



Barriers to progression:

The experience of black and minority ethnic staff in further education

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Skills for Learning Professionals

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Executive summary

Introduction

In 2002 the Commission for Black Staff in Further Education (CfBSFE) published a report on the under-representation of black and minority ethnic staff in the sector. The report made a series of recommendations designed to empower black and minority ethnic staff to aspire to leadership positions and to enable the further education sector to address the issues in relation to the under-representation and career progression of black and minority ethnic staff.

Recent data (Lifelong Learning UK, 2010) suggests that despite the implementation of equalities legislation and various initiatives to support the progression of black and minority ethnic groups, black and minority ethnic staff are still under-represented in management and leadership roles in the further education sector, despite often being more qualified than their white counterparts.

The evidence indicates a clear need for a more in-depth investigation of the issues that might deter the development and/or progression of skilled black and minority ethnic staff in the further education sector, which this small-scale research project sets out to achieve.

Methodology

The research adopted a mixed methods approach and involved:

- a literature review of previous research, policy documentation and reports
- a total of 21 one-to-one interviews with black and minority ethnic staff, black and minority ethnic individuals who have left the further education sector, members of human resources staff, stakeholders and trade union representatives who work with the further education sector
- four focus groups with black and minority ethnic staff who work within the further education sector.

Key findings

Current 'state of the sector' on race equality

- The findings from this project indicate that in many ways the barriers to career progression for black and minority ethnic staff are already well documented, and that the main problem has been the lack of action taken over the last decade to fully address the situation.
- Importantly, black and minority ethnic staff in this research identified racism and discrimination as still prevalent and posing a barrier to their progression. Some research participants talked of being excluded from the organisational culture and that the policies and procedures in relation to implementing equalities' legislation are in some organisations ineffective in implementing cultural or structural change. These findings indicate that while the sector may have moved forward somewhat in implementing equalities' legislation more needs to be done to implement cultural and structural change.
- It was also noted that while there are more black and minority ethnic staff in senior management positions in the further education sector than ten years ago, these numbers are far from reflective of the black and minority ethnic population nationally and even further from reflecting the black and minority ethnic learner population.
- The current and future 'state of the sector' on race equality is likely to be shaped by public spending cuts. In particular there was a fear amongst participants that public spending cuts in the further education sector may have a significant impact on black and minority ethnic staff by reducing the commitment of some organisations to address equality and diversity issues. This is likely to impact on staff from diverse backgrounds, making them feel less valued because the importance of an ethnically diverse workforce is made less evident.
- In addition, while the full impact of funding cuts remains to be seen it is likely to impact on black and minority ethnic staff's ability to progress in the future due to less funding made available for professional training and development. It is therefore a real possibility that any progress that has been made to date towards improvements in the recruitment, retention and progression of black and minority ethnic staff within the further education sector may slow down or even be reversed.

Black and minority ethnic staff experience across the sector

- A key element in the understanding of participants' experiences is the issue of exclusion via the organisational culture, which is perceived as being based on a predominantly white set of values. It would appear, from the evidence in this small-scale study, that little has changed since the CfBSFE report in terms of the way that black and minority ethnic staff experience working in the sector. There continues to be issues relating to informal recruitment practices which continue to exclude black and minority ethnic staff, and factors such as having different accents and surnames were described as often playing a part in recruitment; staff described being excluded from promotion or job opportunities because of their accent or stereotyped because of their names. This form of racism was described as much harder to challenge due to being covert.
- Participants felt strongly that black and minority ethnic staff should be treated as a diverse group of individuals often with very different cultural and religious backgrounds, and different languages and ethnicities. It was noted that there is sometimes a failure on the part of organisations and senior managers to recognise staff from diverse backgrounds as not one homogenous group but a very diverse group with multiple identities, different cultural and religious backgrounds, languages and ethnicities. In some instances black staff groups can be successful in taking these differences into account and promoting these across the organisation.

- There is some evidence to suggest that colleges with a significant black and minority ethnic workforce may be less susceptible to racism and discrimination, and that the organisational culture in larger organisations may be more receptive towards the views of black and minority ethnic individuals and equality and diversity issues in general.
- Gender-related issues were mentioned throughout the research, highlighting the different experiences of female and male black and minority ethnic staff with the organisational culture at a senior management level being seen as largely male-dominated acting as a barrier for female staff. Informal practices and a lack of support and flexibility served to disadvantage minority ethnic women and some female staff spoke of outdated attitudes and views towards them from male senior managers, including black and minority ethnic male managers. For those black and minority ethnic women who did succeed to senior management level it was at considerable cost such as working longer hours.

Barriers to progressions for black and minority ethnic staff

- Black and minority ethnic staff taking part in this research identified racism and discrimination as the main barrier to their recruitment, retention and progression. This racism and discrimination can manifest itself in both covert, as well as overt ways, such as white college staff persistently ignoring black and minority ethnic staff or being excluded from information regarding career progression opportunities.
- Issues of discrimination and racism often focused on white senior managers, line managers and HR staff who may pose barriers to career progression for black and minority ethnic staff. There was a feeling amongst some of the research participants that some white senior managers were reluctant to promote black and minority ethnic staff to senior positions in order to protect their own positions. However, there was also evidence to suggest that their behaviour in treating black and minority ethnic staff differently may in some cases be due to cultural ignorance rather than deliberate intent. These findings may provide some explanation to the findings of the CfBSFE report that recruitment and promotion is in some instances racially-biased to the disadvantage of black and minority ethnic staff.
- Tokenism was identified as a barrier where some organisations consider they have appropriate and effective equality and diversity policies in place when in fact it is not the case. This may be due to a lack of awareness of these policies and a lack of action from senior managers. Although the Equality Act 2010 has effected some change in policies and procedures in a few further education organisations, the perceptions by some black and minority ethnic staff interviewed were that in some colleges this may be a token rather than genuine effort to implement the Act.
- Reflecting on the barriers internal to black and minority ethnic staff, participants felt that black and minority ethnic staff may lack confidence due to previous negative experiences in the workplace which have reduced or “shattered” their confidence. Participants noted that black and minority ethnic staff may lack confidence in their own abilities and their ability to challenge the views of line managers or senior managers, in particular if these views related to the abilities of black and minority ethnic staff. In addition, black and minority ethnic staff may lack confidence in the ability of their organisations to facilitate the progression of black and minority ethnic staff.
- Lack of confidence may therefore pose a barrier to career progression in a complex manner that is closely and directly linked with the external/organisational environment. This means that black and minority ethnic staff may not progress in their careers in the same way that white staff are able to.
- The impact of the barriers experienced by black and minority ethnic staff is wide-reaching, impacting on the health and wellbeing, and their immediate and longer term career prospects. The evidence from this research clearly indicates that black and minority ethnic staff can be adversely affected by discrimination and racism which is mainly attributed to stress, constant scrutiny, being discriminated against and having to work harder.

- Even when working harder than their white counterparts black and minority ethnic staff still struggle to progress; this is especially the case for black and minority ethnic staff who have reached middle management level. This means that significant proportions of black and minority ethnic staff may be prevented from being able to progress their careers and move up the hierarchy within their organisations.

Reasons for black and minority ethnic staff leaving the sector

- The Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) report (2008) found that there is a low retention of black and minority ethnic staff within the sector and that this is primarily based on black and minority ethnic staff feeling ignored, stressed and not able to progress in their careers. The findings from this research echo these findings and indicate that based on their experiences of racism and discrimination, some black and minority ethnic staff leave the further education sector, often due to stress factors but also due to the frustration at a lack of career progression and recognition for their efforts and achievements.
- Black and minority ethnic staff also often noted that their organisation had not adequately supported them in relation to complaints and grievances, again indicating that there has been little progress since the publication of the CfBSFE report in 2002. Addressing issues related to racism and its many forms was identified as a real concern for many research participants which was particularly evident when dealing with policies and procedures in terms of complaints and grievances, which black and minority ethnic staff found at times unsupportive and ineffective.
- Several explanations as to why organisations did not support black and minority ethnic staff in making complaints or putting forward grievances of racism were made. These include senior managers being frightened of addressing race equality for fear of using the wrong terms and not knowing how to talk about it, and line managers feeling that it was the responsibility of HR. HR staff themselves often have a focus on maintaining an orderly working environment and are reluctant to tackle issues of conflict, indicating that there is nobody to take on the responsibility of dealing with complaints and grievances. This means that black and minority ethnic senior managers may not be able to sufficiently support other black and minority ethnic staff for fear of showing favouritism or increasing their own sense of isolation within an organisation.
- There is also evidence to suggest that it may be advantageous for black and minority ethnic staff to move to bigger organisations where there are more black and minority ethnic staff and therefore possibly a more inclusive work culture, which may be more conducive to career progression. This highlights the uneven and varied support for black and minority ethnic staff, and indicates that if left unchallenged this uneven support may increase as more black and minority staff move to bigger organisations, with smaller organisations being increasingly 'white'.
- In order to address these reasons for black and minority ethnic staff leaving the sector, and to ensure that valuable people from diverse backgrounds are not lost to the sector more needs to be done by organisations to understand their motives for leaving. Many black and minority ethnic staff who leave said they had not been asked, even though to do so would assist organisations in retaining their staff.

Overcoming barriers, tackling race equality and promoting good practice

- In order for black and minority ethnic staff to succeed in progressing in their careers various strategies have been adopted to overcome barriers. These include developing confidence and using initiative. However, for many staff this was not always easy to do as their confidence had been reduced or "shattered" based on previous negative experiences.
- In addition, some black and minority ethnic staff thought that to succeed they required more qualifications and experience than their white counterparts. Other black and minority ethnic staff referred to having to adapt to their organisation's environment by changing their identities and that this was necessary to fit into the predominantly 'white' culture that was present in their organisation.

- It is evident that the most important supporting factor in black and minority ethnic staff being able to overcome barriers is a line manager who can act as an informal mentor or role model and guide the way to career progression.
- However, in order for line managers to provide support that will genuinely benefit black and minority ethnic staff in their career progression, structures need to be in place for the line managers themselves to be supported, and there is a need for whole organisational change in the organisation's culture.
- It therefore seems that race equality needs to become a priority for senior management teams as in order for real change to be made in addressing the inequalities that currently exist, there needs to be the will and the commitment to instigate it, and this needs to come from senior managers. The whole organisation needs to take responsibility for culture change, and that can only happen if policies and practices are enforced all the way down the organisation. This includes the need for clear lines of responsibility involving the roles of both senior management and human resources, to ensure that all staff including line managers adhere to and promote equality and diversity policies.
- A crucial part of an improved whole organisational strategy and culture is a fair recruitment and promotion process. For example, it was noted that HR professionals play an important role in career progression for black and minority ethnic staff as they are responsible for recruitment policies and staff development within an organisation. They can ensure that detailed feedback is offered to unsuccessful applicants to enable them to develop, and that an organisation's policy provides feedback in a consistent way.
- There was also a feeling amongst participants that funding and inspection agencies could do more to encourage the development and enforcement of policies. Trade union organisations were not often mentioned spontaneously by black and minority ethnic staff, many of whom were more likely to seek advice and guidance from other external bodies, such as the Network for Black Professionals (NBP). However, where trade unions were mentioned by participants, they highlighted the staff development information that was on offer. Trade union representatives felt that their union did offer advice and support aimed at black and minority ethnic members, but that they often knew little about it, and that more still needs to be done to highlight the role of trade union organisations. These findings indicate that trade unions may have moved on since the findings of CfBSFE report (2002), which noted that trade unions sometimes did not have the expertise or knowledge to address race issues and support black and minority ethnic staff. However, it is clear from this research that trade unions may need to move on further to promote their expertise and knowledge and actively support black and minority ethnic staff.
- Training and continuing professional development were also mentioned as being very important for black and minority ethnic staff to enable them to acquire the necessary skills to perform their job roles successfully and to progress in their careers. In particular, as confidence building is an important aspect of training, there seems to be scope in the short-term for considering coping and resilience strategies for the barriers and issues that currently exist in the sector.
- In addition, softer skills such as interpersonal, leadership and organisational skills can often be more difficult for black and minority ethnic staff to acquire as they have less access to the experiences in which they are learnt. This emphasises the importance of mentoring schemes, secondments and work shadowing.
- Whilst participants want to progress in their careers because they are the best person for the job, there were mixed views about the role of positive action, as they wanted to succeed in a role by being the best person for the job and by not being perceived as having had special treatment. Specifically, there was concern that there is a low awareness and understanding of positive action in organisations which was often not correctly applied and which can therefore lead to cynicism from white staff, and greater isolation of black and minority ethnic staff. However, if organisations committed themselves to positive action fully, and the processes were embedded into recruitment and selection processes in a transparent way, then it could have a positive impact.

- In order to promote good practice in race equality across the sector partnership working was found to have a positive impact as organisations can learn from each other and provide support and advice to each other and work locally to support staff. The ideas suggested of twinning providers and of setting up networks and partnerships with local interest groups were both seen to have been helpful.
- Examples of good practice that could be promoted across the sector included ensuring that detailed feedback is offered to unsuccessful applicants to enable them to develop, and ensuring that an organisation's policy provides such feedback in a consistent way. Other examples include HR circulating information that would be of use to black and minority ethnic staff, for example the newsletters of relevant black and minority ethnic specific organisations, and training and development opportunities.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been identified for different stakeholders as ways to tackle and eradicate racism and discrimination in the further education sector:

Sector bodies and stakeholder organisations

- publicly acknowledge the current situation and re-open the dialogue to tackle racism
- establish equality standards which are enforced by Ofsted and criteria is embedded into the Common Inspection Framework
- government departments work collaboratively and with their sponsor departments, to challenge negative stereotypes and assumptions about black and minority ethnic people
- organise a programme of dissemination events, conferences and expert seminars to support sector organisations to develop effective policies and practices in the areas of race equality
- ensure that public spending cuts do not disproportionately disadvantage black and minority ethnic staff. This can be achieved through for example equality impact assessments on redundancy and restructuring policies.

Further education providers

- have the confidence to discuss race equality openly and thoroughly and to be prepared to acknowledge that there may be existing issues within their organisation.
- have clear and effective race equality policies in place
- identify clear lines of responsibility and accountability for these policies
- equality impact assess policies, procedures and practices to ensure that they are not indirectly (or directly) advantageous to white staff and to see where policies and practices can be modified to ensure black and minority ethnic staff are actively encouraged and supported
- work in partnership with sector organisations, such as the NBP, AoC, ALP
- work in partnership with other providers to learn from best practice in supporting black and minority ethnic staff
- publicise and increase awareness across organisations that more needs to be done to promote a fully inclusive culture.

Senior managers and governing bodies

- be committed to race equality and act on implementing strategies to create an inclusive culture
- put strategies in place to address under-representation in the workforce at all levels and monitor progress made at regular intervals
- Build and maintain the confidence of black and minority ethnic staff e.g. through mentoring and work shadowing.

HR staff

- continue to provide and increase the availability of black and minority ethnic staff groups and support networks to build staff confidence
- introduce positive action initiatives to support recruitment and progression of black and minority ethnic staff
- ensure HR actively support black and minority ethnic staff progression
- provide support for black and minority ethnic staff to access training and the acquisition of formal qualifications, by providing courses, funding and time off work to attend courses
- establish the reasons black and minority ethnic staff leave the sector and agree strategies to address the issues
- work with sector bodies and trade unions to ensure that gender does not impact on staff recruitment, retention or progression
- consider policies such as flexible working to support black and minority ethnic women with caring responsibilities
- monitor the gender composition for middle management and senior management to ensure female representation.

Introduction

Despite a range of policy initiatives, effort and commitment over the past decade, the most recent statistical data (Lifelong Learning UK, 2010) indicates that staff from black and minority ethnic groups are still under-represented in management and leadership roles in the further education sector.

The results from the Annual Workforce Diversity Profile have prompted the need for a more in-depth investigation of the issues that might deter the development and/or progression of skilled black and minority ethnic staff in the further education sector i.e. further education colleges, work based learning and adult and community learning providers. Although the Annual Workforce Diversity Profile uses data related to the college workforce from Staff Individualised Record (SIR) data and focuses solely on further education colleges, it is likely that the profile in work based learning and adult and community learning will be similar or perhaps worse, and is likely to mirror the experiences of black and minority ethnic staff in colleges.

The 2007/8 Annual Workforce Diversity Profile reported that 8.5 per cent of the further education workforce was identified as being from a black and minority ethnic background. Of these, only 1.8 per cent occupied a senior management role, compared with four per cent of staff from a white ethnic background. Further analysis was undertaken to identify whether the qualification levels of black and minority ethnic staff were a contributing factor to under-representation at this level. It was found that 61.8 per cent of black and minority ethnic staff held qualifications at National Qualifications Framework (NQF) levels 6 and above, compared with 53.1 per cent of staff from a white ethnic background.

In 2002, the Commission for Black Staff in Further Education (CfBSFE) published a report on the under-representation of black and minority ethnic staff in further education colleges and the instances of institutionalised racism reported by them. The report made a comprehensive series of recommendations designed to empower black and minority ethnic staff to aspire to leadership positions and to enable further education providers to address the under-representation and career progression of black and minority ethnic staff. As a consequence of this report, the Black Leadership Initiative (BLI[®]) was established to introduce practical measures that would improve career development opportunities for black and minority ethnic managers working in the further education sector. The BLI[®] is now the training and development arm of the Network for Black Professionals (NBP) a key partner of the Workforce Race Advisory Group¹ set up to shape and inform workforce development in the further education sector, challenge racism and break down barriers to progression for black and minority ethnic staff.

Lifelong Learning UK, supported by the Race Equality Implementation Group, commissioned this research to provide a 'snapshot' of the barriers to progression for black and minority ethnic staff in the further education sector and to consider the progress that may have been made since the CfBSFE report. The research is a small scale study, taking into account the views of 26 black and minority ethnic staff, five black and minority ethnic staff who have left the sector, five black and minority governors, five black and minority principals, and five stakeholders (human resources (HR) staff and trade union representatives). The main aims of the research are to:

- obtain a clear position on the current 'state of the sector' on race equality (including organisational policies and procedures related to recruitment, development and progression and representation on governing bodies)
- understand the black and minority ethnic staff experience across the sector

¹The group has since been renamed as the Race Equality Implementation Group

- identify perceived or actual barriers to progression
- understand why black and minority ethnic staff leave the sector and their destinations
- identify how further education organisations tackle race equality in their organisations
- identify positive action initiatives and their impact on under-representation
- promote existing good practice across the sector
- make recommendations to organisations and sector stakeholders to address the findings.

In order to achieve these aims a range of issues related to the barriers that black and minority ethnic staff may face were considered, including the perceptions of a 'glass ceiling.' This led to an exploration of how the barriers can be addressed by considering factors that enable progression, identifying examples of good practice and the skills and competencies that have contributed to success for black and minority ethnic staff. In addition, reasons that prompted some staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds to leave the sector were considered.

The focus of the research is on the workforce and governing bodies of the further education sector (colleges, work based learning and adult and community learning providers) in England only.

This report is intended to be of interest to all who work and study in the further education sector, including further education colleges, work based learning and adult and community learning providers.

Report structure

The report includes a brief overview of the research methodology and a brief background section, which provides the context for the project. The research findings are organised around the following themes:

- Organisational barriers to recruitment, retention and progression
- Internal barriers to recruitment, retention and progression
- The experience of black and minority women
- The effects of public spending cuts
- The impact of barriers for black and minority ethnic staff
- Possible ways to address barriers
- How some black and minority ethnic staff have overcome barriers.

Quotes from the interviews and focus groups are used throughout the report to illustrate the issues and to make it engaging and relevant to the further education sector and providers.

