



**Career Decisions and Job Hunting in the Real World:  
A Self-Help Guide for Ethnic Minority Students and  
Graduates: Introduction and Overview**

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## Foreword

The development of this guide was supported by the European Social Fund (HE ESF Objective 3: *Research into equal opportunities in the labour market*) and the University of Bolton, as part of the work carried out under the project *Perceived discrimination and its effect upon post-higher education job-seeking behaviour*.<sup>1</sup> The project started in January 2004 and ran until August 2006. The main researchers were two members of the University of Bolton's Department of Psychology & Life Sciences, Rob Ranyard and John Charlton, and two research students, Susan Taylor and Audrey Peterson (who left the project towards its end). In addition, Andrea Taylor, a research assistant, Claire Hewson, another member of staff at Bolton, and June Ogden, a consultant with experience of advising unemployed ethnic minority young people, joined the team towards the project's end.

The guide has been edited by Rob Ranyard, Claire Hewson and John Charlton. The *Introduction and Overview*, and *Part 1 to Part 4*, have been specifically written for the guide, mainly by Rob Ranyard and Claire Hewson. John Charlton also contributed to these parts of the guide, and in addition managed the research that informed it. Some of the material in *Part 5* and *Part 6* were contributed by June Ogden, including *Part 5b*. The other sections of *Part 6* were adapted from careers information published by the Association for Graduate Careers Advisory Services, AGCAS, and the Prospects website. These sections were adapted by Anne Higham and Jacqui Hogan of the Careers Service of the University of Bolton, with additional contributions from June Ogden.

The *Introduction and Overview* begins with a brief rationale for a careers guide oriented towards ethnic minority students and graduates. Following this, the stages involved in career planning and job hunting are introduced and barriers to equal opportunities for ethnic minority job seekers are discussed. Three further information boxes deal with the place of ethnic minorities in the UK labour market, and how perceived and actual ethnicity-related prejudice and discrimination may impact on stages in the job-seeking process. The later sections present an overview of the main parts of the guide, including an outline of the self-help career planning and job hunting exercises contained in the guide. Finally, additional sources of careers and job seeking advice are discussed, and a model Equal Opportunities Policy is illustrated in an appendix.

We hope that students and graduates of all ethnic backgrounds will find the guide useful in their search for graduate employment and welcome feedback and suggestions for improving this part of the guide.

## Notes

1. The project web pages can be found at:  
[www.bolton.ac.uk/uni/research/psych/behavior.html](http://www.bolton.ac.uk/uni/research/psych/behavior.html)
2. Contact e-mail addresses:  
[R.Ranyard@bolton.ac.uk](mailto:R.Ranyard@bolton.ac.uk); [C.Hewson@bolton.ac.uk](mailto:C.Hewson@bolton.ac.uk); [J.Charlton@bolton.ac.uk](mailto:J.Charlton@bolton.ac.uk)

## **Introduction and overview of the guide**

### *Why a guide for ethnic minority graduates?*

In an ideal world, job opportunities would be equally open to similarly well-qualified graduates, regardless of personal qualities such as gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic background. In the real world, this is not always the case. Prejudice and discrimination do exist, whether explicit or implicit. This may directly affect a person's chances of getting a job at any point in the career decision making, job hunting, and selection process.

Discrimination on the basis of a person's ethnicity is illegal, and encouragingly there has in recent years been an increasing awareness of and adherence to equal opportunities regulations (e.g. as set out in The Race Relations Act 1976, and The Race Relations Amendment Acts 2000), amongst employers. Furthermore, this awareness has gone beyond a simple compliance with legislation: more and more employers are starting to be both proactive in promoting a culture of equality within the workplace, and to recognise the benefits of taking positive action to develop a culturally diverse workforce. Appendix A presents an example of an organisational equal opportunities policy (from the University of Bolton). Nevertheless, despite such positive developments, prejudiced attitudes may still operate, especially at a subtle level, and may have an impact upon the types of jobs that are accessible to, and the career opportunities available for, ethnic minority graduates. Indeed, research has shown that people from ethnic minority groups, including graduates, do suffer a disadvantage in the UK job market (see further information box 1).

