

23rd February 2016

Focus Group: Experiences of young Londoners from BAME backgrounds

Participants: 8 young people aged 18-24, 6 males and 2 females from BAME backgrounds including: Asian British Bangladeshi; Asian British Indian; Black British Caribbean; Colombian.

Experiences of trying to find work

Experience so far	Challenges
<p>Found it easy to get interviews but wasn't really getting anywhere once interviewed. Joined the Young London Working caseload and was put forward for a job on a fixed term contract. After that she looked online for a job and found something quite quickly – still there now after 14 months.</p> <p><i>Positives</i> – things that helped were having a portfolio that university helped her to put together to bring to interview, or to include a link on CV.</p>	<p>When looking for work– needed help with how to interview well and succeed in securing a job. Felt that her ethnic background was unimportant – more that her barriers were related to being young and lacking in confidence.</p>
<p>Studied mechanical engineering and did a placement at Jaguar Land Rover. He has applied for loads of temp jobs. He had a story about a friend from the same background who sent two CVs to an employer and changed his name to Smith on one of them, which got him an interview. In his experience, smaller companies tend to give feedback which is helpful, but larger companies don't get back in touch.</p>	<p>Graduate jobs often require online tests – the maths test often really hard, so has failed many of these.</p>
<p>Was unsure about a career coming out of school but knew he didn't want to go to university. He did an accounting and finance course but had no response from employers about part time finance roles.</p>	<p>Has experienced something that felt like discrete racism. He was invited to interview at estate agents and when he got there he was told that they were not holding interviews. Felt that there was no diversity e.g. not one person he could visibly see in the office was from a BAME background and that this may have played a part in them changing their minds about interviewing him.</p> <p>He has tried to a lot of different roles, but never stayed in work anywhere long.</p>
<p>Had a gap year after college, and then went on to do an internship in fashion. First work experience was of very low level work i.e. sticking on labels etc. Found out about getting jobs herself, also did pre-employment course.</p>	<p>Noticed a trend that there was a theme of discrimination within the workplace linked to ethnicity – she was let go because she was told she wasn't always greeting customers and felt that the management was turning a blind eye to other non-BAME staff members who also didn't greet customers.</p>
<p>After school wanted to do art and design in college. Volunteered at a charity shop for four months. He was planning to go to university but then was put off by tuition fees and the idea of being in debt. Worked at his Dad's office because he couldn't find anything other than working in his Dad's travel agency. Didn't want to work in front of a computer which he felt</p>	<p>Felt that not fitting in has been a challenge when going to interviews/assessments.</p> <p>Sees experience as the biggest barrier – all employers say you need experience.</p>