Research participants are referred to as further education staff (which includes staff from colleges, work based learning and adult and community learning), HR staff, or trade union representatives. Where possible, without compromising anonymity additional details are given, such as provider type.

The final section of the report provides conclusions and recommendations for the further education sector and its partner stakeholders.

Methodology

This small-scale research project was carried out using a mixed method approach. The methods applied were deemed the most appropriate to enable a thorough comprehension of the issues and to elicit the views of a wide range of participants including black and minority ethnic staff from a variety of roles and levels and other relevant stakeholders. The methods adopted were:

- a literature review of previous research, policy documentation and reports
- a total of 21 one-to-one interviews with black and minority ethnic staff, black and minority ethnic individuals who have left the further education sector, members of HR staff and trade union representatives who work with the further education sector
- four focus groups with black and minority ethnic staff who work within the further education sector.

In order to maximise participation and to ensure the participants were as representative as possible, the project was publicised using various media including the project team's websites and through stakeholder organisations. A one-page brief outlining the aims of the research and encouraging individuals to take part was distributed to sector organisations for promotion.

The data gathered was analysed and the findings are summarised in the following sections of the report. The analysis focused on identifying common themes, and contradictory themes, and developing an interpretation of these patterns and findings. Where appropriate quotes have been included to illustrate the issues and all responses have been anonymised. The findings are presented without prejudice and reflect the issues raised in the analysis of the various data sets secured. When considering the findings it is important to bear in mind the small sample size, indicating that views and experiences of participants taking part in this research may not represent the views and experiences of all black and minority ethnic staff within the sector.

For a full description of the methodology, including participant profiles, please refer to the Appendix.

Research issues

From the planning stage of this project, it was evident that the aims and issues to be addressed may provoke strong opinions. There was a general sentiment amongst many black and minority ethnic staff that similar research had already been undertaken, that recommendations to address barriers had previously been made, but that no significant action to implement recommendations had yet been taken. Despite this frustration many staff and stakeholders were very keen to be involved in this project, and some individuals made direct contact with the research team to volunteer to take part. In addition, some staff who were not able to take time out of their working day contributed to the project by providing comments via email.

Many research participants expressed strong views and described negative experiences that they often had not previously shared for fear of any negative impact on their careers, family and social life. A fear of being identified was therefore common, making confidentiality and anonymity for all research participants a vital aspect of this project. As such, none of the comments included in this report are attributed to any one individual, either through the opinions they gave, or through reference to their job title. Some participants also requested that their identities were further disguised by omitting the type of provider and/or work location.

Whilst the interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded, several interviewees requested not to be recorded as they considered it may make them more easily identifiable. Some staff invited to take part in

focus groups preferred to be interviewed on a one-to-one basis rather than share their experiences with other participants.

The issues around anonymity and confidentiality are themselves evidence of the sensitive nature of the research into barriers to progression for black and minority ethnic staff and indicate the significance of this research and the findings obtained.

Background to the study

Institutional racism was first officially acknowledged following the publication of the Macpherson Report (1999) on the inquiry into the murder of the black teenager, Stephen Lawrence. Subsequently it became apparent that a radical rethink was required in the way in which public sector organisations operated and the way they were addressing discrimination and racism. The report triggered the enactment of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 introducing the Race Equality Duty, which placed a legal obligation on public bodies to actively promote equality and good relations, in addition to eliminating discrimination.

Around the same time, the Labour government established a number of public sector floor targets (minimum targets) to monitor progress towards addressing issues of disadvantage and inequality, which included measures such as educational achievement, participation in the labour market, health and poverty. These were based on research, including that carried out by Pathak (2000) for the Department of Education and Employment which found:

“A clear pattern of continuous under achievement for certain ethnic groups which starts in early education, continues through further and higher education and persists in the labour market” (Pathak, 2000: 1).

Currently 11 per cent of the UK population and eight per cent of the UK workforce describe themselves as being from a black and minority ethnic background. In addition to this three per cent discrepancy between the workforce and the wider population, black and minority ethnic workers are *“disproportionately concentrated in lower-paying jobs and under-represented among higher occupational scales”* (UNISON, 2010).

Whilst there is evidence to suggest that the employment participation gap for people from a black and minority ethnic background has narrowed in the past decade (DCLG, 2010), recent labour market statistics suggest that black and minority ethnic groups remain less economically active than white British groups and experience a significantly higher level of unemployment (Barrett, 2010). In addition, graduates from black and minority ethnic backgrounds appear to experience higher levels of unemployment following graduation than their white counterparts, indicating that higher levels of education do not necessarily equate to higher levels of employment for people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds (Pathak, 2000). More recent longitudinal studies have confirmed that this higher level of unemployment persists with time (HESA, 2007).

In employment, black and minority ethnic people continue to face obstacles that do not appear to exist for most of their white counterparts. For example, when considering entering the teaching profession in schools, Cunningham and Hargreaves (2007) found that overseas-trained teachers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds faced difficulties and were often retained as supply teachers for long periods of time without the security and status of a permanent contract. A recent project by the Refugee Council found that the experience and qualifications of refugee overseas-trained teachers is often not recognised and/or valued by schools. This

can be exacerbated by the role recruitment agencies play, as they are often conducted as private businesses and as such not subject to the public sector equality duties (Refugee Council, 2010).

Ethnicity and employment in the further education sector

In 2002, the CfBSFE published a report highlighting the under-representation of staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds at management and senior management levels in the further education sector. By 2004 the situation had failed to improve, with the NBP noting that almost 150 colleges had no governors from black and minority ethnic backgrounds (NBP, 2004). More recently, the Annual Workforce Diversity Profile report 2007/08 (Lifelong Learning UK, 2010) found that people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds account for 8.5 per cent of the further education college workforce. The overall numbers of black and minority ethnic staff working in the further education sector showed a small increase of 0.7 per cent over the period 2005/6 to 2007/8 from 7.8 per cent to 8.5 per cent of all staff. However, the proportion of black and minority ethnic staff was significantly below that of the black and minority ethnic student population, which was 21 per cent in 2007/08. Workforce data collection for adult and community learning and work based learning providers is currently being collected, but is as yet not sufficiently reliable to be included in this report.

Black and minority ethnic staff working in further education colleges have historically been more likely to be employed on casual or fixed term contracts and to be employed on a part time basis. The Annual Workforce Diversity Profile report 2007/8 (Lifelong Learning UK, 2010) suggested that the picture has not changed significantly.

Leadership and management

According to the Annual Workforce Diversity Profile data, staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are also likely to be better qualified than their white counterparts but despite this, they continue to be under-represented in management positions (CfBSFE, 2002). Although the Commission used a different data set in 2001 and caution needs to be used when making direct comparisons, the published SIR data for 2007/8 suggests that although the gap has narrowed slightly, there remains a significant difference in progression to leadership and management positions between staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and their white colleagues.

The NBP reported the number of principals from black and minority ethnic groups increased from two in 2002 to 13 in 2010. However, a further 25 principals (making a total of 38) would need to be appointed to ensure that the profile of senior leaders in the sector more accurately reflects the UK population overall and a further 59 (making a total of 72) to reflect the college student population.

Experiences of black and minority ethnic staff in the further education sector

The Commission for Black Staff in Further Education Report

The literature on the experiences of the black and minority ethnic workforce in the further education sector remains dominated by the work of the CfBSFE published in 2002, almost a decade ago. The report was based on the views of 200 staff working in further education colleges in England in 2000 from both black and minority ethnic and white British backgrounds. The key findings from the report are summarised below:

- Equality policies do not always work in practice because there are no clear codes of practice. This means that policy implementation can be uneven and inconsistent, particularly in relation to grievances and performance appraisals.
- Under-representation of black and minority ethnic professionals in leadership and management positions may be inadvertently influenced in subtle ways. Photographs of leadership teams and board members

displayed in reception areas of organisations which depict teams of a white ethnic background for example may indicate to visitors, potential staff and students that individuals from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are not able to progress to these positions.

- Concerns over racially-biased internal and external recruitment and selection, particularly during restructuring and mergers. Discrimination is reinforced by the undervaluing of non-traditional qualifications and overseas experience, the use of inconsistent and ineffective equalities monitoring data, and informal recruitment practices. The appointment of senior management positions often involves governors with little or no equalities training, and who are unlikely to be from a black and minority ethnic background.
- Racial stereotyping and discrimination is significant and black and minority ethnic staff are under pressure to prove themselves and take on a disproportionately heavy workload.
- Complaints and grievances related to bullying and harassment are not taken seriously; there is a lack of transparency in processes relating to complaints and grievances with staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds often feel isolated.
- In some instances trade union branches do not have the expertise or knowledge to address race issues and support staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. This leads to staff from these groups being reluctant to join a trade union or existing union members not receiving appropriate advice. However, the report noted some positive work by some trade unions into race equality, for example in publicising that racism exists and the need for it to be tackled.

Following the Commission's report, the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES) commissioned the Office for Public Management (OPM) to undertake a scoping exercise to assess the interventions that would be necessary to improve the diversity profile of the further education sector (DfES, 2006). The study reviewed work that had been undertaken since the publication of the Commission's report to support greater diversity in the sector. This largely critical study of the sector's track record on making progress on workforce reform found that institutional practice to widen the diversity of the workforce was highly variable.

In 2008, the Centre for Excellence in Leadership ((CEL), which is now part of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)) revisited these issues to identify how far the position of black and minority ethnic staff had changed. The report published by CEL echoed the Commission's report in that many black and minority ethnic staff still felt ignored, had low morale and were keen to leave the sector. The staff described their experiences as feeling trapped beneath glass, or even concrete, ceilings and of not being able to win promotion on merit as they believed that promotion was achieved through informal networking, from which they felt excluded (CEL 2008; Cassidy, 2003).

Exploring reasons for low levels of retention of both white and black and minority ethnic staff more closely, Wilson et al (2005) noted that many left the sector due to stress and a desire for greater job security. Comparing the experiences of staff from both white and black and minority ethnic backgrounds, Wilson et al found that staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds were more likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs and therefore more likely to be actively applying for other jobs. More recently, the Annual Workforce Diversity Profile for 2007/8 (Lifelong Learning UK, 2010) observed that the number of people leaving the sector was over two per cent higher as a proportion of the workforce for black and minority ethnic staff than for white staff, indicating that black and minority ethnic staff may continue to face greater challenges in their employment than white staff.

Staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds continue to be underrepresented in management and leadership roles (Lifelong Learning UK, 2010) which can lead to low morale and a desire to leave the sector (CEL, 2008). This indicates that despite much research, effort and commitment over the past decade, black and minority ethnic staff still face barriers in their career progression that ultimately lead to their leaving the sector. There is little research exploring destinations of black and minority staff who leave the sector and whether and why their experiences are improved in their new places of work.

The relationship between black and minority ethnic status and gender

Despite the increased numbers of women from all ethnic backgrounds joining the labour force, women continue to be underrepresented in senior managerial positions and in public office (EHRC, 2010). In 2007, women, who make up the biggest proportion in the further education sector workforce, are over-represented in first line management roles, but under-represented at senior management levels (LSN, 2007).

There is extensive literature which indicates that women, and in particular black and minority ethnic women, face obstacles in their careers not faced by their male counterparts. A report by the Women's Leadership Network (WLN) and LSN (2010) found a lack of flexible working opportunities and a culture surrounding senior management positions that assumes that staff are available for work at any time, which is often not suited to those with caring responsibilities. Family commitments also present a problem if relocation, regular travel and long hours is required as part of taking up a senior role. For women from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, family commitments were often more of an obstacle as they were more likely to have dependants and in the case of black women more likely than other groups to be lone parents whilst working full-time (WLN & LSN, 2010). As such, women from black and minority ethnic backgrounds may encounter a double glass ceiling reflecting the greater difficulty to progress in their careers compared to white women or men from black and minority ethnic groups), particularly as they consider that the image, presence, leadership and communication style of white women is more positively perceived in the workplace (The Diversity Practice, 2007).

While family commitments remain important for women, the literature also indicates that many women, particularly from Black Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds, feel that their aspirations and abilities are obscured by an organisational culture characterised by outdated stereotypes and generalisations, which lead to them being discriminated against during recruitment and promotion (The Diversity Practice, 2007).

Interventions to address barriers

At the level of policy and practice, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) took responsibility for developing the response to the Commission's findings which led to the establishment of the BLI[®]. This is now the professional development arm of the NBP, funded through an annual tendering process to deliver positive action professional development programmes for black and minority ethnic staff working in the further education sector. The BLI[®] adopted an inclusive sectoral approach to professional development by developing mentoring programmes for aspiring managers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds that harnessed the knowledge and skills of largely white, progressive senior leaders working in the further education sector.

Equality and diversity training

The importance of equality and diversity training for all staff is frequently referred to and is a significant part of DfES (2002) publications that followed the CfBSFE report. In particular it is noted that equality and diversity training should be mandatory, tailored, relevant and effective. Training needs to be targeted at senior managers and governors as a lack of appropriate training targeted at these roles can reinforce discriminatory practice. It is also important to remember that there is often resistance amongst staff to change, and that training is needed in how to handle racist incidents (Dadzie, 2003).

Informal networks

It is evident that aspiring managers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds often lack access to those informal networks that can play an important role in career progression (CEL, 2008; Roberts, 2008). Taking the importance of informal networks into account the BLI[®] has pioneered mentoring schemes for aspiring senior managers and leaders from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Evaluation of the work of the BLI[®] (CSK, 2007) indicates that approximately 70 per cent of participants have achieved career progression in some form since their contact with BLI[®] programmes and that all attribute this, in some way, to the support provided by

the BLI® and the NBP. As further evidence of the impact of the Network's Positive Action programmes on the career progression of black and minority ethnic professionals in the sector, internal and external evaluative studies have also been undertaken (Zahno, K. et al, ,2004 ; Ecotec, 2005; NBP, 2006; NBP 2007). These attest to the quality and effectiveness of these programmes, which are delivered in partnership with LSIS (NBP, 2004) and which have been highlighted in the Foster Review (2005) and the Further Education White Paper (2006).

Organisational and leadership development

The report published by CEL (2005) acknowledged the challenges posed by the CfBSFE's work and noted that recent research had suggested that there were sufficient numbers of black and minority ethnic managers at second tier and middle management level coming through to change significantly the characteristics of senior leadership in colleges in the future (NBM, 2004), but that more work needed to be done to support these staff.

A number of themes picked up by the Foster Review (DfES, 2005) noted the continuing disparity between the ethnic profile of the student body and that of the leadership of both colleges and further education sector bodies. The Review identified a number of recommendations in this area including a proposal to independently review recruitment processes for chairs of further education colleges, and the use of senior executive search services in order to increase the number of black and minority ethnic candidates presenting for interviews in non-executive and senior management roles.

Following on from the Foster Review, the CEL report (2008) described the key characteristics of a “*black and minority ethnic friendly*” college as one with:

- effective staff induction
- the presence of individuals from black and minority ethnic backgrounds in senior positions
- high status training on equality and diversity
- a clear and meaningful complaints procedure to deal with issues of racist behaviour supported by an effective disciplinary process
- acceptance by college management of variations in dress and personal presentation
- strong and effective black and minority ethnic staff groups
- access to work placements and shadowing opportunities
- support for appropriate positive action initiatives
- active leadership for equality and diversity issues from senior managers.

These characteristics underpinned the report's recommendations which focused on the responsibilities of the CEL as the sector body responsible for improving the quality of leadership and management. They also underpinned the work of Lifelong Learning UK to support workforce reform and provide relevant policy, research and statistical advice to the sector and the key role of individual provider organisations to provide leadership and direction at the local level (Gervais, 2009).

Positive action

One of the notable features of the CEL Succession Planning study (CEL, 2008) was the overwhelmingly positive opinions expressed by participants about the quality and benefits of positive action programmes. As noted earlier, CEL had given strong leadership on equality and diversity issues and, in 2004, the BLI®, funded by the LSC and located in the Association of Colleges, was relocated in the CEL as a targeted programme of leadership support for black and minority ethnic managers. CEL also funded and supported the NBP in the development of a wider range of positive action professional development programmes for black and minority ethnic staff, including programmes targeted at junior managers (e.g. 'First Steps to Leadership') and others for black and minority ethnic managers capable of making the next step into the post of principal (the 'High Fliers' programme).

Inspection process

The CfBSFE report noted the relatively weak link between the inspection process and equality and diversity practices adopted by providers. Ofsted (2005) published a report on the progress of colleges in this area and identified that there were few colleges that were active and systematically promoting race equality, with particular gaps in staff and governance. In order to promote equality and diversity through the inspection process, in 2009 Ofsted introduced a new Common Inspection Framework (CIF) for the further education sector in which the category of equality and diversity became a 'limiting grade' in the assessment of providers' leadership and management performance.

Perceptions of diversity

Perceptions of diversity are often too narrow, which hinders barriers to progression to be fully addressed. For example, Lumby (2005) found that perceptions of diversity were focused largely on removing practices which unfairly hindered groups and which inhibited access to progression. Less common was an understanding of cultural difference and the need for a dialogue between management and staff. Subsequent studies have confirmed the ambiguity of the sector's commitment to embracing diversity at a strategic level (Morrison et al, 2007). The problem of self-identity is also identified as a barrier to progression to leadership for visible minorities who perceive that they would be required to suppress and change aspects of their identity in order to be considered for leadership positions (Morrison et al, 2007).

In one of the few accounts of ethnicity experience in the further education sector that is not based on further education organisations, Hunter describes how black and minority ethnic staff struggle with the contradictions that arise from the maintenance of their racial identities and community authenticity once they accept an 'insider' institutionalised status as a manager in an ACL organisation (Hunter, 2006).

The need for further research

Over the last ten years there have been several reviews and reports published to promote equality and diversity in the further education sector to improve the career aspirations and trajectories of under-represented groups, including black and minority ethnic staff. Many interventions, initiatives and strategies have also been implemented with some success. However, despite these interventions, recent statistics taken from the SIR data suggest that the gap still remains for staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds in terms of leadership and senior management roles.

This small-scale study explores the current issues around the barriers to progression that this group of staff may face in order to review the extent of the progress, and to further promote and encourage good practice across the sector. Within the current economic climate of reduced public spending, it is also important to consider the impact these cuts have on barriers to progression faced by black and minority ethnic staff. It is hoped that this small-scale study will act as a pilot for a more comprehensive, wide-ranging study to explore barrier to progression and necessary actions for black and minority ethnic staff to progress.

Organisational barriers to recruitment, retention and progression

Key findings

- Black and minority ethnic staff taking part in this research identified racism and discrimination as the main barrier to their recruitment, retention and progression. Racism and discrimination can manifest itself in both covert, as well as overt ways, such as white college staff persistently ignoring black and minority ethnic staff or being excluded from information regarding career progression opportunities.
- Participants in the research felt strongly that black and minority ethnic staff should be treated as a diverse group of individuals who often had very different cultural and religious backgrounds, and different languages and ethnicities.
- There is some evidence to suggest that colleges with a significant black and minority ethnic workforce may be less susceptible to racism and discrimination, and that the organisation culture in larger organisations may be more receptive towards the views of black and minority ethnic individuals and equality issues in general.
- A key element in the understanding of participants' experiences of racism is the issue of exclusion via the organisational culture, which is perceived as being based on a predominantly white set of values which black and minority ethnic staff spoke of the difficulties of trying to fit in.
- Participants noted that accents can play a significant part in recruitment with black and minority ethnic staff often describing being excluded from promotion or job opportunities because of their accent. Personal names can also be a reason to be "*under the spotlight*" with some black and minority ethnic staff describing experiences of being stereotyped and not shortlisted because of their names.
- Related to the experience of discrimination during recruitment is the experience of research participants that job descriptions are sometimes written in a way that may disadvantage black and minority ethnic staff, such as not being written in plain English which can make it difficult to clarify to match their skills against.
- Tokenism was identified by participants as a potential barrier where some organisations consider they have appropriate and effective equality and diversity policies in place when in fact it is not the case. This may be due to a lack of awareness of these policies and a lack of action from senior managers. Although the Equality Act 2010 has effected change in policies and procedures in some further education organisations, the perceptions by some black and minority ethnic staff interviewed were that in some colleges this may be a token rather than genuine effort to implement the Act.
- Forums for staff to discuss any barriers, programmes and initiatives relevant to black and minority ethnic staff may be tokenistic in that the issues discussed in this forum are not acted upon. For equality initiatives, such as staff groups and diverse recruitment panels, to be effective, they must have a legitimate role within the organisation.
- Some white senior managers may pose barriers to career progression for black and minority ethnic staff, by not only being reluctant to recruit staff from diverse backgrounds but also some black and minority ethnic staff may be reluctant to join, for fear of being bullied.