The purpose of the present guide is to provide information about the types of issues that are relevant for ethnic minority graduates, and to offer advice, resources, tools and strategies for helping to obtain a desirable and rewarding job despite these potential difficulties. In particular, while employers' attitudes may impact upon an applicant's chances during the selection process (i.e. application and interview stages), an individual's own perceptions of prejudice and discrimination may also impact upon his or her career choices and job hunting tactics, possibly to a disadvantage. The ways in which actual and perceived discrimination may potentially have an impact at different stages in the career decision and job hunting process is summarised in the next section.

The current guide is intended as a supplement to existing general guides, to provide advice specifically aimed at ethnic minority graduates, who may face additional difficulties compared with the white ethnic majority. It draws upon original data from a linked research project which asked a large sample of graduates about their perceptions of prejudice in the job-seeking process, and gathered information about their job-seeking activities, in an attempt to try and uncover the ways in which such perceptions may have an impact upon career decisions and job hunting tactics. The findings from that study inform and motivate the advice and guidance offered in this pack. The parts of the guide which follow this introduction offer strategies for raising awareness of, and overcoming, potential barriers related to prejudice and discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity.

### *Further information box 1: The place of ethnic minorities in the UK labour market*

Research has shown that ethnic minorities in Britain suffer a disadvantage in the UK labour market. As well as displaying overall higher levels of unemployment than the White majority<sup>1</sup>, ethnic minority adults are also more likely than *similarly qualified* White adults to be unemployed<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, several authors have noted the “over-education” of the ethnic minority workforce in the UK labour market, compared with the White workforce<sup>3</sup>, meaning that ethnic minority employees are more likely to be in jobs for which they are over-qualified. Finally, there is evidence that ethnic minority employees receive lower wage premiums for being over-qualified, and greater wage penalties for being under-qualified, than do White employees<sup>4</sup>. Although evidence indicates that the second generation ethnic minority have closed the education gap, compared with the ethnic majority (the British Indian group actually being more highly educated than the White group), they still appear to suffer similar levels of ethnic penalties in the job market as the first generation<sup>2</sup>. Being UK born, and English language fluent, has been found to raise the likelihood of over-education amongst ethnic minorities<sup>4</sup>.

Thus, the above evidence indicates that the disadvantaged position of ethnic minorities in the UK labour market can not be explained by lower educational levels, and thus cannot be resolved by focusing on educational attainment alone. Indeed, there is evidence that ethnic minority graduates have more difficulty accessing ‘graduate’ jobs than do White graduates<sup>5</sup>. There is also some evidence that ethnic minority graduates tend to graduate with lower degree classifications, which has been shown to be largely explained by their being less well-qualified upon entering higher education (not surprising, given that degree-level education take-up is higher amongst ethnic minorities), and having a tendency to choose subjects in which it is harder to obtain higher degree classifications (less are awarded)<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, some unexplained variance in the degree performance of ethnic minority and White graduates still remains, after taking into account the aforementioned two factors<sup>7</sup>, and it is not clear which other factors may account for this.

*Stages involved in finding the right job, and barriers to equal opportunities that may arise*

Many career choice and job hunting guides exist. For a selection of recommended guides see the list at the end of this introduction. These guides tend to be in general agreement concerning the key stages involved in finding a suitable job. These stages can be summarised as follows:

*Key job hunting stages*

1. Assessing your *skills*: what can you do?
2. Reviewing your *values*: what do you want?
3. Surveying the job market: which sectors may suit you?
4. Exploring job sectors further: matching your skills and values with specific job profiles.
5. Targeting and applying for suitable jobs.
6. Presenting yourself in a way which maximises your chances of obtaining your chosen job.

At each of the above stages, prejudice and discrimination related to ethnic origin, and cultural differences, may play a role (see further information box 2). The general guides available are useful, but often do not consider the role of prejudice and discrimination in these stages and how they may be overcome.

