, it is necessary for the company to hold all applicants to the same high standards regardless of background. The fact that one of the few positive action steps not taken by Company A was that pertaining to the provision of special training for under-represented ethnic groups to prepare them to compete on genuinely equal terms for jobs and promotion, is consistent with the idea that personnel already employed by the company should already possess the ability to compete for jobs/promotion, owing to the high admission standards. Likewise, neither Company B nor Company C stated that they provided special training for under-represented ethnic groups. As previously implied with respect to Company A, this may suggest that the corporate view of these two companies is that such a step would constitute providing employees from ethnic minority groups with preferential treatment. It could also be indicative of a belief that

it is not the responsibility of a private company - which by virtue of being a business is very likely to have the primary goal of maximising profit and which may therefore be less likely to take resource consuming positive action steps that may not be seen as contributing to this aim - to redress societal inequalities.

In summary, there were notable differences between the responses of Company A and those of Companies B and C to the questions posed. Respondents for all three companies explicitly asserted that their companies did not discriminate on the grounds of ethnicity when it came to staff recruitment, but Company A differed from the others in that it appeared to actively pursue an agenda to ensure an equitable ethnic balance, and this balance had been achieved. Possible reasons for this difference pertain to the nature of the work performed by the three companies and the fact that Company A appeared to have a clear motivation for pursuing diversity. Possible barriers to employing members of ethnic minorities were suggested by representatives of Company A and Company B.

All three of the companies participating in the present study were medium-sized or large-sized private sector businesses. Although studies such as that of Connors *et al.* (2004) touch upon the private – public sector divide, it may be fruitful for future research to focus upon differences in desire for diversity between private enterprises and public and non-profit organisations, since, in pursuing diversity agendas which go beyond the prescriptions of legislation, private enterprises by their nature are likely to require justification in terms of corporate profitability for implementing resource intensive policies. This contrasts with the situation in public and non-profit organisations which, while still being limited by available resources, are not primarily motivated by the need to make profits. Similarly, a comparison of the policies of smaller and larger companies along with companies owned/run by White employers and those run by employers from ethnic minorities may also prove fruitful.

Although, by virtue of the fact that their representatives were willing to take the time to complete the questionnaire, the present companies may have had a particularly enlightened view, the present observations are encouraging in that the case of Company A illustrates that given sufficient corporate will and resources, and channelling these into strategies such as those mentioned on the questionnaire used to collect data in the present study, it is possible to achieve an ethnically balanced workforce.

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**Appendix**

**The Employer Questionnaire**



## **Research into Post-Higher Education Job-Seeking Employer Questionnaire**

**This questionnaire forms part of the materials for a research project jointly funded by the European Social Fund and The University of Bolton. The project aims to examine issues surrounding people's job seeking upon leaving Higher Education, from both the job seeker's and the employer's perspective, with a particular emphasis upon ethnicity issues. A major aim of the project is to provide an information and advice pack for people leaving Higher Education, employers, and careers officers.**

**To help us to examine things from the employer's perspective, we would be grateful if you would complete this questionnaire.**

**Please note that your and your company's / organisation's responses to this questionnaire will remain anonymous.**

**If you have any queries either about the questionnaire or about the project as a whole please contact either Dr John Charlton (tel: 01204 903142, e-mail: [jc4@bolton.ac.uk](mailto:jc4@bolton.ac.uk)) or Professor Rob Ranyard (tel: 01204 903421, e-mail: [rr1@bolton.ac.uk](mailto:rr1@bolton.ac.uk)).**

**Section A: Some basic information about yourself**

1. Your age: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Your sex: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Your ethnic origin (please tick or write in a box below as appropriate) :

(a) **White:** British  Irish  Any other White background (please indicate)

(b) **Mixed :** White and Black Caribbean  White and Black African  White and Asian   
Any other mixed background (please indicate)

(c) **Asian or Asian British:** Indian  Pakistani  Bangladeshi   
Any other Asian background (please indicate)

(d) **Black or Black British:** Caribbean  African  Any other Black background (please indicate)

(e) **Chinese**

(f) **Other Ethnic Group (please indicate)**

**Section B: Strategies employed to try to ensure proportionate ethnic minority representation among the employees of your company / organisation**

Except where indicated, by circling the appropriate response, please indicate the extent to which the actions below (that might be part of an equal opportunities policy) are implemented by your company / organisation:

**Advertising Vacancies**

Does your company / organisation...

4. Simultaneously advertise all vacancies internally and externally .....	Always	Sometimes	Not very often	Never
5. Ensure that knowledge of vacancies reaches under-represented ethnic groups internally and externally .....	Always	Sometimes	Not very often	Never
6. Notify vacancies to job centres, careers offices, schools, colleges, universities, etc, with significant minority group rolls .....	Always	Sometimes	Not very often	Never
7. Notify vacancies to minority press/media and other organisations .....	Always	Sometimes	Not very often	Never
8. Include an appropriate short statement on equal opportunities in all vacancy advertisements .....	Always	Sometimes	Not very often	Never
9. Print leaflets detailing job vacancies or promotion opportunities in languages used by under-represented ethnic groups .....	Always	Sometimes	Not very often	Never

## Selection and Recruitment

Does your company / organisation...