- Some participants noted that white senior managers are fearful that their superiority would be challenged, while other participants noted that the behaviour of white senior managers was based on a cultural ignorance coupled with a lack of confidence in how to talk informally to people from different cultures.
- Black and minority ethnic staff often cited stress as the main reason for leaving the sector, which is often associated with the feeling of not being adequately supported by their organisations in relation to complaints and grievances.
- Several explanations were suggested as to why organisations did not support black and minority ethnic staff in making complaints or putting forward grievances of racism and discrimination. These included senior managers being apprehensive of addressing race equality; line managers feeling that it was the responsibility of HR; HR being averse to managing conflict in relation to racism, and issues related to trade unions having to act for both victims and perpetrators.

Participants' perceptions and experiences of racism and discrimination

The participants who were consulted as part of this research identified discrimination and racism as the main barriers to their recruitment, retention and progression. The view of one member of staff was that *“racism is alive and well in the sector.”*

Several staff described examples of vacant posts and career opportunities as not being advertised openly but used instead to ‘reward’ members of staff for longstanding service. It was suggested that these internal promotions favoured white members of staff who were often groomed by their managers to fill vacant, more senior, posts. Black and minority ethnic staff felt that they were often excluded from these opportunities for progression because they did not have the same close relationships with their line managers or the support networks which are available to white staff:

“There is a way of how promotions occur in our institution that favours whites, jobs aren’t advertised openly and whites get more support in being groomed for them.”

These findings support previous research (CEL, 2008; CfBSFE, 2002) which found that black and minority ethnic staff often lack access to informal networks, sometimes described as ‘informal cronyism’, which can negatively impact on their career progression.

Job descriptions can sometimes be used to reinforce institutional racism as they are not always clearly written using straightforward language which can disadvantage some black and minority ethnic staff. Some participants felt that this may prevent some staff from applying even though they may be suitably qualified.

The research found no evidence to suggest that the locality of the organisations (urban/rural) or their size had a significant impact on whether an organisation is perceived to be more or less institutionally racist. However, one HR staff member considered that where institutions did have significant numbers of black and minority ethnic staff recruited to the workforce that college procedures were more likely to be updated to ensure greater inclusivity. This may suggest that colleges with a significant black and minority ethnic workforce may be less susceptible to racism. In addition, there is some evidence to suggest that the organisational culture in larger organisations may be more open towards the views of all staff and more supportive of equality and diversity.

Many interviewees suggested that accents can play a significant part in the recruitment of black and minority ethnic staff. One college principal noted, *“I have a British accent. If I’d had a strong accent I wouldn’t have got my position.”* Another principal agreed, saying that he got his position during a lunch with governors and thought that if he had not had a British accent he would not have got the position.

One focus group participant told a story of a colleague who came from India and had taken a specialist course in English to enable her to get a job. She was placed on a low level course even though she knew she could do the higher level:

“They didn’t listen to her and it was because she had a strong accent. It held her back six months and it’s a big thing if you want to get a job and be independent.”

This study indicates that the racism, as described by and experienced by participants in this study, may not always be obvious, and the barriers to progression, retention and recruitment for black and minority ethnic staff can be more subtle and less obvious such as that described by one member of staff describing the atmosphere in college as often very “chilly”: *“It’s definitely covert... God knows what they’re saying behind my back.”*

Participants in one staff focus group did not refer openly to racism but preferred to talk about discrimination, agreeing that *“discrimination was always indirect rather than direct.”* For example, they thought that black and minority ethnic staff may be persistently ignored, rather than directly targeted with racist comments. These participants felt that black and minority ethnic staff were discriminated against not primarily because of their race, but for being different in some way, such as having a different religion. One participant from a Black African background who had lived in the UK all her life, and belonged to the Christian faith did not generally feel discriminated against, but was aware of other Black Africans who did.

Another participant only felt comfortable being in one department if a friend who works there was with her. She described her experience of discrimination as something that the *“majority tolerates, the minority embraces.”* In general participants felt that this kind of covert discrimination was difficult to pinpoint making it harder to deal with. This point was recognised by one HR staff member interviewed who suggested that if an organisation uses a narrow definition of racism it may mean that racism will not be fully challenged.

For other black and minority ethnic staff taking part in this research discrimination is expressed in the form of various types of prejudices and stereotypes but it was thought that black staff may experience more negative behaviours because they were more visually different. Additionally for many people, names are associated to their ethnicity:

“People who you don’t know come up to you and address you by name because your name means you are black.”

Black and minority ethnic staff thought that this kind of prejudice could have an impact on the recruitment process. These findings resonate with research carried out by Woods et al (2009) into recruitment practices and the impact of recruiters’ perceptions around ‘white’ surnames as opposed to black and minority ethnic surnames. Woods et al found that applications from candidates with typically white names were significantly more successful in being shortlisted than applications with typically black and minority ethnic names, even if their applications were identical.

Prejudices and incorrect assumptions are sometimes based on the physical appearance of Asian, black and minority ethnic staff. One principal stated that in one of his previous roles as a senior FE college manager, an Ofsted inspector interpreted their ‘terms and language in a racist way’. He explained that during an inspection and a discussion about the community and widening participation, it was assumed that he was talking about the Asian community when he was talking about the community as a whole. This principal is an Asian. However in his then senior role he had corporate responsibilities with the whole community and as such his conversation with the Ofsted Inspector was not shaped by his Asian ethnicity but by his senior FE manager identity. This example shows the importance of being aware that identities are complex and they can change in relation to the circumstances and the role of the person in society.

This perception of black and minority ethnic staff as one homogenous group was discussed at length in one staff focus group where participants commented on being grouped together with other black and minority ethnic staff as *“one big lump of something that is different from being white.”* These participants felt strongly that they were a diverse group of individuals who often had very different cultural and religious backgrounds, different

languages and ethnicities, and, agreed with the comment by one participant: *“the idea that all black and minority ethnic staff are somehow similar, have the same needs and thoughts is a racist one.”*

These sentiments were echoed by one HR staff member who noted that in the further education college where she worked, there had been a black staff group, but this had been discontinued as black and minority ethnic staff were not attending and had expressed a desire for issues discussed in the group to be included in general staff meetings. This HR staff member noted that in her college black and minority ethnic staff often did not want to be *“singled out and made to be different.”* Therefore the provision of a black staff group had been unsuccessful and may have had the effect of further isolating black and minority ethnic staff. However, it must be noted that generally black staff groups in organisations can be successful. The CfBSFE report (2002) noted the importance of black and minority ethnic staff groups and highlighted that they can be effective if they have a formalised, legitimate role within the organisation, and a well organised and focused remit. The report highlighted the importance of senior management buy-in and the need for staff groups not to be tokenistic but to provide support and guidance for black and minority ethnic staff.

How organisational culture may pose a barrier for black and minority ethnic staff

A key element in understanding participants’ experiences of racism is the issue of exclusion via the organisational culture. Being from a black and minority ethnic background is seen as a reason for being excluded from normal every day conversations and discussions about job opportunities. In a focus group with staff, one participant explained how she felt excluded:

“My institution isn’t at all prestigious, but they act as though it’s a white boys’ club. I can’t progress beyond my middle management level because the whole culture above me is one that I can’t be part of because of my skin colour.”

Other participants commented that in order to progress their careers they needed to adopt certain behaviours to fit in with senior staff, although they were convinced that even if this happened they *“would never truly fit in.”* The perception of not fitting in was also echoed in a focus group with governors describing their organisations as similar to *“an old boy’s network”* that was based on a clearly white culture and set of values. They thought that it is a culture that does not expressively exclude black and minority ethnic staff, but to fit in, one has to display certain behaviours that conform to the white majority view. Research carried out by Morrison et al (2007) and Hunter (2006) supports this view, with Morrison et al recognising the need for black and minority ethnic staff to change their identities to a more white identity to enable them to take on leadership positions whilst Hunter mentions the struggle that some staff have with trying to reconcile their identities at work as well as in their home and social lives. The CEL report (2007) also recognised that staff often feel unable to express their true identities. For some this may mean that once they accept an ‘insider’ organisational status they lose their community authenticity (Hunter, 2006).

In two different focus groups participants explained how in their organisation only white staff were informed about promotion opportunities and that important information regarding career progression was talked about surreptitiously rather than openly as described by the following two quotes from black and minority ethnic staff participants:

“There is a ceiling for BME [staff], as BME staff are not told about jobs because they don’t have the same level of informal contact and so don’t hear about opportunities.”

“I had a white counterpart with the same job role who started a few months ago, while I had worked in that role for four years. I walked into a conversation my white counterpart was having with a more senior colleague who was advising her how to get into teaching. I was never given this information and if I hadn’t walked in on the conversation would never have known about it.... It made me feel bad because I had never been considered as suitable for teaching or having any aspirations... It makes you wonder what other information I missed out on.”

Similarly, one senior manager explained how in her organisation only white staff were informed about promotion opportunities and that this occurred through informal chats and socialising that she was not part of, nor felt that she could be part of:

“I’m not informed about promotion opportunities... This happens informally when I’m not around as I’m not part of that culture... It’s white and I can’t be part of it.”

These findings are similar to those of the CfBSFE report, which highlighted that many staff come to know about opportunities for progression via informal networks, rather than through formal recruitment processes which can discriminate against black and minority ethnic staff who often lack access to informal networks.

Staff talked about the impact of not being informed about promotion opportunities as being very “demoralising” and in “taking away your confidence.” Many spoke of white senior managers not being willing to encourage the work culture to be more inclusive towards black and minority ethnic staff commenting that:

“Senior managers have no interest in changing their work culture as this would make them less superior.”

Other participants were less critical about the behaviour of white senior managers, explaining that they encountered a cultural ignorance coupled with a lack of confidence in how to talk informally to people from different cultures:

“Black and minority ethnic staff are treated differently to white staff because white senior managers don’t know how to treat BME staff. They don’t know which box to fit them into and they are less easy to talk to as they may have a different culture or religion. There is less ease of informal conversation.”

“White colleagues are more easy talking with each other, they talk about their culture and normal day-to-day things. My life is different and I think they don’t know how to talk to me.”

While the size and location of an organisation does not seem to have an impact on the prevalence of racism, there is some evidence from the focus groups with staff and from the interviews that the organisational culture in larger organisations is more open towards the views of black and minority ethnic people and more supportive of equality and diversity issues in general. From interviews with members of HR staff it seems that this may be because many larger further education organisations which often employ more black and minority ethnic staff are located in urban areas with a larger general black and minority ethnic population and are likely to have more learners from diverse backgrounds. While this does not necessarily prevent racism or discrimination, it does often mean that the culture of an organisation is more accepting of difference.

“It’s not about the size of institutions... but in general larger institutions are better at including BME staff in their organisational culture because they have more BME staff and students, and it comes naturally to them.”

Tokenism and not acting on equality and diversity policies

There was much mention of tokenism related to equality and diversity issues and this was noted as a barrier for black and minority ethnic staff that was described by a trade union representative as being “difficult to address through equality legislation and often falls through the net.” This interviewee went on to talk about initiatives and policies at individual organisations suggesting that whilst they may seem like good practice, they may not necessarily translate into improved practice but may actually be a barrier to recruitment, retention and progression for black and minority ethnic staff:

“Having initiatives and policies in place may make college management complacent as they think nothing more needs to be done.”

One staff member interviewed commented that her college has a forum for black and minority ethnic staff where they are able to discuss some of the barriers, programmes and initiatives relevant to them. The forum had been created in response to an equality audit and was used to flag up good equality practice. However, the

interviewee added that the issues discussed in this forum are not acted upon which makes the group effectively tokenistic. Consequently she felt that the forum had been set up by the college to publicise their efforts to be inclusive rather than to address the needs of black and minority ethnic staff. These feelings were echoed by others including one staff member who commenting on her college's practices said that they were:

“Quite good at celebrating diversity but when it comes to the recruitment drives or the nitty gritty of staff I think we fall down on stuff. But there will be a drive to put one BME [staff member] on all recruitment panels.”

Many of the staff interviewed considered tokenism was commonplace in their organisations and that being asked to take part in recruitment panels or important meetings was not always for the right motives:

“Sometimes, I don't know if I can say this, but you do get a sense sometimes that you're making up the numbers, you know, and it's something you can only feel if you're from a BME background.”

The research suggests that efforts to be inclusive towards black and minority ethnic staff members are not always perceived as genuine attempts to support the progression of black and minority ethnic staff, and, as the CfBSFE report (2002) recognised, for equality initiatives to be meaningful, they need to have a legitimate role within the organisation.

During the focus group with governors there was a lively discussion of the impact of the Equality Act 2010 and how this may provide opportunities to change the predominantly white culture in further education colleges. The legislation had brought about some changes in policies and procedures and had had an impact on the recruitment and promotion of black and minority ethnic staff. However, there was a sense that some colleges may be making a token effort rather than initiating real change:

“Because of the Equality Act coming out recently it's gone a bit 'OTT' in terms we have to tick every single little box, we've got to have BME staff on every panel. I was on a panel and I felt quite honoured but then I thought, ohhh I am ticking that box.”

Similarly there was a feeling that while equality and diversity training is provided by colleges, it is not always a compulsory part of staff training. As such staff who may have worked in the college for a number of years may have never attended the training and there is no pressure from the college management to ensure that all staff do so. Whilst equality and diversity may be included in meeting agendas, many black and minority ethnic staff felt this had little meaning which can itself act as a barrier when organisations consider they have the right policies and procedures in place when this may not be the case in practice.

In addition, where organisations did have equality and diversity policies in place, there was often a lack of awareness of the application of policies and a lack of action on policies from senior managers. Several individuals commented that their organisations have the right policies in place to try and ensure there are no obvious barriers, but they fail in being pro-active in encouraging and developing their black and minority ethnic staff as one trade union interviewee outlined:

“Often all the policies are in place and we've worked successfully with college management to put these in place, but they aren't used in practice... Often there is a lack of awareness of policies and how they should be applied.”

How some senior management may pose a barrier for black and minority ethnic staff

While the organisational culture as a whole and the prevalence of tokenism were identified by participants as barriers to career progression, there is also evidence that individuals in senior management positions can also present difficulties in terms of moving on to more senior posts. In particular, two black and minority ethnic senior managers interviewed suggested that some senior managers may be protective of their own positions

and that by including staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds in their group it might in some way jeopardise their own positions:

“Managers are always protective of their position and they don’t want to be pushed into a position where they are the minority... they are more happy with what they know and that means other white managers.”

The two senior managers interviewed noted that they were the only staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds in the senior management team, and felt that the white senior managers did not actively encourage other black and minority ethnic staff progressing to this level.

In addition to white senior managers acting in a way which appeared to protect their own position, the predominantly white culture of the team may act as a barrier. One interviewee revealed that that he would not want to join the senior management team because he felt that he:

“May be bullied and the culture is not familiar to me... The senior management team culture is a totally white culture and it’s not for me.”

If there were one or two other members of staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds in the team he would consider a senior manager role as a position to aspire to. Similar thoughts were expressed in a focus group where staff recognised that:

“One or two BME staff in senior management is not sufficient as they will be bullied into submission and will have to conform to the dominant white culture.”

This confirms the findings outlined in the CfBSFE report (2002) with black and minority ethnic staff feeling the pressure to conform to a ‘white culture’ through bullying and harassment, particularly more senior staff. It is therefore evident that in order to encourage more black and minority ethnic staff to succeed there needs to be a drive to proactively change the composition of senior management teams to make them more diverse and inclusive. There is also a need to address the perception of an exclusive culture at this level if we are to be successful in attracting diversity to senior management. This is and will continue to be a significant challenge to every organisation.

Insufficient handling of complaints and grievances

Although organisational structures were seen as the main barriers to progression for the majority of participants, it was sometimes difficult to separate these from personal barriers. When participants explained their experiences, there was a tendency to link the two. For example, one participant in a staff focus group when describing dealing with a complaint or grievance talked about the importance of having the confidence and support to challenge authorities, line managers or senior managers, as well as the need to have appropriate structures in place. She revealed that not being able to effectively deal with racism had caused her to leave her employment and that in doing this she was not alone.

While Wilson et al (2005) found that staff leaving the further education sector often do so because of stress, their findings indicate that this stress is related mainly to a heavy workload. This project indicates that for staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds the reasons for leaving the sector are often related to stress, but that this stress is often associated with feeling unsupported by their organisations in dealing with complaints and grievances. One black and minority ethnic senior manager, who moved organisations several times early in his career, described his experience as being “so stressed about not being able to speak out against discrimination.”

Another interviewee, talked about the impact of not being able to put in a grievance on his career:

“I haven’t been confident to put in a grievance even though I have been treated in a racist way by my line manager. Instead I left the employment and this wasn’t good for my career progression. I know of BME staff who have left their jobs because of racism and were unemployed for a while.”

There was an agreement amongst focus group participants and staff interviewees that support for black and minority ethnic staff to deal with racism or discrimination was often inadequate at best and non-existent at worst. It therefore seems that there is a certain *“inability of the organisation to do anything”* and that if black and minority ethnic staff wanted to challenge racism they had to rely on support *“on a personal level, such as from other BME staff who have experienced the same thing”* rather than from their organisation.

While putting forward a complaint or grievance is no doubt challenging and stressful for any member of staff, there is some indication that it may be particularly difficult for black and minority ethnic staff as they may not always have family support. In one focus group discussion staff recognised that for some black and minority ethnic staff they fear that they would be deemed to have failed if they admit to having experienced bullying and are therefore often reluctant to share their experience with family and friends. This can often be the case for second generation immigrants where it was recognised their parents may have worked hard to enable their children to progress and have a *“better life.”* To avoid disappointing their parents, there is a sense therefore of not wanting to share their negative work experiences. This can in turn mean that for some black and minority ethnic staff they are further isolated and alone in dealing with racism and discrimination.

Focus group participants and interviewees offered several explanations, outlined below, as to why their organisations did not support them in making complaints or putting forward grievances of racism:

- Senior managers are reluctant to address race equality because they are unsure of what terms to use and how to talk about it;
- Line managers and senior managers feel that dealing with racism and discrimination is the responsibility of HR, and they therefore do not act;
- HR staff are too focused on ensuring a calm working environment and are therefore averse to conflict that may arise when dealing with racism;
- Trade unions having to act for both victims and perpetrators;
- Trade union organisations can be susceptible as any organisation to racism.

“Compromise agreements” are regarded as easy options. For example, several black and minority ethnic staff noted that they had been asked to *“forgive and forget”* racist comments and behaviour and that HR and senior managers often aim to seek a compromise between accuser and accused rather than actually tackling racism.