*Organisation of the guide*

The six parts of the guide which follow this introduction address each of the stages of the job hunting process, as identified above, as follows:

**Part 1:** Assessing your skills (stage 1)

**Part 2:** Reviewing your values (stage 2)

**Part 3:** Surveying the graduate job market and identifying suitable sectors (stage 3)

**Part 4:** Matching your skills and values with specific job profiles (stage 4)

**Part 5:** Targeting and applying for jobs – **5a.** Advertised vacancies; **5b.** Speculative application (stage 5)

**Part 6:** Presenting yourself effectively (stage 6)

A key theme throughout is how to turn recognition of the ways in which actual and perceived prejudice and discrimination may impact upon the job-seeking process into a positive resource, leading to the generation of effective and useful strategies to maximise the chance of obtaining a satisfying and rewarding job despite these potential barriers. Further information box 3 provides some additional detail concerning the ways in which *perceptions* of prejudice have been shown to influence job-seeking behaviour and outcomes.

***Further information box 2: How ethnicity-related prejudice and discrimination may potentially impact upon stages in the job-seeking process***

Referring to the six key stages outlined above, prejudice and discrimination is most likely to have an impact during the selection and recruitment process, primarily stages 5 and 6. This could possibly occur because of potential employers' prejudiced attitudes and preconceptions influencing their assessment of an applicant's skills, values, and ability to successfully fulfil an occupational role. It may also occur due to a job seeker's perceptions of discrimination impacting upon the range and type of careers explored, and the jobs selected to apply for (see further information box 3 for expansion). For example, a lack of role models in certain fields which traditionally have a low ethnic minority representation may discourage ethnic minority job seekers from considering entering into that field. A lack of role models could also possibly influence a person's own assessment of their skills, abilities and potential.

Basic and fundamental values can differ between different cultural groups. Whereas a dominant cultural value within mainstream British culture is *individualism* (paying attention to one's own desires and values), certain ethnic minority groups tend to hold more *collectivist* values and beliefs (paying attention to the values and requirements of significant others). A person's values and beliefs will influence what they consider important. Such differences can be relevant to the selection and recruitment process. For example, if an employer holds essentially individualist values, this may bias them against an applicant who expresses values in contrast with this perspective, e.g. collectivist values. Of course, the converse could also occur, an employer holding collectivist values may be biased against an applicant expressing individualist values. If an applicant identifies and remains aware of such potential differences in cultural values, this may confer an advantage in the selection and recruitment process, especially at the self-presentation stage. Further discussion of this issue, and more concrete illustrations of the way in which differences in cultural values may impact upon the selection and recruitment process, is provided in later parts of the guide.

As well as differences in basic, fundamental values, different cultural groups may also have different customs and conceptions of appropriate forms of behaviour, such as in a formal interview setting. Having an awareness of these differences will also give an applicant an advantage in minimising any potential problems which could occur, and possibly lead to a disadvantage in the selection process. Illustrations of such potential influences and their impact are provided in later parts of this guide.

*Further information box 3: Evidence relating to how perceptions of prejudice and discrimination may impact upon career decisions and job-seeking strategies*