10. Keep selection criteria (in job descriptions and employee specifications) under constant review to ensure that they are justifiable on non-discriminatory grounds as well as being essential for the effective performance of the job.....	Always	Sometimes	Not very often	Never
11. Detach personal details (including ethnicity information) from completed application forms before the start of the selection process .....	Always	Sometimes	Not very often	Never
12. Involve more than one person in the selection interview and recruitment process .....	Always	Sometimes	Not very often	Never
13. Ensure that all people involved in the selection interview and recruitment process have received training in equal opportunities .....	Always	Sometimes	Not very often	Never
14. Involve members of ethnic minority groups in the shortlisting and interviewing processes .....	Always	Sometimes	Not very often	Never
15. Involve women in the shortlisting and interviewing processes .....	Always	Sometimes	Not very often	Never
16. Ensure that the content of tests used in selection is completely relevant to the job specification .....	Always	Sometimes	Not very often	Never
17. Record reasons for selection and rejection of applicants for vacancies .....	Always	Sometimes	Not very often	Never
18. Ensure that interview dates do not coincide with important days for under-represented ethnic groups (e.g. Fridays for Muslims) .....	Always	Sometimes	Not very often	Never

**Taking positive action**

Does your company / organisation...

- 19. Encourage under-represented ethnic groups to apply for training and / or employment opportunities with the organisation ..... Yes / No
- 20. Provide special training for under-represented ethnic groups to prepare them to compete on genuinely equal terms for jobs and promotion ..... Yes / No
- 21. Use lawful exemptions to recruit suitably qualified people to cater for the special needs of particular ethnic groups ... ..... Yes / No
- 22. Make efforts to identify and remove unnecessary or unjustifiable barriers to the employment and promotion of under-represented ethnic groups ..... Yes / No
- 23. Provide appropriate facilities and conditions of service to meet the special needs of under-represented ethnic groups ..... Yes / No
- 24. Take steps to ensure that your racial equality policy has a high public profile ..... Yes / No
- 25. Provide mentoring schemes to develop the potential of staff from under-represented ethnic groups ..... .. Yes / No
- 26. Use outreach schemes to encourage under-represented ethnic groups to apply for employment ..... Yes / No
- 27. Allow time off for religious holidays other than Christian events..... Yes / No
- 28. Provide prayer rooms ..... Yes / No
- 29. Allow people time to pray during the working day ..... Yes / No
- 30. Ensure that all people in management or any other supervisory positions have knowledge of ethnic minority customs and cultural differences ..... Yes / No

31. Does your company / organisation have catering facilities?..... Yes / No

If Yes, do the catering arrangements take into account the special dietary requirements of ethnic minority employees? ..... Yes / No

**Keeping personnel records**

Does your company / organisation...

32. Keep a record of all employees' and job applicants' gender, racial origins and disabilities to ensure the effective operation of equal opportunity policies ..... Yes / No

If Yes, what do you use this information for (please give a brief description on the following lines)?

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33. Regularly analyse records to monitor the effectiveness of equal opportunities policies .....Always Sometimes Not very often Never

**Miscellaneous**

Does your company / organisation...

34. Have a written racial equality policy? ..... Yes / No

35. Have a committee or working group that is responsible for implementation of racial equality policy?..... Yes / No



**Section C: Advantages and barriers to employing ethnic minority people in your company / organisation**

On the following lines please list important advantages and barriers with respect to your company's / organisation's employment of members of ethnic minority groups:

Advantages:

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Barriers:

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**Section D: Ethnic minority people in your organisation**

47. Does your company / organisation find it difficult to recruit ethnic minority job applicants for...

a) Unskilled posts .....	Always	Sometimes	Not very often	Never	Not Applicable
b) Skilled posts .....	Always	Sometimes	Not very often	Never	Not Applicable
c) Secretarial / clerical posts .....	Always	Sometimes	Not very often	Never	Not Applicable
d) Professional posts .....	Always	Sometimes	Not very often	Never	Not Applicable
e) Managerial posts .....	Always	Sometimes	Not very often	Never	Not Applicable

48. In general, are ethnic minorities under-represented in your organisation? .....Yes No Don't Know

If you answered 'Yes' to Question 48 please complete questions 48a, 48b, 48c and 48d. If you answered 'No' to Question 48 please go to Question 49.

48a) Why do you think this is?

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(please continue on a separate sheet if necessary)



48d) Do you think there are any steps that the government could take to help your company / organisation to redress this imbalance?

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(please continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

49. If you answered 'No' to Question 48, why do you think your company / organisation has been so successful in achieving a proportionate representation of ethnic minority people?

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(please continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

**Section E: Some information about your company / organisation**

50. What is the main function or activity of your company / organisation (e.g. Local Government, manufacturer, retailer, etc)?

(please indicate) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

51. In which town, city or other geographical area(s) does your company / organisation recruit employees?

(please indicate) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

52. What is the estimated proportion of people from ethnic minority groups in the geographical area in which your company / organisation usually recruits? (Please circle the appropriate response below.)

Less than 1%   1-5%   6-10%   11-20%   21-30%   Over 30%   Don't Know

53. What is the estimated proportion of people from ethnic minority groups in your workforce? (Please circle the appropriate response below.)

Less than 1%   1-5%   6-10%   11-20%   21-30%   Over 30%   Don't Know

54. How many (full time equivalent) staff does your organisation have? \_\_\_\_\_

55. Does your company / organisation recruit people for posts which require a degree level education? Yes / No

56. Does your company / organisation take on graduates for posts that **do not** require a degree? Yes / No

57. Which types of selection methods do you use? (If you use different methods of selection for different levels of post within the company / organisation, please be specific when writing the list on the lines below):

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**So that we can contact you to clarify any issues if necessary and so that we can monitor returns from companies / organisations, please enter your name, post, telephone number, e-mail address and post and company / organisation below:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Position in company / organisation: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of company / organisation: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for completing this questionnaire**