These views indicate that there is no clear line of responsibility in dealing with racism, which means that *“the stick of dealing with racism just gets passed round and round and nothing is ever done.”*

Black and minority ethnic senior managers stated that they feel uncertain as to the best way to support other black and minority ethnic staff who experience racism, and that sometimes they feel *“threatened and intimidated”* by other senior managers which leads them to be cautious in supporting other staff in case it is perceived as favouritism:

“You feel that if you support and encourage BME staff then it’s frowned on by senior managers because you’re favouring your own... I’m careful not to get too involved if there are issues around racism.”

As a whole, almost all black and minority ethnic staff interviewed or who took part in focus groups noted that they did not talk about racism in their organisations for fear that this would further isolate them and that they would not be listened to as the following comments demonstrate: *“racism is unchallenged”* and *“nobody wants to talk about it or acknowledge that it exists.”* This in turn makes it difficult for black and minority ethnic staff to confront racism.

There is evidence from one staff member who held a trade union branch position that even trade unions can be reluctant to deal with claims of racism. She commented that her trade union very rarely used the word 'racism' because they are afraid that it is too contentious. Instead they use the terms *"bullying and harassment"* as this is felt to be less contentious and provides more ground for negotiation. She thought that trade unions would be able to better support staff if they:

"Confront racism head on, name it as such and make it clear that it is unacceptable... support victims as victims and not try to negotiate away perceived differences in opinion that are just an excuse for discrimination."

Another trade union perspective indicates that there is such sensitivity around discussing issues related to race that where a discussion around race is initiated by a trade union college management often it can be viewed as an 'attack':

"When you start to engage in a discussion about race or if race is one of the things you want to talk about with management the first thing they hear is you're calling me a racist."

It is also evident that many black and minority ethnic staff feel that they are unable to challenge racism and put forward complaints and grievances because they fear public victimisation and labelling. One interviewee who was employed in a work based learning organisation noted that he would not want to raise a complaint because *"the publicity associated with this is immense and you would be labelled as the person making a complaint forever."* Another staff member working at a further education college stated that she would think very carefully about making a complaint because she felt this would make her seem *"weak and may contribute to the image of BME staff as constant victims."*

There was a lengthy discussion in one focus group with staff surrounding the issue of victimisation. The discussion in this focus group suggests that many black and minority ethnic staff feel that complaints and grievances often centre on black and minority ethnic staff as victims and how to support black and minority ethnic staff rather than on *"punishing and putting right the behaviour of the perpetrator."* This further focuses attention and publicity on black and minority ethnic staff, which can be associated with *"high levels of stress."*

Putting forward complaints and grievances is not only associated with stress for black and minority ethnic staff, but also impacts on their future career prospects. This is evident from some black and minority ethnic staff who worryingly, but not altogether surprisingly, noted that they felt that they could not challenge senior managers if they wanted to continue progressing:

"To challenge your line manager or senior managers would in most cases be career suicide. Nobody in their right minds would do it."

The other focus group participants agreed, suggesting that there was a choice of either progressing their careers by *"keeping their heads down and trying to fit in,"* or making their voice heard by trying to challenge and deal with racism and discrimination.

Interviews with HR staff confirm that the use of more subtle remarks that may be perceived as racist, such as referring to someone as a *"scrooge"* for not celebrating Christmas, are common across their organisations and difficult to deal with. One member of HR staff felt that many of these remarks, were not intended to be racist, and suggested that accusing an individual of being racist would not be constructive in solving the problem and may send them *"into defence mode."* He thought he needed to use a cautious approach when dealing with accusations of racism, and in his four years of working in his organisation said he had not yet used the term *"racism."* This example may in itself demonstrate a form of racism by HR staff.

The suggestion that individuals may be perceived to be racist without actually meaning to be contradicts the strong sentiment that emerged from one focus group who agreed that:

“You know when you are being targeted in a racist manner and the person doing the deed also knows it... Other people, bystanders, may not realise but you just know.”

One senior black and minority ethnic manager agreed with this and went further to explain that he felt that there were several individuals in his organisation who deliberately used more covert forms of racism because they knew that this would go unchallenged as it would be difficult for victims to raise a complaint:

“This kind of hidden racism is worse, it’s the constant nagging and making you feel inadequate and unwelcome... You can’t really complain about someone never saying good morning but it’s there and you know that it’s racism.”

This disparity between the views of HR staff and the perceptions of black and minority ethnic staff indicates the need for clearer guidelines and action on what constitutes racism and the way that complaints and grievances regarding racism should be managed.

Internal barriers to recruitment, retention and progression

Key findings

- Internal barriers to progression were identified as related mainly to the confidence of black and minority ethnic staff due to previous negative experiences in the workplace which had reduced or “shattered” their confidence.
- Black and minority ethnic staff lacked confidence not solely in their own abilities, but also in the ability of their organisations to facilitate the progression of black and minority ethnic staff.
- Confidence was noted as an important barrier in challenging the views of line managers or senior managers, in particular if these views related to the abilities of black and minority ethnic staff.
- This research indicates that the notion of ‘Internal barriers’ to black and minority ethnic staff recruitment, retention and progression is a complex one that is closely and directly linked with the external/organisational environment. This means that black and minority ethnic staff may not progress in their careers in the same way that white staff are able to.

While the organisational barriers were considered to be significant as barriers to recruitment, retention and progression for black and minority ethnic staff it is also important to consider factors that may be internal and which may act in preventing staff from black and minority ethnic background in progressing their careers. One of the most significant factors to emerge from the interviews and focus groups was in relation to the confidence levels of some black and minority ethnic staff. Many of the participants admitted that their confidence had been reduced or “shattered” based on their negative experiences in the workplace. These negative experiences were often their own personal experiences, but were also sometimes the experiences of family and friends which had led to “a whole culture of BME people who think they are not as good, [and] not as able to succeed in their jobs as white people.” This lack of confidence appears to have an impact at all levels of their professional experience, from the recruitment stage, through job retention to progression.

This lack of confidence also meant that some staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds were reluctant to apply for positions that they are clearly qualified for. HR staff interviewees agreed with this, stating that they often did not receive sufficient applications from black and minority ethnic candidates for vacant positions. This applied both to externally advertised vacancies and internal vacancies:

“Inevitably it is difficult for us to appoint black and minority ethnic staff if they don’t have the confidence that they can do the job and don’t apply.”

As discussed in the section about organisational barriers, there was a feeling amongst some interviewees that job descriptions may be written in such a way that excludes black and minority ethnic applicants, rather than it being a lack of confidence that prevents them from applying.

Several interviewees spoke about not applying for positions at organisations that they felt were not supportive of black and minority ethnic staff or at which there was “a history of not taking equality and diversity seriously.” These staff said they lacked confidence, not in their own abilities, but in the organisation’s ability to enable black and minority ethnic applicants and/or staff to succeed and progress, as one interviewee explained:

“I wouldn’t apply at a college that has a bad reputation in supporting BME staff... If I hear via the grapevine that things aren’t good at the college, that there is racism and bullying of staff then I wouldn’t apply... It would be detrimental to my career to work in such an environment.”

Confidence was also noted as an important barrier in challenging the views of line managers or senior managers, in particular if these views related to the abilities of black and minority ethnic staff. For example, one staff member mentioned that her line manager had suggested training that she felt was not appropriate and too junior for her. However, she lacked the confidence to challenge the manager’s views and as a result of this felt she “wasn’t getting the right training... felt patronised and not supported in progression.” When asked what would enable her to challenge her line manager in order to access appropriate training she suggested that appropriate support mechanisms need to be in place to enable her to challenge her line manager’s decisions.

In relation to staff from black and minority ethnic staff succeeding to senior posts, one HR staff interviewee suggested that black and minority ethnic staff often do not have sufficient confidence to aim for senior positions. However, from the interviews with some black and minority ethnic staff it is clear that they are ambitious and confident in being able to successfully hold senior positions, but feel unsupported by line managers. One black senior manager noted that he was reluctant to join the senior management team because he feared that “he was not as overtly confident” in his abilities and in articulating them to others. However, when questioned about his reasoning for this he explained that this was due not to his actual abilities, but to a different way of speaking and expressing his abilities, which he put down to a different culture, which was “not understood and not appreciated by white staff.”

It is clear that ‘internal barriers’ have a significant role to play in relation to black and minority ethnic staff recruitment, retention and progression and that the impact of these is directly intertwined with the impact of external/organisational and environmental factors. This in turn means that black and minority ethnic staff may not be able to progress their careers in the same way that white staff are able to:

“Internal barriers do exist and they are important to consider and affect career progression, but I’m not sure that internal barriers would exist if the external environment was as it should be.”

The experience of black and minority ethnic women

Key findings

- This research indicates that black and minority ethnic women face many barriers to career progression, including having their aspirations and abilities obscured by outdated stereotypes and generalisations, which may lead to discrimination in recruitment and promotion.
- The experiences of research participants indicates that white men often do not know how to interact appropriately with black and minority ethnic women, and there is evidence to suggest that some male senior managers, regardless of ethnic background, may hold racist and/or sexist views.
- Black and minority ethnic women, similar to white women, have family responsibilities to take into consideration when progressing their career, which are likely to have a greater impact on their careers than for black and minority ethnic men.
- The lack of flexible working arrangements and the stress and long hours associated with senior positions means that some black and minority ethnic women make an active choice not to progress in their careers.

Gender emerged as an important theme throughout the interviews and focus groups, which highlighted the different experiences of male and female black and minority ethnic staff. Gender as a specific factor was not explicitly part of the research questions for the project, but as it was consistently mentioned by interviewees and focus group participants and therefore warranted a separate section in this report.

In one focus group with black and minority ethnic staff there was a long discussion on the relationship between being a woman, being from a black and minority ethnic background, and professional status:

“Senior people are men and they are wary of women in general, and in particular they are wary of BME women, they wouldn’t think of us as progressing and wouldn’t support us.”

It seems that this “wariness” is partly related to the organisational culture that female staff consider to be male-oriented. The focus group participants all went on to agree that senior management teams are male oriented in their way of working and in how staff socialise, particularly with after-work activities. One participant referred to senior managers in her organisation socialising by “going for a drink” after work. She commented that this is difficult for many women who have children to look after or are responsible for cooking dinner. They all agreed that it was often easier for white women to fit into this male culture as they would, for example, “be used to going for a drink” and would therefore know how to behave. One female senior manager suggested that whilst white male senior managers may know how to behave around white women, they may not know how to behave appropriately around women from black and minority ethnic backgrounds:

“White senior managers know how to talk to white women... it’s easier for white women to make it into senior management because they aren’t seen as alien... A BME woman is different, white managers don’t know how to talk to her, don’t know how to behave. It makes it a whole lot more difficult.”

A recent report by the WLN and LSN (2010) noted that the negative impact of an organisation's culture on career progression for women is particularly related to a culture of working long hours and being judged on presence rather than on outputs. This report supports the findings from this research and in addition highlights the difficulties for black and minority ethnic women fitting in with a culture in which socialising after work is seen as an integral part of the working culture.

In addition to white men not knowing how to behave around black and minority ethnic women, it seems that in some instances black and minority ethnic male senior managers may hold racist and/or sexist views. One interviewee suggested that if people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are appointed to senior manager positions they are generally male and from her experience they are often not comfortable with black and minority ethnic women progressing because they see their role as being in the home with families. Another interviewee talked about female staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds being prevented from progressing by white male staff who made assumptions based on their cultural backgrounds:

“White male senior managers often have really outdated and false beliefs about the role of women in other cultures. They think we’re in the house and kept there by our husbands... It’s not true and it’s holding us back in the workplace... It’s the white males who are senior to us holding us back, not our husbands.”

These views reflect the findings of The Diversity Practice (2007) and of the WLN and LSN (2010) report in that the aspirations and abilities of black and minority ethnic women appear to be obscured by outdated stereotypes and generalisations, which may lead to being discriminated against during recruitment and promotion. The WLN and LSN report in particular notes that some male members of staff, albeit a minority, hold outdated views of women and as such resent women in management positions. The current project indicates that these views can be held by male staff regardless of ethnic background, indicating that the recruitment and progression of male black and minority ethnic staff may not necessarily lead to a positive change in terms of recruitment, retention or progression for black and minority ethnic women.

Women from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, similar to white women, have family responsibilities that they must take into consideration when progressing their career, and these responsibilities are likely to have a greater impact on their career than for black and minority ethnic men. In our research all the female interviewees listed family responsibilities and achieving a work life balance as important factors. The long hours and the extra workload that many black and minority ethnic staff refer to having to do to progress may therefore present a double barrier for some female black and minority ethnic staff.

“BME women are hit doubly hard. They often have a family who they are responsible for... they have to work hard at work because they are BME and then they have to work hard at home because they are a woman.”

These findings resonate with the findings of a survey undertaken by the WLN and LSN (2010) which found that 75 per cent of female black and minority ethnic respondents working in the further education sector had encountered barriers to career progression compared to 42 per cent of female white respondents.

Female focus group participants and interviewees thought that there was a lack of support from senior management for all women regardless of ethnic background in achieving a work/life balance or to be family orientated because there was an assumption that senior staff were expected to work late and at weekends. These women suggested that the lack of support was partly due to *“a lack of understanding and flexibility amongst senior staff to allow career progression of mothers.”*

One interviewee disclosed that her manager had not permitted her to reduce her teaching hours during the summer holidays, which posed a great difficulty for her as her three young children were at home and needed looking after. Another more senior black and minority ethnic member of staff reported that her principal insisted that she attend twilight meetings, which were outside of her ordinary working hours; this meant that she had to pay a babysitter to collect her son from day care. While these barriers posed by a lack of flexibility and impact on all women there is evidence from the report by the WLN and LSN (2010) that the lack of flexible work arrangements is likely to act as a greater barrier for black and minority ethnic

women who are seen as more likely to have children than white women, more likely to have more children than white women and more likely to work longer hours than white women while simultaneously caring for children (WLN & LSN, 2010).

The lack of flexible working arrangements and the stress and long hours associated with senior positions means that some black and minority ethnic women make an active choice not to progress in their careers, as described by one interviewee:

“I would like to move into a more senior position but I don’t want stress. There is an expectation that you have to do more hours and I want to be at home to bathe my children.”

The presence of other women in senior management, regardless of ethnic background, does not in itself appear to support the progression of black and minority ethnic women. One interviewee suggested that this may be due to *“a tendency of women at the top to be very pushy... having to fight for the role and push others out of the way.”* Similar comments were made by other interviewees and in one focus group the participants discussed at length the difficulties that women, regardless of background, face in senior management. The group agreed that women in senior management faced such challenges in successfully accomplishing their jobs and being respected in their positions that as a result they are sometimes re *“unable to support other women.”* In addition, and in line with findings from other recent research (The Diversity Practice, 2007), they suggested there is often a high level of competition amongst women which increases as they progress into more senior roles. As a result of this they thought that for some women this can result in them being perceived as highly ambitious and therefore may regard other women who are similarly ambitious as competition:

“There’s competition amongst women and I don’t really know how it arises and what could be done about it... I do feel that having senior women in post isn’t always helpful to other women progressing.”

Interestingly, and possibly contrary to findings outlined in the literature (e.g. WLN and LSN, 2010; The Diversity Practice, 2007), there is some indication therefore that the main factor in black and minority ethnic women not applying for jobs or progressing to more senior posts is not a lack of confidence but other reasons which they see as beyond their control. These relate to a dominant male working culture, racist and/or sexist views, a lack of support and flexible working arrangements. Considering these experiences of black and minority ethnic women in the further education sector it is evident that more still needs to be done to break the ‘glass ceiling reinforced by concrete’ (The Diversity Practice, 2007) in order to ensure that women from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are able to progress in their careers.

“All the barriers faced by all BME staff apply to women, only more so.”

The impact of public spending cuts

Key findings

- Research participants noted that public spending cuts in the further education sector are likely to have a significant impact on black and minority ethnic staff, and this impact is likely to be greater for them than for white staff. It seems that this is in part due to black and minority ethnic staff in general holding less senior positions than white staff which are more likely to be cut. There was also a feeling that the cuts and redundancies were likely to disadvantage black and minority ethnic staff, such as in not receiving the same level of support from senior management.
- There is evidence to suggest that the reduction in public spending is having an impact on the commitment of some organisations to address equality and diversity issues. This may make staff from diverse backgrounds feel less valued because the importance of an ethnically diverse workforce is made less evident.
- Some funding cuts are likely to have an impact on opportunities to access continuing professional development, which can, in turn, have a negative impact in terms of career progression of black and minority ethnic support staff.

In terms of recruitment, retention and progression there was agreement amongst interviewees and focus group participants that the funding cuts in the further education sector are likely to have or have already had a significant impact on black and minority ethnic staff, and that this impact is likely to be greater than for white staff. One interviewee suggested that: Summing up this sentiment it was noted that *“BME staff will bear the brunt of the recession.”*

Many staff who were interviewed reported that black and minority ethnic staff in general hold less senior positions than white staff and that it is these less senior positions that are more likely to be cut. In addition, many of the interviewees noted that black and minority ethnic staff are more likely to work in administrative roles:

“Often if you’re from a BME background you’re not very senior and you work in admin... In good times all is ok and you can just go about your job, in not such good times your job is the first to be cut.”

This resonates with the findings in the latest Annual Workforce Diversity Profile report (Lifelong Learning UK, 2011) which shows that black and minority ethnic staff are under-represented as senior managers, assessors and verifiers, but over-represented in the groups of administrative and service staff.

There were several other interviewees who said that their roles were ‘at risk’ and three interviewees had already been made redundant. While many felt that cuts and redundancies were inevitable to some extent, there was also a strong feeling amongst interviewees that cuts and redundancies were unfair and disadvantaged black and minority ethnic staff. Several staff thought that there was not the same level of support from senior management for black and minority ethnic staff as for white staff. They thought this was

likely to be because white staff are “cliquey” and have more support networks and ‘insider information’, as one interviewee described:

“My white colleagues, even those at the same level as me, have much better links to management and a better relationship to their line managers... They are much better supported and it’s easier for them to demonstrate their worth to the college and they end up keeping their job.”

It is evident that as a result of restructuring brought about to reduce costs, several black and minority ethnic staff who took part in the project had been asked to move from their current position to more junior positions or positions that were in some form less attractive. One interviewee describes her experience and the impact it was having on her working life:

“I came from teaching to work in finance... If I do go back to teaching I’m actually moving backwards in my career. It makes me angry and right now I’d rather leave than do that.”

This member of staff, at the time of the interview, was unsure whether she would remain with the organisation. In addition there is evidence that some black and minority ethnic staff may be more likely to accept voluntary redundancy because they feel that they cannot compete with white colleagues for the jobs that are available. There was agreement in one focus group that if voluntary redundancy was offered it may be best for to take this rather than try to compete with white staff for jobs because “white staff are better in the know, better equipped with how to get the jobs,” and that “white managers are simply much more likely to give the job to the white candidate.”

Black and minority ethnic staff experiencing redundancy or demotion had a general feeling of helplessness in the situation:

“My job that I worked so hard to get and put so much effort into is just being taken from me. There’s nothing I can do about it.”

HR staff noted that it is a challenging time for everyone in the further education sector. They suggested that some of the issues relating to funding cuts, such as redundancy and lack of career progression, faced by black and minority ethnic staff are common to all staff. However, one HR interviewee did acknowledge that the cuts may make things harder for some black and minority ethnic staff:

“There have been lots of initiatives to support BME staff and this has helped a lot... Now with the funding difficulties we are seeing some of this support being added to more general support. It may make it more difficult for BME staff.”

The views of the trade union representatives suggested that the difficulties that some black and minority ethnic staff are currently facing are wide-reaching and are often not adequately taken into consideration by college management. For example, one trade union interviewee referred to a college that had added equality and diversity within course content to the curriculum managers’ responsibilities.