While some authors have explained ethnic disadvantages in the UK job market as existing largely due to discrimination in the selection process<sup>2</sup>, consideration of the job-seeking methods used by different ethnic groups has also been highlighted as a potentially important factor<sup>4</sup>. Perceptions of prejudice may influence career choices made, and job-seeking methods adopted. While there is some evidence from US-based studies that ethnic minority university students perceive greater job market discrimination than White students<sup>7</sup>, and that racial discrimination can have an influence upon career-related behaviour and limit the career options that ethnic minority students consider<sup>8</sup>, there has been very little work on this in the UK. In particular there has been a lack of research linking perceptions of prejudice and discrimination with career decisions and job-seeking strategies. Exploring this aspect was a key aim of the linked research study which informs this guide. To summarise the key findings of that study, ethnic minority graduates perceived it as more difficult for members of their own ethnic group to get a range of specified graduate level jobs than did White graduates for members of their own ethnic group. Also, there was some evidence that ethnic minority graduates' choices of jobs to target were more influenced by the experience or possibility of discrimination, compared with White graduates. However, there was no strong evidence that perceptions of discrimination by ethnic minority groups led to less effective job-seeking methods, or reduced success in obtaining graduate level jobs. These results are encouraging, though it cannot be assumed that perceptions of prejudice will not have a negative impact on the job seeking methods or success of some graduate job-seekers. Closer inspection of individual cases in the present study did indicate that although the ethnic minority graduates who volunteered to take part clearly did perceive prejudice and discrimination against members of their own ethnic group, and even in specific instances against themselves personally, this did not prevent them from targeting and applying for jobs within their chosen field, and persisting until they achieved success. Some of these individual case studies are presented later in this guide, as positive examples. Whether or not the graduates who took part in the present study are typical of graduates more broadly would require further investigation. Nevertheless, they provide useful role models.

### *Exercises offered*

The current guide also offers a set of supporting self-help and assessment exercises to assist in the job seeking process. These exercises consist both of already existing tools and resources, and tools developed as part of the previously mentioned research study which informs the guidance and advice offered here. These exercises and tools are as follows (those marked \* are also available as computer-based exercises on the accompanying CD rom):

1. An exercise for assessing your skills (stage 1).
2. A job search confidence questionnaire\* (stages 2 to 6).
3. Exercises for assessing your basic values and more specific occupational values\* (stage 2).
4. An exercise for surveying the graduate job market and identifying sectors to explore further (stage 3).
5. An exercise for matching your skills and values with specific job profiles (stage 4).
6. A job search diary exercise, used in the present research project, as a tool for keeping a record of progress, evaluating achievements, and the ongoing job-search situation\* (stages 5a and 5b).

### *Recommended career guides*

Below is a selection of useful careers guides, with brief descriptions. The first guide listed is aimed specifically at ethnic minority job-seekers, while the others are more general.

1. CRAC (2006). *GET 2006 Guide for Ethnic Minorities*. London: Hobsons.

The *GET 2006 Guide for Ethnic Minorities* is a most useful source of information for ethnic minority graduates and students. It gives an overview of a range of career areas, discusses important recruitment issues and gives useful job hunting advice. It also contains a compendium of employers, and a selection of them have advertised by presenting a profile of their company, together with information on the application process and profiles of ethnic minority graduates who work for them.

The career areas covered in the guide all have a positive approach to diversity in the workplace: science, engineering and technology; finance (accountancy, investment banking and insurance); the public sector (teaching, the NHS, local government and the fire service); law; and the armed services. In his article *Diversity and graduate recruitment today* Gary Woodward says that the public sector and finance have a particularly active diversity agenda nowadays. He lists several diversity aware employers in these areas, including MI5 and HM Prison Service, as well as employers in the law and other areas.

As well as diversity awareness, the guide presents useful discussions of what the Race Relations Act means for ethnic minority job seekers, their expectations and attitudes and the business case for diversity.

The guide offers some very useful job hunting advice. For example, it recommends looking out for targeted diversity events, such as those advertised by the civil service at [www.faststream.gov.uk](http://www.faststream.gov.uk), and discusses the value of mentoring schemes such as that offered to Asian solicitors, barristers, trainee solicitors, pupils and law students (see [www.societyofasianlawyers.com](http://www.societyofasianlawyers.com)) and of minority-ethnic professional networks such as African and Caribbean Diversity ([www.acff.org.uk](http://www.acff.org.uk)). Rachael Ross, in her article *Targeting the right employer*, recommends that job seekers target employers with a positive attitude towards diversity, by checking out their publicity literature (are minority-ethnic employees and customers visible?), their website (does it include a section on diversity?) and its recruitment literature (any positive minority-ethnic employee case studies?). She also recommends checking whether the employer is a member of Race for Opportunity ([www.raceforopportunity.org.uk](http://www.raceforopportunity.org.uk)) which exists to promote diversity in the workplace.