Furthermore, if these specific roles relate to equality and diversity then black and minority ethnic staff may be particularly at risk because equality and diversity is not always considered important by organisations. One interviewee mentioned that the inclusion manager in her organisation had recently lost his post, whilst another interviewee who held a senior role in diversity had been downgraded to a less senior teaching role. As a reason for this demotion she was told that equality and diversity is the responsibility of everyone in the organisation. These examples illustrate that in times of economic difficulties and subsequent restructure equality and diversity is not seen as important. This view was echoed in other interviews with senior managers, HR staff and trade union representatives. One HR staff member at a work based learning provider noted that priorities at his organisation had shifted due to the funding cuts with restructuring and finding ways to reduce staff being the priority. In contrast, he suggested: “Equality and diversity are not high on the agenda.” The devaluing of equality and diversity clearly affects individuals working in this area, who are often from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and whose roles are more likely to be at risk. In addition, devaluing equality

and diversity through the funding cuts is likely to have a negative impact on the culture of an organisation. This in turn can make black and minority ethnic staff feel less valued because the importance of an ethnically diverse workforce is made less evident.

While funding cuts clearly have a direct impact on the job security of black and minority ethnic staff, there is also evidence suggesting that the funding cuts have an impact on opportunities to access professional development, which, in turn, can have a negative impact in terms of their career progression. One interviewee explained:

“I couldn’t afford to pay for the course I’m on myself...and I think not going on courses would mean that I can’t progress.”

One black senior manager mentioned how difficult it was for her to attend training not only due to the lack of funding available, but also because in the current climate of funding cuts other posts were being made redundant, which meant that she had to take on more work and responsibilities, and had less time to attend training. She thought that black and minority ethnic staff already worked harder than white staff but an even greater workload would mean no time to attend training. While she was aware that this meant that she was unable to further her skills, she admitted that in order to retain her current position she had to “*work around the clock and admit there is no time for training courses.*”

Cuts in public spending may have an indirect impact on black and minority ethnic staff being able to access training as they will not have the time, in addition to the direct impact of cuts to CPD budgets. In addition, the reduced availability of training and development means that the full impact of funding cuts is likely to manifest itself in years to come as fewer black and minority ethnic staff than at present are able to progress due to a lack of training. It is therefore possible that some of the progress made towards the recruitment, retention and progression of black and minority ethnic staff within the further education sector, as acknowledged by the Foster Review (DfES, 2005) may be slowed down or even reversed.

The impact of the barriers for black and minority ethnic staff

Key findings

- The impact of the barriers experienced by staff is wide-reaching, impacting on the health and wellbeing, and immediate and longer term career prospects of black and minority ethnic staff. The evidence from this research clearly indicates that black and minority ethnic staff are adversely affected by discrimination and racism which is mainly related to stress, constant scrutiny, being discriminated against and having to work harder.
- There is also the feeling amongst black and minority ethnic staff, particularly those at a senior level, that one of the reasons for stress is having “*to hold the torch for other BME staff.*”
- Research participants noted that even when working harder than their white counterparts, black and minority ethnic staff struggle to progress, and this is especially the case for black and minority ethnic staff who have reached middle management level. This suggests that black and minority ethnic staff may be prevented from progressing their careers and moving up the hierarchy within their organisations.
- Based on issues related to health, wellbeing and an inability to progress, black and minority ethnic staff may leave the further education sector, even at the cost of their own career prospects.
- It may be advantageous for black and minority ethnic staff to move to bigger organisations where there are more black and minority ethnic staff and therefore a better work culture, which may be more conducive to career progression.

The impact of the barriers experienced by staff is perceived as “*wide-reaching and really means that you are affected in all kinds of ways.*” This relates to health and wellbeing, as well as the immediate and longer term career prospects of black and minority ethnic staff. The evidence from this research clearly indicates that the health and wellbeing of black and minority ethnic staff is adversely affected by discrimination and racism. It is also evident that even when working harder than their white counterpart staff from diverse backgrounds struggle to progress, and this is especially the case for staff who have reached middle management level. Based on these issues related to health, wellbeing and an inability to progress, staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds may leave the further education sector, even at the cost of their own career prospects.

The impact on health and having to work harder

The research participants were clear about the impact of the barriers on their health and wellbeing. From their perspective, prejudices, discrimination and exclusion lead directly to poor mental health, as they cause constant stress. Many of the staff who were interviewed noted accounts of how racism and discrimination at work which had left them feeling “*very stressed,*” “*fearful of going in to work*” or “*constantly inadequate and put down.*”

Most commonly this stress is related to the direct experience of racism and discrimination, which is discussed in an earlier section on organisational barriers to recruitment, retention and progression. The negative impact of this on the health of black and minority ethnic staff is difficult to over-emphasise; one interviewee describes how it feels:

“I was close to mental breakdown... the impact on your health is massive. If you haven't experienced bullying yourself you cannot understand what a massive impact this has on your health.”

This stress is frequently related to having to work harder than white staff to retain their current position and to progress; one interviewee suggested that *“all the tough assignments are undertaken by BME staff and managers because no one else is prepared to do them.”* This interviewee added that it was often in an effort to prove their worth for the organisation. However, their work was often scrutinised more than that of white staff as described by two interviewees who worked in further education colleges:

“When white senior staff present a report no questions are asked, but when a BME senior staff [member] does this it is considered invalid and not trustworthy.”

“BME budget holders are scrutinised in a much harder way. There is a long history of this happening in the 1990's with Asian groups, the view was that you had to 'keep a close eye' on them.”

There is also the feeling amongst black and minority ethnic staff, particularly those at a senior level that one of the reasons for stress was having *“to hold the torch for other BME staff.”* This expectation was something that not all participants would want if they were in a higher position because they regarded it as an added pressure and contributor to stress. Taking this added stress into consideration several black and minority ethnic staff stated that they did not feel able to progress to higher levels.

The impact on career progression for black and minority ethnic staff

This project clearly indicates that despite black and minority ethnic staff working harder than their white colleagues, many of them experience the 'glass ceiling,' created by the organisational barriers to recruitment, retention and progression discussed earlier. Several examples of this were shared by staff, such as the college staff member who had gained additional qualifications and years of experience but had remained in the same position within his college for twelve years. He stated that he felt that although the college did not necessarily want him to leave, they also did not want him to progress: *“they just want me to stay where I am.”* This experience was echoed by others who also felt that they had all the necessary qualifications and experience to progress, but nonetheless had remained in their positions for many years. Reflecting on her earlier career one senior manager at an adult and community learning provider described her experience of being trapped in a junior role:

“It wasn't just hitting the ceiling... but also having sticky floors. I was told 'you are trained more than you need to be for the job you're doing', so they could not see what I wanted to do, what my ambition was... so it's like 'stay in your box'.”

The view that black and minority ethnic staff are tolerated up to a certain level, but not above, was a common view amongst the staff interviewed. The perception is that some black and minority ethnic staff are often recruited at a relatively junior level and remain at this level, while white colleagues are able to progress. One staff member noted that in her college black and minority ethnic staff and white staff may start at the same level, but while white staff progressed to higher positions, black and minority ethnic staff often did not. A common sentiment across the black and minority ethnic staff interviewees in middle management or senior positions was that they had not only worked harder than their white counterparts, but also that it had taken

them longer to progress. One member of HR staff supported this, stating that statistics in her college indicated that *“BME staff are more likely to stay in junior or middle management roles, and that white staff more often progress and progress faster.”*

The impact on black and minority ethnic staff retention

As noted by one black interviewee barriers *“aren’t just barriers to career progression, they also affect your health and mean that you may actually leave a career.”* Research by Wilson et al (2005) and Cassidy (2003) indicates that the barriers discussed which impact on recruitment and progression are also potential reasons why black and minority ethnic staff leave the sector altogether. Wilson et al suggested that black and minority ethnic staff are more likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs and their employers and therefore more likely to actively seek other employment. The interviews conducted with HR staff found that turnover rates for black and minority ethnic staff often appear to be significantly higher than for staff from white backgrounds. This may be due to many black and minority ethnic staff wanting to leave the sector partly due to experiences of discrimination, partly due to difficulties faced in being able to progress in their careers.

One staff member, who has worked in various colleges for almost 30 years, commented that from her experience black and minority ethnic staff are likely to move to other organisations if they experience discrimination. She suggested that this was because staff felt that nothing is done about discrimination and that in order to avert further stress they preferred to move on.

“In the experience of most staff, if you have a bad experience and are discriminated against the best thing is to move on, that’s what most staff do.”

This feeling was echoed in a focus group discussion with staff:

“It’s common to leave if you experience racism... I’ve known of whole groups of BME staff who have just left.”

These views clearly indicate that in order to retain black and minority ethnic staff the further education sector needs to find effective ways of dealing with discrimination. Interviews with HR staff suggested that the lack of career progression is also a significant reason given by black and minority ethnic staff for leaving the sector. One member of HR staff commented that:

“It is more difficult to progress in an organisation that you have worked in for a while because senior staff see you in a specific role and do not see your potential.”

Many of the staff interviewed mentioned that for black and minority ethnic staff that work in a small college it may be advantageous for them to move to a bigger organisation where there are more staff from diverse backgrounds which may produce a better work culture, and be more conducive to career progression:

“You stand a better chance of career support and progression in a larger institution with other BME staff.”

However, interviews with black and minority ethnic staff who have since left the sector suggested that even if individuals are initially drawn to providers with high numbers of black and minority ethnic staff, they may be disappointed by their commitment to equality and diversity. Here is the comment by one staff member who moved from a small organisation to a large further education college and then, disappointed with the college, left to re-train as an engineer:

“I thought a larger institution with more BME staff would be better. I applied for a job at a large college and moved there... I was disappointed by their lack of commitment to equality and diversity and it just became unbearable... eventually I left the sector.”

The evidence suggests that once several black and minority ethnic staff members leave, for example from one department, it will be more difficult for the remaining black and minority ethnic staff because *“the culture shifts to an even whiter one.”* This may in turn cause a chain reaction with more staff leaving and fewer staff recruited from diverse backgrounds.

Even if black and minority ethnic staff are able to progress and, for example, reach senior management level, the pressures associated with reaching this level can make it difficult for them to retain their positions, as one interviewee described it:

“BME staff have to be good to get to the top and they have to be superhuman to stay there.”

These findings are supported by the findings of CEL (2008) and Cassidy (2003) which found that black and minority ethnic staff are *“trapped beneath a glass ceiling”* and frequent experiences of discrimination are common reasons for black and minority ethnic staff leaving the sector.

Ironically staff turnover rates for black and minority ethnic staff could be even higher than those currently experienced if black and minority ethnic staff were more confident that other areas of employment outside the further education sector were significantly better at promoting race equality.

“I’m still here not because I really want to be... I put up with all the discrimination because I have to and I’m not sure that other places are really any better... If I knew of somewhere to go where there was a more genuine commitment and enforcement of equality and diversity I’d go there.”

Potential ways to address barriers

Key findings

- This research suggests that the most important factor in being successful is having a supportive line manager who acts as an informal mentor or role model and guides the way to career progression. It seems that this supportive line manager does not have to be from a similar ethnic background.
- In order for line managers to provide support that will genuinely benefit black and minority ethnic staff in their career progression, it seems that structures need to be in place for the line managers themselves and a change in the culture of the organisation.
- Several suggestions were put forward to assist line managers in providing support for black and minority ethnic staff. These included bi-annual appraisals and further support for mechanisms already in place in some organisations, such as work shadowing.
- Training and continuing professional development were mentioned as being very important for black and minority ethnic staff to enable them to acquire the skills necessary to perform their job roles in order to progress in their careers.
- There is some evidence that black and minority ethnic staff may particularly benefit from external training as this allows them to network and access more varied training.
- It seems that equality and diversity training for staff involved in recruitment is crucial to facilitating the recruitment and career progression of staff from diverse backgrounds.
- According to research participants developing successful whole organisational strategies to the implementation of policies, the critical role of senior management, and positive action are highly important to support the recruitment, retention and progression of black and minority ethnic staff. Having effective policies in place to promote equality and diversity, and actively implementing and monitoring these policies was noted as one of the most important whole organisational strategies.
- There is evidence to suggest that there is a need for clear lines of responsibility involving the roles of both senior management and human resources to ensure that all staff including line managers adhere to equality and diversity policies.
- Positive action can be used to support black and minority ethnic staff. However, there was concern amongst research participants that there is a low level of awareness and understanding of positive action in organisations which was often not correctly applied. This can lead to cynicism from white staff, and greater isolation of black and minority ethnic staff.
- Organisations working in partnership to support equality and diversity can have a positive impact on the progression of black and minority ethnic staff, with organisations sharing best practice and working locally to support staff.

Although a significant part of the research focused on the potential barriers that staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds faced in the further education sector, the interviews and focus groups did also highlight several ways in which these barriers could be and have been addressed. As one interviewee explained, addressing barriers is “*something the sector is thinking about, but movement has been slow and more needs to be done.*” The black and minority ethnic staff who took part in the research suggested several ways in which barriers could be addressed and these have been organised under four headings:

- supportive managers
- training and continuing professional development
- whole organisational strategies
- external organisations that provide support for black and minority ethnic staff and further education organisations to address the barriers.

Supportive managers

Many of the black and minority ethnic staff interviewed, across all subsectors, agreed that the most important factor in being successful is having a supportive line manager who acts as an informal mentor and is able to guide the way to career progression:

“Line managers are the gatekeepers to career progression; they can support you, believe in you, send you on training and protect you from discrimination.”

In addition, there was a clear indication from interviewees that the lack of a supportive manager often meant that even if there were other initiatives such as training, equality policies and positive action, it was difficult or as one interviewee described it “*impossible*” for black and minority ethnic staff to progress.

“If you don’t (have a supportive manager) then there is no way that you can progress, you’ll be stuck where you are or worse.”

A participant in the senior management focus group agreed that the role of her line manager in supporting her career progression was crucial. Yet she emphasised that it was not necessary to have a line manager role model from a similar ethnic background. She explained that although her current line manager was also from a Black African background, she was not a role model for her. Instead she remembered a white line manager who supported and challenged her and this helped her to build up her confidence.

“She (the current line manager) is too busy and more worried about trying to comply with the requirements of her post... I had an Irish line manager who wasn’t BME and he nonetheless supported me and challenged me and built up my confidence.”

The participants in all the staff focus groups and most of the interview all shared similar views about the role a supportive manager can play and that their ethnic background was of less importance than the value of the support and encouragement they provided.

The support of more senior managers was also identified as crucial to ensure that line managers are able to act on the support needs of black and minority ethnic staff. Many focus group participants and interviewees across all types of organisations commented that having people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds in senior management could also help them. In addition there was a need to have a real shift in numbers of black and minority ethnic staff in senior management otherwise it would be difficult to have the appropriate support. It was suggested that when there were few black and minority ethnic staff in senior management positions they tended “*to conform to the white culture*” and that black and minority ethnic line managers in this culture “*are protecting their own role and are not often able to support BME staff below them.*” Therefore it seems evident that having a diverse senior management team does not necessarily stop bullying “*one BME senior manager will*

be bullied into submission by others.” The solution is not merely to have black and minority ethnic staff in high positions, *“instead the environment needs to be prepared for BME staff to succeed in these positions.”* This indicates that in order for the line managers to provide support that will genuinely benefit black and minority ethnic staff in their career progression, structures, need to be in place for the line managers themselves.

“If there is also support from more senior people then you are very lucky and can progress... Line managers need the support from senior management in order to act.”

However, Lumby (2005) notes that in order for a more sustained change within organisations to encourage black and minority ethnic staff career progression it is also necessary to have a whole organisational approach that ensures line managers are adequately supported to encourage black and minority ethnic staff. This whole organisation approach is especially important when staff are considering more senior posts as one interviewee suggested:

“We feel overqualified and there is less support... They (managers) are afraid that if they help us then their jobs might be at risk. They are interested more in protecting their own jobs.”

Several suggestions were put forward to assist line managers in providing support for black and minority ethnic staff including bi-annual appraisals, opportunities for work shadowing. One participant mentioned that the forum for black and minority ethnic staff in her organisation advertised work shadowing, but the process to get involved was extensive with a form for her manager to complete which was twenty pages long which her line manager found off-putting. In another focus group discussion, a governor underlined this when he suggested:

“Often there is no time for this (bureaucratic process), so even if there is a supportive line manager then it’s much more difficult for BME staff to progress.”

These findings indicate that, while a supportive line manager can clearly be a gateway to career progression for staff, it may in many cases not be sufficient by itself. Instead, as implied by Lumby, a more holistic approach is necessary to ensure that structures throughout the organisation are in place to support not only black and minority ethnic staff at all levels, but also to provide support for line managers to assist staff to progress.

Training and continuing professional development

Training and continuing professional development were mentioned as being very important across organisations to enable staff to acquire the skills and understanding necessary to perform their job roles and to progress in their careers. While it was acknowledged that training and continuing professional development are important for all staff, interviews with members of HR staff suggested that this may be especially important for black and minority ethnic staff:

“Training is essential for BME staff, more than for white staff... BME staff need to prove they have the skills as the culture in organisations often just doesn’t recognise skills. Training allows BME staff to prove skills.”

Almost all black and minority ethnic staff that were interviewed talked about the importance of training and professional development as a way to develop and build confidence, This in turn helped in progressing their careers by giving them the confidence to apply for positions and take on additional responsibilities. This concurs with the recent research findings on the professional training for black and minority staff delivered by the BLI® (LSC, 2004; CSK, 2007).

It seems that while all black and minority ethnic staff recognise the importance of training for their career progression, having support is also clearly crucial, as one interviewee suggested: .

“Training is really important and everyone knows it, but sometimes it can be difficult to attend training if you don’t have the support.”

One governor suggested that “*organisations really need to push training (in relevant areas) in order for BME staff to progress.*” Several other interviewees and focus group participants commented that they had taken annual leave to go on training and had funded courses themselves; they were worried that asking their line managers to take part in training might negatively impact on their relationship.

“I’ve been quiet about going to training because I don’t want my line manager thinking that I want her job. You have to pick your battles wisely.”

Although training and continuing professional development are important ways in which organisations can support the career progression of black and minority ethnic staff, not all participants interviewed regarded these initiatives as positive experiences. Some interviewees felt that professional development opportunities can be a way to show that black and minority ethnic staff do not have the appropriate skills in certain areas which in turn can make staff feel let down “*because they show that your line manager has low expectations of you.*” Therefore, while training can be an important lever for progression, there is a need to ensure that this training is not used as a means to discriminate against black and minority ethnic staff.

Noting her college as an example of good practice, one senior manager described the internal training programme that her college offered which involved three days training spread across three months. This enabled staff to take part in training while spreading the time that they took off from their job role. The training involved targeted career development, such as setting clear goals and a personal development plan to encourage staff to think about career progression beyond the length of the training course. Whilst this course is aimed at all staff, this senior manager interviewee noted that black and minority ethnic staff may particularly benefit from the training which she described as:

“Relatively easy to access even without much line management support, builds up confidence and encourages a longer vision to career planning, which is important especially for BME staff as they are often in quite junior roles.”

There is some evidence that black and minority ethnic staff may particularly benefit from external training as this allows them to network and develop a general awareness of “*how things are done in other institutions.*” Several participants in one staff focus group agreed that external training had built up their confidence by being able to experience how other black and minority ethnic staff had progressed in their careers and to learn more about how they themselves might progress.