Finally, the guide contains useful advice on where to go for careers support, mentioning in particular the following websites:

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

2. Hawkins, P. (1999). *The art of building windmills: Career tactics for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Liverpool: Graduate into Employment Unit.

This guide presents a number of key ‘tactics’ for finding your ideal job. The sections on ‘focusing your skills’ and ‘revealing the hidden jobs market’ are especially useful. Throughout, the guide emphasises building up confidence by learning to recognise and value the skills and abilities you possess, as well as learning to be able to communicate and present these effectively to potential employers. Tips on how to construct an effective CV, and how to perform well at interviews, are given. A number of useful exercises are provided to help in achieving the above goals.

3. Leach, J. (Ed.) (2005). *The Guardian guide to careers*. London: Atlantic Books.

The bulk of this guide consists of an alphabetical directory of *industries*, that is job sectors, or fields, within which you may find a profession to suit you. For example, the guide starts with ‘Advertising, marketing and public relations’. A very useful overview of each industry is presented, covering the range of job roles available within that industry, and roughly what these entail; the qualifications and training needed; how difficult it is to enter into the industry; and the average graduate starting salary. A selection of useful contacts is also provided, along with some useful ‘online reading’ resources for each industry listed. Sections on ‘corporate culture’ and ‘ethical questions’ are also included where these are of particular relevance. This book also offers chapters on how to decide what type of job would suit you, and how to go out and get a job once you have decided what you want to do (including useful sections on locating jobs to apply for, dealing with interviews, constructing a CV, dealing with rejection, and so on).

4. Lees, J. (2005). *How to get a job you’ll love*. London: McGraw-Hill.

The initial chapters of this book focus on deciding which career is right for you. Emphasis is on deciding what you want out of a job, and how to make a choice that will ultimately lead to a fulfilling and rewarding working life. An exercise to help you identify your 'career hot buttons' (elements which are important to you in your career decisions) is given in chapter five. Exercises for assessing your skills and values are then provided. Strategies and exercises for exploring different 'fields' of work are then presented, with an emphasis on how to narrow down the range of fields to a manageable selection that could suit you. Subsequent chapters then provide guidance on searching for and applying for jobs, including sections on how to uncover the 'hidden job market', how to perform effectively at interviews, and how to construct a CV. A list of useful websites is provided in Appendix 2, and useful books and other resources in Appendix 3.

5. Widmer, J. (2002) *The Penguin careers guide* (11<sup>th</sup> Ed.). London: Penguin.

The main function of this guide, like the Guardian careers guide, is to provide an overview of the range of industries available, to be considered when making initial career decisions and narrowing down options. In a similar way, the main careers are presented in alphabetical order (starting with accountancy). The entry qualifications, type of work, different job roles, training opportunities and professional awards and qualifications, and useful follow-up contacts for further information are provided for each type of career. Also, the opportunities for late entry into the career, taking a career break, obtaining part-time work, and the position of women are considered. A useful section on 'personal characteristics' is also provided, which outlines the type of person that would most likely be suited to the career in question. Unlike the Guardian guide, this one does not provide advice on the process of targeting and applying for specific jobs. However, it does include some useful introductory discussion of equal opportunities legislation, specifically in relation to sex discrimination, and considers the related topic of late start careers, and returning to work after a career break (women being more likely to encounter such issues due to taking time off for pregnancy and childcare). It also reviews the British qualifications system, and provides a section on how to fund your studies. A list of organisations which can offer career advice and guidance, and a list of useful related publications are also provided. Rather than competing with the Guardian careers guide, this guide may in many ways be considered as complimentary, in that it offers advice and information which supplements that provided in the former, both guides taking a somewhat different, but equally useful, angle on the career selection and job seeking process.