In addition, there is evidence from senior managers and governors that organisations, even larger organisations, may not always be able to provide internal training that provides the same benefits for black and minority ethnic staff that external training would. This included the recognised advantages of networking at external events which was described by one interviewee:

“My college will send through information on training to all staff, this includes internal training and also external training, such as that provided by the NBP... It shows that they want to you to go and it has been vital for my career to be able to attend external training... I’ve met people and seen how I can progress.”

While the importance of training for black and minority ethnic staff is an essential ingredient for their progression, training of those staff involved in recruitment is seen as another key issue as suggested by one interviewee,

“Agents and recruitment panels need training in equality and diversity to ensure recruitment is fair and that BME staff are recruited.”

Another black principal said that she was asked by the governing body of her organisation to be the equality and diversity voice in the selection process for recruitment. However, being selected to be in the recruitment panel she considered was simply part of the process of “*ticking the boxes*” and does not indicate a genuine commitment of her organisation to support the recruitment of black and minority ethnic staff.

In order for staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds to feel confident when applying for jobs, recruitment panels need to understand what equality and diversity actually means in practice. A participant in one a focus group highlighted that her college is *“quite good at celebrating diversity but when it comes to the recruitment drives or the nitty gritty of staff I think we fall down on stuff.”* She suggested that in order to ensure that organisations embrace and understand equality and diversity *“training in equality and diversity is important for all staff”* and training for people involved in recruitment is essential in order for black and minority ethnic staff to have the *“confidence and awareness to challenge racism.”*

Whole organisational strategies

The importance of whole organisational strategies in relation to supporting line managers and training has already been noted. In addition, whole organisational strategies are essential in relation to successfully implementation of policies, senior management involvement, HR issues and positive action which in turn are seen as *“essential to secure progression for BME staff.”* In particular, having effective policies in place to promote equality and diversity was seen as crucial to implementing a whole organisational strategy to equality. These policies need to ensure that all issues, including barriers, that black and minority ethnic staff face are properly addressed and that an *“equality and diversity policy is more than a generic document.”* The need for a policy that is specific to the organisation and takes into account the needs of all its staff, including those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, was acknowledged by participants in the focus groups and by trade union representatives who agreed that *“the (equality and diversity) policy needs to be really specific, specific to the location and to the needs of the staff.”*

The need for monitoring and enforcement of policies was a common theme during the focus group discussions with staff and there was a general sentiment that organisations often had good policies in place, but were either not able or not willing to ensure that all staff adhered to these policies. One interviewee argued that *“even with the best equality and diversity policy in place an organisation will fail in delivering equality and diversity if they don’t monitor and enforce them.”* There were several solutions suggested including the need for clear lines of management responsibility to ensure that line managers are responsible for their staff adhering to policies *“in the same way as managers are ultimately responsible for the quality of work within their team.”* Staff in one focus group agreed that if line managers do not ensure that their staff adhere to equality and diversity policy then their own line managers should get involved, thus ensuring a clear line of responsibility.

This denotes the importance of senior management involvement in the monitoring process and the need for senior managers to take the issues seriously. Participants in one focus group agreed that senior management involvement could be encouraged by an organisation’s targets, including a measure on black and minority ethnic staff progression. They thought that this would highlight the importance of equality and diversity and as *“institutions are driven by targets”* black and minority ethnic staff recruitment, retention and progression would be better supported.

Highlighting the importance of raising staff awareness of equality and diversity policies, this staff focus group all agreed that developing an internal survey to find out if staff recognise the importance of equality and diversity would be useful. Some participants said that this type of initiative was already in place in their organisations and one participant noted that it had been successful *“in making it clear that policies are to be used everyday and not just to be written and forgotten about.”* Another participant in the group stressed that surveys need to be completed by everyone and findings made widely available as this would highlight the importance of equality and diversity policies and their implementation.

One of the principals interviewed suggested that an analysis of people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds who leave further education was critical in order to ensure that the lack of equal opportunities in the sector was not a reason for leaving. Interestingly three of the five leavers who were interviewed noted that they had not been asked about their reasons for leaving which left them with a feeling of being

“*disposable and replaceable.*” There is a need for closer consideration of why black and minority ethnic staff might leave the further education sector and how this may be related to equality and diversity in general. Wilson et al (2005) provide an analysis of recruitment and retention in the further education sector and note several reasons for staff leaving the sector, which included lack of career progression, too heavy a workload, low salary and lacking job security. These issues are likely to affect all staff, but there is evidence from this project that there are other reasons for black and minority ethnic staff leaving the sector different, including issues related directly to equality and diversity. These findings are supported by Cassidy’s (2003) conclusion that black and minority ethnic staff frequently leave the sector due to discrimination on a whole organisational level and therefore are unable to progress.

The importance of HR involvement in developing and implementing whole organisational strategies to support the recruitment, retention and progression of black and minority ethnic staff was frequently mentioned, and several examples of good practice were referred to throughout the interviews and focus group discussions:

- One senior manager noted that his organisation had made a commitment to provide specific, tailored feedback to all individuals during appraisals and following unsuccessful promotion or job applications. The HR department in this organisation provided templates for giving this feedback, and compiled and monitored the information gained to “*gain a picture of staff needs and how the college can better support staff*” and to increase transparency. This senior manager commented that this form of tailored feedback specifically benefited black and minority ethnic staff as it provided them with clear guidance on how to progress and ensured that “*the recruitment and promotion process is transparent and everyone has an equal chance.*”
- Another effective way for HR to support the progression of black and minority ethnic staff was put forward by another participant who explained that her HR department forwards the NBP newsletter to all staff. This made it clear that the organisation is aware of black and minority ethnic issues, is supportive of black and minority ethnic staff progression, which in turn makes it more difficult for line managers to deny staff access to the training and support offered by the NBP.
- Many black and minority ethnic staff mentioned that their organisations had equality and diversity forums which they thought could provide support for black and minority ethnic staff, but often were “*merely token gestures without any impact on college policy or practice.*” The impact of equality and diversity forums could be encouraged by following the example of one college, whose HR staff noted that the equality and diversity forum in her organisation was minuted and these minutes are passed on to HR and senior management who then discuss them in their meetings and provide the forum with feedback. This helps to ensure that senior management are committed and take black and minority ethnic issues seriously.

The concept of positive action² can be an important whole organisational strategy to support the recruitment, retention and progression of black and minority ethnic staff. Several staff mentioned that they felt that positive action had increased the number of black and minority ethnic staff in general, and in particular, the number of black and minority ethnic senior managers in their organisations. There was also agreement amongst participants that the inclusion of positive action in the Equality Act 2010 had raised awareness of black and minority ethnic issues across their organisations, including the under-representation of black and minority ethnic staff at senior management level.

There was concern, however, particularly amongst black and minority ethnic senior managers, that positive action was often not correctly applied for example, in not providing sufficient support for black and minority ethnic staff recruited or promoted through positive action initiatives which can result in staff leaving their posts;

²General positive action provisions allow employers to target measures such as training at specific groups that are under-represented or disadvantaged in the workplace. The new positive action provisions in relation to recruitment and promotion in the Equality Act 2010 mean that it is not unlawful to recruit or promote a candidate who is of equal merit to another candidate, if the employer reasonably thinks the candidate:

- has a protected characteristic that is under-represented in the workforce; or
- that people with that characteristic suffer a disadvantage connected to that characteristic.

Positive action is entirely voluntary – there is no requirement for an employer to use either the general provisions or those relating to recruitment and promotion.’ (Government Equalities Office, 2011: 3-4).

“Sometimes what happens with positive action is that they want to appoint a black person but they won’t provide the support – maybe it’s deliberate – and when it comes to the probationary review it will show that the person hasn’t been able to do the job and then the person is out. I have seen this in my previous college and white colleagues doing the same here, and also when you meet other colleagues that was their experience as well. Maybe this is to prove that positive action and black candidates are not as good.”

Many interviewees and focus group participants also referred to a low awareness and understanding of positive action in their organisations. For example, in one focus group there was a sentiment that staff in their organisations often perceive positive action in terms of black and minority ethnic staff being favoured over white staff, even if black and minority ethnic staff had less experience or qualifications.

Similarly, other black and minority ethnic staff, especially those already in relatively senior posts, expressed a degree of uncertainty about positive action. Whilst on the one hand they were keen for more black and minority ethnic staff to be recruited and for better career progression, they also had concerns that it may lead to cynicism from white staff, which could lead to greater isolation of black and minority ethnic staff:

“I have very mixed feelings (about positive action). On the one hand I want more BME staff to do well... however, I worry about people thinking that I’ve not got to where I am because I’ve worked hard and have the experience and skills.”

This indicates that some staff are not confident that positive action will be understood and differentiated from positive discrimination³ or have a positive impact for black and minority ethnic staff.

Black and minority ethnic staff across organisations also had concerns that positive action would not actually be implemented. This was particularly the case for staff in smaller organisations and/or organisations in geographical areas with a low black and minority ethnic population. It therefore seems that, while the size and location of an organisation may not have an impact on the prevalence of institutional racism, the implementation of policies to support equality and diversity and the recruitment, retention and progression of black and minority ethnic staff may be affected by an organisation’s size and location:

“In rural areas there is less of an understanding of positive action and therefore it’s implemented less. Even BME people don’t see the benefits.”

Similarly one trade union representative expressed concerns that positive action would be difficult to work in practice to benefit black and minority ethnic staff recruitment or progression as she thought it highly unlikely that two candidates would be identically matched in terms of skills and qualifications,

“I can’t think of an instance where somebody is going to be identically matched... I don’t think it (positive action) will have any impact at all to be honest.”

Positive action was however seen as useful as part of a dialogue between trade unions and senior management in relation to equality and diversity issues including how to increase the number of black and minority ethnic staff in senior management posts.

Taking the views of black and minority ethnic staff into consideration, the HR staff who were interviewed thought that black and minority ethnic staff often did not want to be treated differently, which meant that positive action policies are not always taken up. These HR interviewees felt that by embedding positive action policies in the whole organisation’s strategy that black and minority ethnic staff would not “*feel singled out and made to be different.*” One interviewee mentioned that in her college positive action was included in both the equality and diversity policy and general recruitment policies, which had made it clear that positive action was part of an overall commitment of her organisation, rather than an “*add on.*” This view supports the findings of UCU (2008) and UNISON (2009) that positive action is most effective when embedded in organisational practice and must be seen as a whole organisational approach to addressing barriers for all staff.

³Positive discrimination occurs when an under-represented group is treated more favourably and this is prohibited in employment law.

Partnerships within the further education sector

Some interviewees, mainly the senior managers and trade union representatives mentioned that organisations working in partnership to support equality and diversity can have a positive impact on the progression of black and minority ethnic staff. These partnerships within the further education sector allow organisations to share best practice as described by one senior manager:

“We could learn a lot from other institutions within the sector... Partnership working is really helpful to learn about what other organisations do to support BME staff.”

The perception that partnerships can benefit organisations in various ways including supporting the progression of black and minority ethnic staff is suggested by one trade union representative as useful,

“Institutions are often not wanting external interference so it can sometimes be easier to support from within the sector... Colleges can support each other.”

Organisations with an unsatisfactory track record of supporting black and minority ethnic staff may not wish to engage external involvement. Support and advice from another organisation may in these cases be more successful than support from external organisations. For example, two black and minority ethnic senior managers noted that they had received support from other organisations in providing equality and diversity training.

One strategy suggested was that of twinning colleges to support each other and this had, in some cases, already been initiated. One trade union interviewee considered that twinning was “a good initiative” and something that could be expanded to ensure that senior management at organisations that are committed could also have a positive influence on other organisations. He mentioned one college which has been very successful at setting up local networks between colleges and establishing a regional hub of equality initiatives so that support is localised, whilst another college has set up a race equality group with local organisations to help them to understand issues faced by their black and minority ethnic staff.

“The more localised the better... Partnerships that are localised are able to take into account variations in BME staff, different BME populations have, for example, different religions.”

The role of external organisations

External organisations, such as sector funding agencies, membership organisations and trade unions play an important role in addressing the barriers faced by black and minority ethnic staff as they often have a more balanced, external perspective that can “support BME staff directly and pressure and encourage institutions to address barriers.”

The role of the NBP was acknowledged by almost all interviewees and focus group participants as being supportive providing training, mentoring and shadowing opportunities for black and minority ethnic staff, and offering support and encouragement in issues related to their careers. Being able to access this support was regarded as useful not only in acquiring new knowledge and skills but also in realising that they are not alone in experiencing discrimination, which had a positive impact on building confidence and raising aspirations. Several interviewees stated that this, in turn, had been helpful in furthering their careers.

The positive impact of the NBP was also highlighted by principals and governors who agreed that more funding to subsidise the BLI® and similar initiatives would ensure that this positive impact was retained. These principals and governors expressed a general disappointment that funding for initiatives such as BLI® had been substantially reduced, which they thought would have a direct impact on the recruitment, retention and progression of black and minority ethnic staff.

“There is generally less funding for everything... Government and local bodies have much less funding to give out and this really affects BME staff because many schemes to support us have been cut.”

These principals and governors also voiced concerns about the revised approach of LSIS from a national to an organisational focus. Concerns about this were related to individual organisations being given more autonomy, which could in turn lead to some organisations not being able or willing to support black and minority ethnic staff in appropriate ways due to a *“lesser degree of national support and guidance.”*

Commenting on the importance of the NBP, one governor explained that within her college, located in a rural area, NBP initiatives are not widely known. This governor explained that the NBP is only known by the black and minority ethnic forum *“because of personal links with people in the Network.”* This highlights the importance of further promoting the work of the NBP and the positive impact it can have, both for black and minority ethnic staff directly, and, perhaps more importantly, for senior management and HR as this could ensure cross-sector knowledge of the NBP’s work.

There is also evidence to suggest that while black and minority ethnic staff who had been on sector initiatives, such as those run by BLI® and NBP, appreciated them and found them helpful, they sometimes found it difficult to implement what they had learned, or to actually progress. One senior manager expressed his frustration by noting that *“without actually being able to use what I learned and be able to make progress the whole NBP training was interesting, but useless in my college.”* This again indicates that it would be helpful for senior management and HR teams to work more actively with the BLI® and NBP to support staff in using their acquired skills during and after training.

While black and minority ethnic staff acknowledge the important work that has already been accomplished by external organisations, there is also a feeling that external organisations, in particular funding and inspection agencies, could do more to encourage policies aimed at supporting black and minority ethnic staff. Several interviewees suggested that funding could be cut or withheld if organisations do not provide sufficient, up-to-date evidence of successfully implementing equality and diversity policies aimed at supporting black and minority ethnic staff recruitment, retention and progression. These staff interviewees suggested that this would encourage organisations to take equality and diversity more seriously and would help to apply pressure to ensure change.

With regards to inspection agencies, several interviewees commented that the process could be improved by inspectors being better informed and trained in equality and diversity, and for equality and diversity to be included as a more critical aspect of inspections that reflects the whole organisation.

“Ofsted inspectors take equality and diversity into account, but they are fooled by lip service and a few token BME managers. They don’t use their power to really see things through and pressure the sector.”

Many interviewees and focus group participants were in agreement that *“external support from these organisations could make a real difference.”*

There was little spontaneous mention by the participants about the role of trade unions in supporting black and minority ethnic staff to address barriers to recruitment, retention and progression. Those who did spontaneously mention trade union support highlighted how the trade union provided policies and information that black and minority ethnic staff could refer to, such as equality and diversity policies and staff development information. When directly asked about the role of trade unions, many staff felt that the trade unions were supportive of issues affecting all staff, such as related to pay, redundancy and grievance procedures. However they said that they would be more likely to seek support from external organisations aimed specifically at black and minority ethnic staff, such as the NBP, rather than approach a trade union as they thought organisations such as NBP were more likely to be able to support black and minority ethnic staff based on their *“specialist knowledge and experience.”*

These views to some extent echo those outlined in the CfBSFE report (2002), which found that some trade union branches did not have the expertise or knowledge to address race equality issues and did not always understand how to actively support black and minority ethnic staff. The CfBSFE report suggested that this led to a reluctance to join by black and minority ethnic people and for those who were already members it often

resulted in receiving inappropriate or ineffective advice.

One senior manager, whilst recognising the important role of trade unions in providing staff development, expressed his disappointment that they do not always provide staff development specifically aimed at black and minority ethnic staff:

“The union here is very active in providing staff development, they pressure for more staff development, but it’s really disappointing there isn’t more specifically addressing BME issues.”

HR staff mentioned that their contact with trade unions was related to staff in general rather than to issues specifically related to black and minority ethnic staff. This was echoed by one of the trade union interviewees who said that the trade union had policies related to black and minority ethnic issues and *“definitely supports the progression of BME staff, but not many BME staff have put forward their specific case.”* Similarly another trade union representative expressed disappointment that their trade union does not have a higher level of engagement from black and minority ethnic staff. However, she mentioned that the trade union does provide support aimed specifically at black and minority ethnic staff, such as specific training, an activist network course and a range of information on the ways in which the trade union can provide specific support. These courses have been highly successful and convinced some black and minority ethnic staff, who were initially sceptical of the trade union, that the union can provide vital support for them and other black and minority ethnic staff.

This trade union representative noted that currently staff often do not know of the availability of this support and that there is a general *“lack of awareness (amongst black and minority ethnic staff) of what the union involves.”* Reflecting on why this may be the case she suggested that many black and minority ethnic staff, especially those new to the sector and in the early stages of their career, are less inclined to become involved with the trade union because they are fearful of being too visible, which may mark them out as a target for discrimination. This highlights the need for trade unions and senior management to encourage staff to take up membership of a trade union by highlighting the important contribution trade unions can make in providing support in terms of career progression, and in ensuring that black and minority ethnic members are not discriminated against.

How some black and minority ethnic staff have overcome barriers

Key findings

- It seems that black and minority ethnic staff who succeed in progressing in their careers have adopted various strategies to overcome barriers, which were described by some research participants as desperate measures to succeed in a hostile environment.
- Confidence and using one's own initiative was noted as an approach for black and minority ethnic staff to progress. However, for many staff this was not always easy to do as their confidence had been reduced or "shattered" based on previous negative experiences.
- Networking and knowing where to access support were noted as ways to gain confidence.
- There was a sense that black and minority ethnic staff needed "more qualifications and more experience than white counterparts" in order to progress. Specifically, there is evidence that in order to progress to senior management posts BME staff need qualifications and experience related directly to leadership roles and interpersonal and organisational skills.
- Black and minority ethnic staff noted that they had to adapt to their organisation's environment by changing their identities and that this was necessary to fit into the predominantly 'white' culture that was present in their organisation.

The interviews and focus groups clearly indicated that black and minority ethnic staff who succeed in progressing in their careers have adopted various strategies to overcome barriers. Some of the strategies, outlined below, should be viewed as "desperate measures to try and succeed in a predominantly white and often discriminatory environment." They are related to confidence and using their own initiative, qualifications and experience and fitting in with a 'white' culture.

Confidence and initiative

The confidence and ability of black and minority ethnic staff to use their own initiative was mentioned by almost all staff and senior managers, as one principal commented:

"Confidence and using your own initiative are key to progression... You really need confidence, a really thick skin in order to overcome the barriers that exist for BME staff."

However, considering that many interviewees revealed that their confidence had been reduced or 'shattered' based on their negative experiences, as discussed earlier, having the confidence to overcome barriers was not easy for them,

"Having confidence in your ability to succeed is essential for progression but it's not easy to acquire in this (college) environment."

Staff in one focus group discussion talked about taking part in training and networking opportunities as important ways to build confidence. Networking in particular provided a way for black and minority ethnic staff to meet other staff in similar positions and to learn from more senior staff who had overcome similar barriers. Senior managers, governors and principals also referred to the importance of black and minority ethnic staff

having information about where and how to access support and information, such as that provided by the NBP, the Association of Colleges or trade unions. They suggested that accessing support and information via these external organisations was critical in helping to build staff confidence by putting them into contact with staff in similar situations, which in turn helped to inform them that career progression was possible.