## Endnotes

1. Jones, T. (1993). *Britain's Ethnic Minorities: an Analysis of the Labour Force Survey*. London: Policy Studies Unit.
2. Heath, A., McMahon, D. & Roberts, J. (2000). Ethnic differences in the labour market: a comparison of the samples of anonymized records and Labour Force Survey. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 163(3), 341-361.
3. Alpin, C., Shackleton, J.R. & Walsh, S. (1998). Over and under-education in the UK Graduate Labour Market, *Studies in Higher Education*, 23, 17-34.
4. Battu, H. & Sloane, P.J. (2004). Over-education and ethnic minorities in Britain. *The Manchester School* 72( 4), 535-559.
5. Connor, H., La Valle, I., Tackey, N.D. & Perryman, S. (1996). Ethnic minority graduates: differences by degree. *Labour Market Trends*, September, 395-6.
6. Leslie, D. (2005). Why people from the UK's minority ethnic communities achieve weaker degree results than whites. *Applied Economics*, 37, 619-632.
7. Turner, B.F. & Turner, C.B. (1975). Race, sex, and perception of the opportunity structure among college students. *The Social Science Quarterly*, 16, 345-360.
8. Swanson, J.L., & Fouad, N.A. (1999). *Career theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## **Appendix: Equal Opportunities Policy, University of Bolton**

### *Introduction*

The University is committed to equality of opportunity in education and employment. It expects that all staff and students alike will contribute to and actively support the University in working towards the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality of opportunity in terms of access to the University's services, employment opportunities and support for students in their welfare and education.

We welcome diversity of origin, background and experience amongst the staff and student community as enriching the experience of all those who participate in the life and work of the University.

### *Compliance with Legislation*

The University will comply with the following legislation:

- The Disabled Persons (Employment) Acts 1944 and 1958
- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- The Race Relations Act 1976 (As amended by the Race Relations Amendment Acts 2000)
- The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Other than in exempt categories)
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Additionally, the University will take account of such codes of practice as are produced by the statutory bodies created under the above legislation.

### *Elimination of Discrimination*

In addition to gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, marital status and disability and others which are covered specifically by legislation, the University is also committed to the elimination of discrimination on the grounds of age, sexual orientation, religious belief, social and domestic background. No applicant, student, member of staff or visitor will receive less favourable treatment on the above grounds or will be disadvantaged by conditions or requirements which have a disproportionately adverse effect on his or her group which cannot be shown to be justifiable other than on the grounds stated.

With respect to staff, selection criteria and procedures will be frequently reviewed to ensure that individuals are selected, promoted and treated on the basis of their relevant merits and abilities and that no issues which are irrelevant to the needs of posts, as properly specified, are considered as part of selection or promotion processes. Disabled applicants who meet essential selection criteria in the opinion of the full selection panel will not be subject to assessment in competition with other candidates at the shortlisting stage and will automatically be invited for interview.

The University will endeavour to ensure that all of its statements are made in non-discriminatory language.

### *Promotion of Equal Opportunities*

The University is committed to the promotion of equal opportunities in a positive way and to the establishment of a culture of equality of opportunity which goes beyond

simple compliance with legislation and extension of the principles of legislation to other disadvantaged groups.

The University will not only endeavour positively to encourage members of under represented groups to approach the University whether it be for employment or education services, but it will also investigate any reasons why such groups would not find the University a receptive and supportive environment and, where appropriate, will allocate resources and take remedial action.

All members of staff and students will be expected to conduct themselves with proper respect for others and for their lawful choices. Mechanisms will be put in place to deal with overt acts of harassment and/or discrimination.

All employees will be given equal access to career development opportunities and, where appropriate and permissible under legislation, employees of under represented groups will be given training and encouragement to achieve equal opportunity within the University.

As concerns students, the University will seek guidance from the professional and other bodies with expertise in areas in which it particularly seeks to promote equal opportunities and will liaise constructively with student representatives with specific responsibility for equal opportunity issues.

The University will maintain staff and student records for the purpose of monitoring the success of its equal opportunity policy, with particular reference to levels or penetration of under represented or disadvantaged groups within the workforce (and its divisions and strata) and within the student body (and its main areas of study).