There is evidence from the WLN and LSN report (2010) that accessing support and information from external organisations may be particularly important for black and minority ethnic women in building confidence. This may be because there are generally fewer black and minority ethnic women in senior positions,

“If you meet someone similar who has progressed you see that you can progress too... We women often think of not being able to progress so if you meet a woman who has it is motivating.”

Several black and minority ethnic staff spoke about needing to use their own initiative because managers may not always recognise that they have an ambition to progress. Using their own initiative to further their career, such as by applying for jobs or taking advantage of promotion opportunities, was therefore vital. Referring to how he had progressed in his career, one senior manager said that he took the initiative to take part in seminars and attending networking evenings and that had he not done so, he would not have made progress in his career since he felt that his managers did not *“put him forward for promotion in the same way that they may do with a white colleague.”* Whilst the value of attending these kinds of events was clearly recognised as important in terms of career progression, for some staff, particularly those with caring responsibilities, it may be difficult to take part. This demonstrates the different experiences and barriers to career progression faced by black and minority ethnic women and men.

Qualifications and experience

There was a sense amongst staff, and particularly amongst staff who had already progressed to relatively senior positions, that black and minority ethnic staff need *“more qualifications and more experience than their white counterparts”* in order to prove their worth. This is related to comments made about managers and HR personnel responsible for recruitment and promotion not realising or not wanting to realise the potential of black and minority ethnic staff in the same way that they realise the potential of white staff:

“I really think that having a Masters and other qualifications have been vital in proving my qualities... I needed it more than my white counterparts to succeed because white managers don't see your potential.”

These findings may go some way to explain the findings of the 2008/9 Annual Workforce Diversity Profile Report (Lifelong Learning UK, 2011) which showed that black and minority ethnic staff are often more qualified than their white counterparts. Considering the current climate of funding cuts to education, including the cuts to bursaries and grants, one member of HR staff at a further education college noted that it is likely to be increasingly challenging for black and minority ethnic staff:

“BME staff often try to progress by getting more qualifications than their white counterparts because this makes it more difficult for them (black and minority ethnic staff) to be refused promotion... We are often more qualified than white staff for the same roles, but this might change if staff have to pay fees for qualifications... It may make it more difficult for BME staff to progress.”

Another staff interviewee explained how, after many years of working in one post, she had taken a part-time Masters course at the Open University. She felt that the Masters course was mainly of academic interest and had not really been applicable to her day-to-day work. Nonetheless, following graduation she had been able to progress to a more senior role almost immediately, which was something that *“without the additional qualification I would never have dreamt of happening.”*

Some of the staff interviewed suggested that in order to progress to senior management posts black and minority ethnic staff may need qualifications and experience related directly to leadership roles and interpersonal and organisational skills. One interviewee commented that *“very important competencies for*

all staff are related to leadership and interpersonal and organisational skills... which BME staff often don't have enough.” However, there is some indication that, rather than not having these skills, black and minority ethnic staff may have a different way of expressing and using these skills, which may be related to *“having a different way of working.”*

In order to gain evidence of leadership, interpersonal and/or organisational skills some black and minority ethnic staff said that they had enrolled on courses, taken on additional responsibilities or had consistently worked long hours. There was a strong sentiment amongst some of these staff that they had to work *“doubly hard”* compared to their white counterparts in proving competencies. One staff member spoke about taking an evening course in management practice to support his progression to a more senior administrative post. However, he said that on completing the course his line manager told him that he would need an additional qualification, an MBA (Master of Business Administration) to progress, even though he knew of white staff working in similar senior positions without this qualification.

Adapting to the organisation's environment

In addition to the importance of having confidence, qualifications and experience several black and minority ethnic staff said that in order to progress in their careers they felt they needed to adapt to their organisation's environment by changing their identities.

“In order to progress you have to know how to fit in and adapt to the white culture.”

This understanding of white culture and how to fit in is often learned via social contacts, but as expressed in an earlier section of the report, this can be particularly difficult for black and minority ethnic staff as they are often excluded from social interaction at work. One female manager at a further education college stated that by being married to a white man had enabled her to understand the white working culture and how to *“fit in and comply with this.”* She would, however still like to see the culture change to be more supporting and accepting of black and minority ethnic staff who perhaps didn't find it as easy to interact with their white colleagues.

HR staff interviewees agreed that language, accent and *“an understanding of how to behave appropriately”* can be important during the recruitment process which suggests that black and minority ethnic staff may need to present themselves in a manner that is complicit with the dominant 'white' way of working to be more likely to succeed. While for more junior positions it may be less important, for more senior positions it was described by several staff as essential, as outlined in the experience of one manager who stated, *“I would not have achieved this position (senior management) if I hadn't fitted in with the white culture and adapted my personality to fit in.”*

Some interviewees thought that it was more prevalent in organisations in rural locations with fewer black and minority ethnic staff where there may be *“a lesser understanding and appreciation of BME culture.”* This indicates that the appointment of more staff from diverse backgrounds, especially in senior roles, may lead to a cultural shift within an organisation, making it more accepting of different cultures, which would in turn lead to supporting the recruitment and progression of black and minority ethnic staff.

The need to fit in with the dominant 'white' culture was described by interviewees as unfair and *“clearly demonstrates that existing racism”* was common amongst staff. In particular, several black and minority ethnic staff were in agreement that fitting in with a 'white' working culture does not demonstrate any skills or experience and is not related to being successful at a specific job. This reflects the findings discussed earlier in the report regarding the exclusion of black and minority ethnic staff through the dominant organisational culture. Highlighting this, one focus group agreed that rather than stressing the competencies that black and minority ethnic staff needed to fit in with the white working culture, it is more appropriate to think about how organisations can change to be more inclusive,

“I've heard so much of the competencies needed by BME staff... often it's just a 'white' way of working, nothing to do with skills... Why not think about how organisations can be more inclusive rather than how BME staff need to change?”

Conclusions and recommendations

One of the most significant conclusions to emerge from the research came from a focus group discussion with black and minority ethnic senior managers in which they expressed intense frustration that this research was being undertaken at this time. They felt that the barriers to career progression for black and minority ethnic staff were already well documented, and that the main problem has been the lack of action taken over the last decade to fully address the situation. This indicates that further larger-scale research is needed to more comprehensively gather the views of black and minority ethnic staff within the sector, and importantly, to consider what action is necessary to address barriers.

Whilst it seems that things may have improved somewhat, with more black and minority ethnic staff in senior management positions in the further education sector than ten years ago, the numbers are far from reflective of the black and minority ethnic population nationally and even further from reflecting the black and minority ethnic learner population.

Participants' perception and experience of racism and discrimination

Participants in this study identified racism and discrimination as a major barrier which manifested itself in many forms. These include the use of informal recruitment practices, which means that black and minority ethnic staff are disadvantaged as they often do not have the close relationships and informal networks with senior managers. As described by participants this form of institutional racism is often covert rather than overt making it harder to challenge. Importantly, black and minority ethnic staff experience prejudice and stereotyping in relation to different aspects of their identities including appearance, accents and surnames. This suggests a failure on the part of organisations and senior managers to recognise staff from diverse backgrounds as not one homogenous group but a very diverse group with multiple identities, different cultural and religious backgrounds, languages and ethnicities.

Organisational culture and exclusion

Being excluded from the organisational culture is part of a wider problem in the understanding of what real organisational engagement with equality and diversity strategies means for senior leaders and governors in the sector. Related to the feeling of exclusion is the feeling that policies and procedures were introduced to satisfy criteria and 'tick boxes' rather than being instrumental in implementing cultural or structural change, which means that black and minority ethnic staff continue to be excluded.

Recommendations for the further education system and relevant national bodies

Objective	Actions to be taken
Relevant sector bodies and organisations to publicly acknowledge that there are still race issues in the further education sector and instigate open, transparent dialogue across the sector on racism and how to tackle race issues.	Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to publicly acknowledge the prevalence of racism within the further education sector and lack of progress made over the last decade. Set-out plans for tackling racism and a timetable for when improvements will be seen.
	BIS policy officials to set up a representative working group to tackle race issues within the sector (to replace the current Race Equality Implementation Group). This should be chaired by the permanent secretary of BIS, or someone at Director General level. The selected Chair should have a specific personal performance indicator to ensure the working group instigate measurable change.
	The working group to report regularly to the BIS select committee on progress made.
	The working group should re-establish a national strategy to addressing the under-representation of black and minority ethnic staff in further education, and all further education providers should be encouraged to sign-up to the strategy.
Equality standards to be established across the further education sector and enforced by Ofsted.	The BIS working group to establish a set of equality success criteria for measuring further education providers. The criteria to include issues of employment and educational provision.
	The criteria above to be embedded into the common inspection framework. The adequacy of the complaint or grievance process and the diversity of the workforce to be form part of the criteria.
	Ofsted inspectors to receive mandatory training on how to inspect the new race equality objectives and the importance of their being enforced.
	Providers to be inspected with the addition of race equality criteria.
	Ofsted inspectors to have the power to grade providers as inadequate as an inspection based on a provider's lack of equality objectives and actions.
All central government departments to work collaboratively, and with their sponsor departments, to challenge negative stereotypes and assumptions of black and minority ethnic people.	A media group to be established as a sub-group of the BIS working group to report on how to improve the media representation of black and minority ethnic people. This should be informed by special interest groups such as the Runnymede Trust.
	Relevant government departments and sponsor departments to be encouraged to consider the active promotion of race equality when equality impact assessing policies to ensure they go further than eliminating discrimination.
	BIS to work with BBC and other media to consider commissioning black and minority ethnic-led short films on non-explicit, institutional racism in Britain.
Further education providers to have the confidence to discuss race equality openly and thoroughly and to be prepared to acknowledge that there may be existing issues within their organisation.	All further education principals and chairs of governors to have mandatory race equality training funded by BIS. The training content should be developed by an appropriate race equality organisation and signed-off by the BIS working group.
	The training should become part of a compulsory induction process for principals and chairs of governing bodies so that new appointees are also trained.
	Ofsted inspectors to encourage further education providers to acknowledge and disclose incidents of racist bullying, harassment and discrimination that are reported within their organisations. Acknowledging such incidents should be seen as the first step in tackling them.
	Further education providers to be encouraged to establish local networks to share good practice and provide support, including race equality issues.
	BIS to include articles on race equality in its newsletters and information packs to further education providers. This might include articles written by college principals who have a diverse, representative senior management team on how they have instigated change.

<p>Providers need to impact assess their policies and practices to ensure that they are not indirectly (or directly) advantageous to white staff and to look to see where policies and practices can be modified to ensure black and minority ethnic staff are actively encouraged and supported.</p>	<p>Equality impact assessment and embedding the proactive encouragement of race equality into policies and practice to be an integral part of the training devised for principals and senior managers.</p>
	<p>BIS to include advice and information on race equality impact assessments and specifically the active promotion of race equality in its publications and newsletters to providers.</p>
	<p>Further Education providers to be encouraged to involve trade union organisations and representatives in the impact assessment process.</p>
	<p>LSIS to publish examples of good, robust race equality impact assessments on issues that are likely to affect the majority of providers and LSIS and BIS to advertise the publication through their websites and mailing lists.</p>
<p>A programme of dissemination events, conferences and expert seminars should be organised in order to support sector organisations to develop effective policies and practices in the areas of race equality.</p>	<p>BIS to organise national conferences on race equality in further education and engage race equality groups and other relevant interest groups in the development of the programme. Issues discussed should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • issues that exist • stereotyping • box-ticking versus meaningful engagement • how to move forward and make improvements • communicating organisational strategies to staff, learners and local communities.
	<p>Central government departments to organise events on progress made since the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. The events should focus on why progress has been so slow and strategies for speeding up progress in future.</p>
	<p>BIS to include articles on areas related to 7.1 and 7.2 in its regular newsletters and publications.</p>

The role of senior management

The crucial importance of the role of senior management in tackling racism and in providing black and minority ethnic staff with opportunities to develop and support to progress is evident. There was a feeling amongst some of the research participants that some white senior managers were reluctant to promote black and minority ethnic staff to senior positions in order to protect their own positions. However, there was also evidence to suggest that their behaviour in treating black and minority ethnic staff differently may in some cases be due to cultural ignorance rather than deliberate intent. This means that all-white senior management team can act as a barrier due to perceptions of being bullied and having to conform to the dominant white culture, thus suggesting that for real change in senior management there needs to be a proactive approach to altering the composition of senior management teams to include more black and minority ethnic staff.

Dealing with complaints and grievances

Addressing issues related to racism and its many forms was identified as a real concern for many of the research participants which was particularly evident when dealing with policies and procedures in terms of complaints and grievances, which black and minority ethnic staff found at times unsupportive and ineffective. This often resulted in work-related illnesses, including stress, and in people leaving the further education sector. Some senior managers are reluctant to address issues related to race equality for fear of using the wrong terms and not knowing how to talk about it. Other senior managers may feel that it was not their responsibility, but instead that of HR staff. HR staff themselves often have a focus on maintaining an orderly working environment and are reluctant to tackle issues of conflict, indicating that there is nobody to take on the responsibility of

dealing with complaints and grievances. This means that black and minority ethnic senior managers may not be able to sufficiently support other black and minority ethnic staff for fear of showing favouritism or increasing their own sense of isolation within an organisation.

Confidence

Confidence emerged as an important theme from the research and it is evident that whilst black and minority ethnic staff can be confident as well as ambitious, a reluctance to apply for a more senior post may come down to not being 'overtly confident' in one's own abilities and in demonstrating them to a predominantly white senior management team. There was also a sense from some participants that they had had enough of constantly applying for jobs and being unsuccessful: they no longer saw the point in trying.

Recommendations for the further education system and relevant national bodies

Objective	Actions to be taken
Senior managers and governors need to be committed to race equality and to implement actions and strategies to create an inclusive culture within the organisation.	Sector bodies to provide senior managers and governors with mandatory, tailored and specific training in race equality so that they feel more comfortable and confident in addressing inequalities.
	Equality and diversity should be a standing item at senior management meetings and meetings of the governing body.
	A member of the governing body within organisations should be appointed as an equality lead and take strategic responsibility for its implementation.
	BIS, LSIS and other sector organisations should ensure the moral case for race equality is well communicated to providers as well as the business and legal case.
	Providers should be made to feel confident, motivated and inspired in tackling racism within their institution through regular, positive communications. Communications should include the dissemination of case studies which make the situation real rather than theoretical.
Senior management and governing bodies should put strategies in place for addressing any under-representation in the workforce at all levels and they should monitor progress made at regular intervals.	BIS/LSIS to develop a self-assessment tool for organisations to use to set a benchmark for where they currently stand to scrutinise the policies, schemes and practices they have in place.
	Providers to undertake the self-assessment, which should be led by the senior management team and the governing body.
	Providers to publish on their website their staff profile by personal characteristics (where this can be done anonymously) along with the results of their self-assessment and the actions they plan to take as a result. The actions should have measurable outcomes and specific deadlines.
	A senior member of HR to be appointed to provide support and advice on dealing with complaints and grievances.
	HR to work with senior management, governing bodies, trade union organisations and staff groups to outline clear guidelines on how to deal with complaints and grievances and disseminate throughout the organisation.

Build and maintain the confidence of black and minority ethnic staff.	Further education providers, sector organisations and trade unions to provide opportunities for black and minority ethnic staff to build confidence through mentoring schemes and work shadowing. These should be tailored for black and minority ethnic women and targeted to ensure an even gender take-up of opportunities.
	Further education providers to encourage the development of black and minority ethnic staff forums which are given a ring-fenced budget to organise events and training and which is formally involved in management decisions which may impact on race equality. Such groups should be involved in the development of race equality strategies and should regularly have the principal and chair of governors attend parts of their meetings to discuss relevant issues. It may be possible to join these forums up with other providers in the area.

The experience of black and minority ethnic women

Gender-related issues were mentioned throughout the research, highlighting the different experiences of female and male black and minority ethnic staff with the organisational culture being largely male-dominated acting as barriers for female staff. In addition, informal practices can serve to disadvantage those who are not seen to participate, and minority ethnic women considered such processes to be barriers to promotion and progression. Some female black and minority ethnic staff also spoke of outdated attitudes and views towards them from male senior managers, including black and minority ethnic male managers, who thought their place was to look after the home and family.

A lack of support and flexibility by senior management was mentioned by some black and minority ethnic female staff, which often led to stress-related conditions, and may mean that some black and minority ethnic black and minority ethnic women actively choose not to progress their careers. For those who did succeed in reaching senior management positions there was a belief that it was at considerable cost, such as working considerably longer hours and being unable to support other women as all efforts were focused on securing their own careers.

Recommendations for the further education system and relevant national bodies

Objective	Actions to be taken
To ensure that gender does not impact on staff recruitment, retention or progression.	Further education providers to work with sector bodies and trade unions to ensure that the needs of women, such as flexible working, are considered. It is important to ensure that adverse impact related to such strategies, for example lower pay in part-time opportunities are also eliminated.
	HR and senior management to ensure that black and minority ethnic women who are appropriately capable and qualified are actively encouraged to apply for promotion.
	Further education providers to regularly monitor their gender composition for middle management and senior management jobs to ensure women are represented at all levels of the organisation.

Public spending cuts

The public spending cuts were seen as being likely to impact significantly on the opportunities for the recruitment, retention and progression for black and minority ethnic staff. There was often a lack of support for black and minority ethnic staff compared with their white counterparts which was seen as significant when applying for positions or retaining their posts. This meant that black and minority ethnic staff are more likely to take voluntary redundancy as they do not believe they can compete with their white counterparts. The result of the spending cuts also means that some black and minority ethnic staff have taken on more junior roles. Cuts in public spending also mean that the commitment to equality and diversity may be reduced, which is likely to result in black and minority ethnic staff feeling less valued.

The full impact of funding cuts remains to be seen but it is likely to impact on black and minority ethnic staff's ability to progress in the future due to the lack of professional training and development. It is therefore a real possibility that any progress that has been made to date towards improvements in the recruitment, retention and progression of black and minority ethnic staff within the further education sector may slow down or even be reversed.

Recommendations for the further education system and relevant national bodies

Objective	Actions to be taken
Ensure that public spending cuts do not disproportionately disadvantage black and minority ethnic staff.	HR to ensure that public spending cuts do not compromise equality and diversity guidelines by completing impact assessments for all restructuring and redundancy proposals. Trade unions and relevant government bodies to monitor this.
	HR to gain and make clear a detailed understanding of direct and indirect discrimination during any restructuring and mergers. This to be assessed through selection criteria and person specifications.
	Providers should look at initiatives that are low cost to implement and those that are likely to have the biggest impact, such as active senior management support and the establishment of black and minority ethnic staff groups. Black and minority ethnic staff groups can also help in the prioritisation of actions and strategies.

Training and CPD for black and minority ethnic staff and training of staff involved in recruitment

One of the key findings is not just the importance of training and CPD for black and minority ethnic staff, but its heightened importance for black and minority ethnic staff over their white counterparts. In particular, as confidence building is an important aspect of training, there seems to be scope in the short-term for considering coping and resilience strategies for the barriers and issues that currently exist in the sector.

In addition, softer skills such as interpersonal, leadership and organisational skills can often be more difficult for black and minority ethnic staff to acquire as they have less access to the experiences in which they are learnt. This emphasises the importance of mentoring schemes, secondments and work shadowing.

The research found that recruitment panels could often benefit from bespoke training in equality and diversity. Having recruitment panels and recruiting personnel who are competent in equality and diversity gives confidence to black and minority ethnic applicants and will ensure that practices will be fair and transparent, helping to combat institutional racism.

Whole organisation strategies to address barriers

In order to promote address the issues that black and minority ethnic staff continue to face in the further education sector a number of strategies emerged from the research. Having clear and effective policies in place to promote equality and diversity was seen as key to progressing race equality. The policies act as a statement of intent and to ensure that all staff within an organisation are aware of their own obligations. Several interviewees spoke about the policies being a 'box-ticking' exercise that did not reflect the reality of the organisational culture; policies can only be as good as the people using them, acting upon them and enforcing them.

Many of the research participants did not feel that race equality was a priority for the senior management teams at their organisations. In order for real change to be made in addressing the inequalities that exist in the further education sector workforce, there needs to be the will and the commitment to instigate it, and that needs to come from senior managers. The whole organisation needs to take responsibility for culture change, and that can only happen if policies and practices are enforced all the way down the organisation. Some participants felt that further education institutions are so target-driven that setting equality targets may help to ensure that progress is made.

Black and minority ethnic staff continue to leave the sector, often due to stress factors but also due to the frustration at a lack of career progression and recognition for their efforts and achievements. In order to begin to address this and to ensure that valuable people from diverse backgrounds are not lost to the sector more needs to be done by organisations to understand their motives for leaving. Many who leave the sector said they had not been asked, even though to do so would assist organisations in retaining their staff.

HR professionals can also play an important role in career progression for black and minority ethnic staff as they are responsible for recruitment policies and staff development within an organisation. In examples of good practice they can ensure that detailed feedback is offered to unsuccessful applicants to enable them to develop, and they can ensure that an organisation's policy provides such feedback in a consistent way. Other examples include circulating information that would be of use to black and minority ethnic staff, for example the newsletters of relevant black and minority ethnic specific organisations, and training and development opportunities.

Views were mixed about positive action in recruitment and promotion. Participants want to progress in their careers because they are the best person for the job, and they want staff to know that they are in their role because they are the best person for the job – they do not want to be perceived as having had special treatment. However, if organisations committed themselves to positive action fully, and the processes were embedded into recruitment and selection processes in a transparent way, then it could have a positive impact.

Partnership working was found to have a positive impact on race equality. Organisations can learn from each other and provide support and advice to each other to share good practice and resources. The ideas suggested of twinning providers and of setting up networks and partnerships with local interest groups were both seen to have been helpful.

Targeted organisations like the NBP were mentioned consistently throughout the interviews and focus groups as being valuable in supporting career progression for black and minority ethnic staff. It was felt however that funding and inspection agencies could do more to encourage the development and enforcement of policies aimed at supporting staff. Trade union organisations were not often mentioned spontaneously by black and minority ethnic staff, many of whom were more likely to seek advice and guidance from other external bodies. However, where trade unions were mentioned by participants, they highlighted the staff development information that was on offer.

Trade union representatives who participated in the research felt that their union did offer advice and support aimed at black and minority ethnic members, but often other black and minority ethnic staff in the sector knew

little about it. It was suggested that more needs to be done to highlight the role of trade union organisations for black and minority ethnic staff; although one individual suggested that they did not become involved with trade unions because they were fearful of becoming “too visible.”

Recommendations for the further education system, relevant national bodies and staff

Objective	Actions to be taken
All further education providers to have race equality policies in place including equal opportunities and equal pay policies.	Further education providers to write and regularly review race equality policies and measure progress.
	All staff to be made aware of the policies and their responsibilities in implementing them.
	Further education providers to conduct annual equal pay audits which cover all protected characteristics, where the data is available. The results to be published on their public-facing website.
Ensure clear lines of responsibility and accountability for equality and diversity policies.	Further education providers to identify clear lines of responsibility for all equality and diversity policies including senior management level.
	Further education providers to outline how policies will be enforced.
Make use of positive action to support black and minority ethnic staff recruitment and progression.	Relevant government policy departments to provide specific, tailored guidance on positive action to all further education providers. The guidance should explain how positive action can be successful, and its importance.
	Trade union organisations to work with providers to introduce a meaningful and useful approach to positive action.
Identify the reasons why black and minority ethnic staff leave the sector to agree recommendations address the issues.	Further education providers to automatically interview all staff who leave on a confidential basis to identify any issues and recommendations the leaver may have.
HR to actively support black and minority ethnic staff progression.	HR to write job descriptions including guidance on the application process, what is expected of candidates, how candidates will be assessed and the essential and desirable criteria for the post.
	Where internal candidates are unsuccessful, HR should provide detailed feedback automatically and line managers should offer to talk to the applicant (if the applicant agrees) about why they were unsuccessful and how they can improve those areas in the future.
	HR staff should also regularly equality impact assess all policies.
	HR should circulate black and minority ethnic-related publications and information to all staff, as all staff may be interested and it reminds all staff of the importance of an inclusive culture.
	Working with the black and minority ethnic staff group and local race community groups, providers should organise equality events, such as Black History Month in October.
Further education providers to work in partnership with other providers to learn from best practice in supporting black and minority ethnic staff.	Further education providers to set up local partnerships with other providers.
	LSIS to support partnership working by considering suitable projects such as a ‘learning from the best’ project for equality and diversity.
Further education providers to work in partnership with sector organisations, such as the NBP.	Further education providers to make available information regarding sector organisations to all staff.
	Initiatives from sector organisations, such as the BLI® to be discussed in staff meetings.

Black and minority ethnic staff overcoming barriers

The research found that to succeed what was described as still ‘a predominantly white and often discriminatory environment’ black and minority ethnic staff feel that they in order to succeed they have to adopt particular ways to overcome the barriers that continue to exist. This includes having enough confidence in their own abilities to apply for positions even in when faced with repeated rejections. For some black and minority ethnic staff this has an impact on their levels of confidence, therefore knowing how to access support and having networking opportunities is seen as a way of maintaining self-confidence and developing a ‘thick skin’ to deal with set-backs. Confidence building is considered particularly important for black and minority ethnic women, as there are even fewer in senior positions than there are black and minority ethnic men.

For some black and minority ethnic staff, gaining more qualifications and more experience than their white counterparts is also seen as a successful way of building confidence and ‘proving their worth.’ Black and minority ethnic staff still describe experiences of having to work harder and take on additional responsibilities than their white counterparts to prove their competencies.

The dominant organisational culture remains for many black and ethnic staff as a particular barrier, with staff having to adapt to the ‘white culture’ rather than an organisation’s culture accommodating a diverse workforce. There was a sense that organisations do not change to become more inclusive; black and minority ethnic staff still continue to have to change and mould themselves to the established status quo within the organisation.

Recommendations for the further education system, relevant national bodies and staff

Objective	Actions to be taken
Support black and minority ethnic staff in overcoming the barriers that are currently present.	Continue to provide and increase the availability of black and minority ethnic staff groups and support networks to build staff confidence.
	Provide support for black and minority ethnic staff to access training and the acquisition of formal qualifications, by providing courses, funding and time off work to attend courses.
	Publicise and increase awareness across organisations that more needs to be done to promote a fully inclusive culture.

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Appendix: Methodology

The project adopted a mixed-methods qualitative approach to ensure that data was gathered, analysed and used in the most appropriate ways. The methods selected included a desk-based literature review, in-depth one to one interviews and focus groups.

Desk-based research

A literature review was undertaken to provide the contextual background to the project and to inform the development of research materials. The review took into account available literature and materials to obtain an overview of the policy context, review previous research findings, explore successes in relation to managers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds in the further education workforce and the issues that need to be addressed.

Search criteria and sources

To meet these objectives we started by establishing some key words for our search. Search terms included 'further education,' 'learning and skills,' 'post-16 education,' 'college,' 'work based learning,' 'adult and community learning' amongst others in conjunction with 'black and minority ethnic,' 'ethnic minority,' 'race equality,' 'barriers,' 'facilitators or enablers,' 'progression' and 'black and minority ethnic staff leavers.' All combinations of the established terms were searched using internet search engines and literature databases, including IDOX and DIALOG.

We also sourced extensive unpublished and published research undertaken by both the NBP and LSN that includes research and data focusing on:

- The experiences of staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds across the further education sector.
- Research evidence on organisational policies relating to the recruitment, development and progression of black and minority ethnic staff. This information has been gained by the NBP from working closely with senior management teams and HR departments in colleges in order to identify barriers and the development of effective strategies (best practice), Lifelong Learning UK Catalyst projects, and perspectives from other holders of key expertise and insight (for example, recruitment agencies working with the appointment of senior post holders into the further education sector).
- Evaluation and impact data of positive action initiatives and their impact upon under-representation, for example, the Black Leadership Initiative First Steps to Leadership and its sister programmes.
- The destinations of staff who have left the further education sector and the reasons for this.
- The impact of public expenditure reductions on black and minority ethnic staff. NBP recently delivered a series of events in this area that provided valuable insights into the effects of public spending cuts on black and minority ethnic staff in the further education sector.
- Previous research undertaken by the Commission for Black Staff in Further Education and the Centre for Excellence in Leadership.

In addition, searches were carried out on the websites of targeted organisations for relevant policies, research findings and materials including:

- Lifelong Learning UK - including the Annual Workforce Diversity Profile reports of 2007/08 and 2006/07 which LSN delivered for Lifelong Learning UK

- Skills Funding Agency and the Young People's Learning Agency (formerly the Learning and Skills Council)
- Learning and Skills Improvement Service
- Association of Colleges and other relevant trade union organisations
- Women's Leadership Network
- Other equality-focused organisations such as the Runnymede Trust and the Equality and Human Rights Commission

Narrowing the search

Search results were narrowed by location so that only results relevant to England were used and only material written and published in the last ten years was included. The remaining results were reviewed and their relevance determined on the titles of the articles/publications and their abstracts and introductions. The resultant list of materials was then downloaded from the internet (where possible), or copies requested from IDOX or DIALOG or from the British Library.

Reviewing materials

The material was reviewed and any key trends identified and summarised together. This provided the contextual background information for this report. In addition, reviewing materials was especially helpful in identifying the sample for the interviews and focus groups, and informing the fieldwork phase of the research including the interview schedule and topic guide questions for the interviews and the focus groups.

In-depth interviews and focus groups with black and minority staff in the further education sector and relevant stakeholders

In-depth semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds currently working in the further education sector at different occupational levels and roles including management staff. In addition five staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds who recently left the sector were interviewed.

The purpose of the interviews and focus groups was to explore their experiences of progression to senior management roles in relation to actual or perceived drivers and barriers. The interviews were mainly conducted by telephone but a small number were carried out face to face to suit the participants.

In addition, we drew on events delivered by NBP for their members on preparing for the impact of public expenditure reductions. These events took place in September and October 2010 in various locations in England. Feedback from these events was used to inform the findings on the impact of public expenditure cuts on staff and managers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

The advantage of the focus group approach was that group discussion produced data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group setting: listening to others' verbalised experiences stimulated memories and ideas in participants.

Selecting the sample

In order to select the sample for the interviews and focus group participants we used the NBP's extensive membership database and LSN's contacts database. Currently 160 colleges affiliate to the Network which boasts the largest database of black and minority ethnic professionals working in and around the sector from colleges, work based learning and adult and community learning providers. The Network has the contacts for most black and minority ethnic principals and governors and a range of other occupational posts was drawn upon for the sample. The Network also has membership records that identified potential interview participants who have recently left the sector and their destinations.

LSN has an extensive database of over 40,000 contacts in the further education sector, including contacts from almost 6,000 colleges, work based learning and adult and community learning providers. Both LSN and the NBP also made use of their strong links with membership organisations including the Association of Learning Providers and the Association of Colleges, and trade unions such as UNISON and the Universities and Colleges Union to recruit participants.

An introductory email was issued to the sample audience inviting their participation in the research. An overview of the research and the value of their involvement were provided to potential participants.

A wide staff sample audience was targeted and selected for the interviews to ensure varied perceptions were captured. This included varying:

- staff occupational levels and positions – including chief executives, principals, deputy principals, managers, practitioners, support staff
- organisational types - colleges, work based learning and adult and community learning providers
- gender
- black and minority ethnic groups
- age
- other factors including disability, sexual orientation and religion/belief
- location – we selected from both rural and urban areas in England
- black and minority ethnic staff leavers.

Recruiting participants

An introductory email was sent to the target sample group to invite participation in either the one-to-one interviews or the focus groups (we ensured that participants were not selected for both). The introductory email outlined the research, what was involved and the value of their contribution to the project. Potential participants were then contacted by telephone to confirm their participation.

Recruiting focus group participants was challenging for a number of reasons:

- Some staff found it difficult to take time off work to take part
- The distance and time to travel to a focus group could be problematic
- Issues surrounding confidentiality with some staff opting to take part in a one to one interview, rather than taking part in a group discussion
- Difficulties in organising a time and venue to suit particular groups, such as HR staff representatives and senior managers.

For these reasons several focus groups were substituted with individual telephone interviews, to allow participants to share their views and discuss their experiences at a time suitable to them. This allowed us to gather information and experiences from individuals whose voices would otherwise not have been heard.

In addition, the adverse weather conditions in mid November – early December, 2010 meant that several individuals who had agreed to participate in focus groups were not able to do so which reduced the numbers in some of the focus groups at the last minute. Where possible individuals who had not been able to attend were interviewed by phone or invited to send their comments by email.

Interview and focus group schedules

The interviews were semi-structured in nature. An interview schedule was developed with questions based on the research questions and the results of the desk research. Similarly a focus group schedule was designed for carrying out the focus groups which outlined the broad topics to cover, providing a guide for interviewers and

ensuring consistency across groups. However, the guides remained open and flexible to allow exploration of individual experiences and perceptions, reflecting the open nature of qualitative interviewing.

The questions focused on the experiences of individuals from a wide range of black and minority ethnic backgrounds in relation to:

- barriers and facilitators for managers and potential managers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds in the further education sector, including examples of good practice in progression
- perceptions of where the advancement of a suitably qualified person from a black and minority ethnic background within an organisation is stopped
- perceptions of the general issues surrounding career progression for black and minority groups, e.g. examples of discrimination and/or harassment, lack of training and encouragement etc
- positive and negative personal experiences of black and minority ethnic staff in relation to career progression
- the range of skills and competencies held by senior managers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds in the sector that may have contributed to their success and/or other factors that enabled them/helped them to succeed
- experiences in relation to any initiatives or training they have been involved in that are directly linked to previous research recommendations to address under-representation and improve the black and minority ethnic management profile
- training and advancement opportunities offered by their employer. For example, does their employer allow flexible working hours to participate in training and other initiatives such as the Black Leadership Initiative?
- the impact on black and minority ethnic staff and managers in the context of the public expenditure cuts, restructuring by providers and redundancies
- reasons why black and minority ethnic staff have left the further education sector, what makes other sectors more attractive and their opinions of considering to return to the further education sector.

The schedules were piloted with two staff members. The purpose of the pilot was to test the usefulness and relevance of the questions. Researchers looked at the participants' responses to the questions and noted the questions that elicited the most useful information. Based on this, the schedule was revised.

Conducting interviews and focus groups

The interview/focus group schedule was sent to the participant in advance to enable them to prepare and to make them aware of what to expect and to make them feel comfortable about their involvement in the research. Participants were also assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Interviews and focus groups were then arranged at timings and locations convenient to participants.

Immediately prior to the interview/focus group care was taken to ensure that participants were properly briefed as to the purpose of the research and its methods of procedure. Participants were then asked to sign a form giving LSN permission to use their responses on the basis of strict anonymity.

During the interviews and focus groups the schedule acted as a guide to elicit responses and explore key themes, but participants were also given the freedom to explore and steer the interview/focus group to the topics they considered most important (within the constraints of the research).

The focus groups were of the dual moderator type, with one researcher leading and managing the session so that it progressed smoothly and the other researcher taking summary notes and ensuring that all topics were covered.

The interview/focus group comments were summarised back to participants to ensure that they felt confident that they had been understood correctly and to provide an opportunity to add additional thoughts

and comments. Summarising the comments also allowed the researcher to ensure that they understood participants correctly.

The interviews were between 30 and 75 minutes in duration, and the focus groups were between 90-120 minutes. Profiling information on interviewees and focus group participants is outlined below:

- Five interviews with leavers:
 - Three female and two male interviewees
 - Three south east, two west midlands and one London
 - Two African, one mixed race, one Caribbean and one Indian
 - Two further education colleges, two further education colleges with work based learning and one work based learning provider
 - One head of school, two curriculum managers, one curriculum leader and one project coordinator.
- Eleven interviews with current black and minority ethnic staff:
 - Six female and five male interviewees
 - Four London, three east midlands, two undeclared, one west midlands and one south east
 - Six Indian, two African, two undeclared and one Caribbean
 - Eight further education colleges, two adult and community learning providers and one work based learning provider
 - Three middle managers, two lecturers, two heads of department, two tutors and two support staff.
- Five interviews with stakeholders:
 - Three female and two male interviewees
 - Two London, two west midlands and one south west
 - Three white, one Asian and one undeclared
 - Three HR professionals and two trade union representatives.
- Three focus groups with black and minority ethnic staff:
 - One focus group in the west midlands
 - Two focus group comprising six participants each in London
 - Nine female and six male focus group participants
 - Five middle managers, four lecturers, three support staff and three tutors.
- One focus group with five governors and five principals in the west midlands:
 - Six males and four females
 - Four Asian, three black and two mixed race and one Caribbean participant.

Confidentiality

One important aspect of this project was to ensure absolute confidentiality and anonymity for all those involved in the fieldwork. None of the comments included in the report are attributed to any one individual and LSN have ensured that they cannot be identified, either through the opinions they gave, or through reference to their job title. It was important for the quality of the research that LSN secured the trust of participants so that they were able to speak freely and frankly to facilitate effective and accurate responses.

Participants in the interviews and focus groups were asked to sign a form giving LSN permission to use their responses on the basis of strict anonymity. The anonymity of individuals was also guaranteed through the use of recording methods that do not allow individuals to be identified and the restriction of access to hard copy and electronic materials emanating from the project and the project database.

As a member of the British Educational Research Association, LSN strictly follows the Association's ethical guidelines.

The interviews were recorded in note form and with the use of a digital recorder with the participants' permission. Some interviewees preferred not to be recorded digitally and in those instances the researchers relied on written notes. Some participants also requested that their identities were disguised further, for fear of being identified, such as not noting the provider type or location they work in. Even though this impacted on the nature of the findings these requests were always fulfilled.

These issues related to confidentiality are in themselves evidence of the sensitive nature of the research into topic of barriers to progression for black and minority ethnic staff and indicate the importance of this research and the findings obtained.

Obtaining the engagement of black and minority ethnic staff

Previous research carried out by both LSN and the NBP in this area has shown that response rates are generally high and that no special measures need to be taken to encourage participation. This research is no exception and staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds were very keen to participate as they considered they had a vested interest in contributing to the research. LSN ensured that all fieldwork was carried out with impartiality to ensure high quality and reliable data is achieved.

Analysis of data

The interviews and focus groups were analysed using a framework for analysis, which was derived from the project's aims and objectives and includes themes that emerged from the data. This framework enabled researchers to code qualitative data into common and/or unique areas, such as:

- experiences of staff and managers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and their employers and stakeholders in addressing race equality
- perceived or actual barriers to recruitment, retention and progression in the further education sector
- gender
- public spending cuts
- impact of barriers
- policy and the effective application of workplace solutions to address under-representation, career development and progression amongst black and minority ethnic staff and managers in the further education sector
- success or failures of initiatives including training to address under-representation at senior management level
- skills and competencies essential for success and opportunities for developing these amongst current and aspiring managers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

From the coding it is possible to re-group the information by key themes, which are outlined in the findings section of this report.



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