<p>limited his options. Stopped signing on, and left the jobcentre as they weren't helping to find him a job. He tried a second employability course programme linked to carpentry which was useless. Had to give that up because he found that he was allergic to dust!</p>	
<p>Became a father at 17, and had to find work to support his young family. Applied and got an apprenticeship with a London Council - but it was only £200 a week which made it hard to support his family. He was interviewed by another person from a minority background, from South Africa, so felt more comfortable. He was then made redundant. The council job helped him to get a job with a housing association – his Mum is a resident. The job came after a structured pre-employment course – where he found a job in admin to apply to. The people from the course encouraged him to apply. He enjoys it – it's a diverse place and his colleagues are supportive.</p>	<p>Low wages for young people – difficult if you have responsibilities</p> <p>Comparing CV with friend who has similar education, grades, etc. but a different address on it. Feels his Peckham address may have played a role in not getting a job.</p>
<p>Politics student. Applied for lots of part time retail jobs after he left school. Uncle helped him to get a job at the council. He did some stewarding work in 2014 –thought he got this job because they were short staffed, as he really didn't have enough experience. Signed up to the Young London Working caseload and got a part time job in retail. Thinks his voluntary experience helped a lot, e.g. being able to use references.</p>	<p>Says his challenges are probably down to experience and limited availability due to his university commitments.</p> <p>Applied for summer programme with a market research firm three years in a row and even though each year he got more experience, he was still unsuccessful each time.</p> <p>His experience of graduate jobs – often failed the online tests.</p>
<p>Left school at 16. Worked in retail after trying everywhere else. Being 16 his CV was sparse, and believes that key to getting the job was asking to meet the manager in store and making a good impression. Also did some voluntary youth experience. A friend got him a role in Canary Wharf which taught him not to be afraid of different kinds of people. The role also made him realise he wanted to do something meaningful. Through an agency he became a TA at a school and has been there for two years.</p>	<p>Being judged on very sparse CV is unrealistic for a retail role when the role requires soft skills rather than academic qualifications</p>
<p>“I personally feel being BAME does play a role. I haven't attended many job interviews, but for the ones I have, I often feel that I will be discriminated because of my colour. What if they don't want a brown person? However, in regards to the first ever job I got (still have), I believe my ethnicity played a positive role, because the community centre I was applying to had an Indian majority as their service users. So I think that helped me out in this instance. My worst experience was when I did work experience at a horrible retail shop, I am sure the manger though that women belong in the realm of cleaning, considering he always made me and the other girl clean.”</p>	<p>One of my major concerns when I apply to jobs; I reckon that some don't reply after seeing my name, sadly.</p> <p>“OMG, what if they want a white person so they can appeal to customers?”</p>

Experiences of the work place

- Group generally believe that once in work, **discrete racism** is not an uncommon experience. Discrete racism in work is subtle “*Not speaking about it doesn’t mean it’s not true*”
- 6/8 young people agreed and said that “**not fitting in**” can be problematic
- 6/8 young people agree that there seems to be a **glass ceiling for people from BAME backgrounds** and that they can be under more scrutiny: “*The freedoms that apply to others don’t apply to you*”
- **Work culture** and relationships with colleagues can feel **exclusive** – i.e. informal networking and relationship building happens after work, colleagues go to the pub and drink etc.

Impressions of the transport sector

- Roles:
 - Engineering
 - Tube drivers (and good pay)
 - Customer service
 - Trains and train drivers
- General thoughts about the sector:
 - London’s population increasing, which means there will be an increased need for public transport and an **increased opportunity** in this sector.
 - Of interest to those studying sustainability
 - Those who have looked for jobs in the transport sector before have done so because they have family members working there or they’ve been interested in structured schemes.
- Group put off by transport sector because:
 - Apprenticeships seem to be for a long time on **low pay**
 - **Reputation of working for the transport sector is negative**, especially with particular companies
 - **Entry level jobs are perceived to be rare** (i.e. non grad schemes, non-management roles).
 - Competitive – **unlikely to succeed** as there are lots of applications
 - Grad schemes **complicated application** and hard tests (e.g. maths tests)
 - **7/8 agree that it’s not what you know it’s who you know**. Easier to get jobs if you know the right people or have the right network “*people our age aren’t going to have crazy networks*”
 - **BUT** known for benefits e.g. free travel and potential for life long career.

SUGGESTIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

1. Outreach

- **Increased awareness** of what's on offer i.e. there must be many more roles in transport that young people don't know to do with business development, accounts etc.
- Employers could start to deliver **work Taster days** – opportunity to meet people and experience what it's like at work to see if it's something they wanted to pursue
- Employers should have **better exposure in schools/colleges** to inspire young people about the workplace and the possibilities out there including practice in assessments/group interviews in schools or online tests
- Invest a dedicated team in sourcing candidates e.g. carry out focus groups with young people

2. Feedback on applications

- Feedback really important, especially for young people to know where they are going wrong.
- **Provide a name and number** of employer as this can help if young people want to call someone to get feedback.
- **“Not enough experience” is not enough feedback from employers!** Employers could signpost to organisations that may help; direct young people towards work experience placements; suggest training courses etc.

3. Advertising vacancies

- Marketing the opportunity in a way that reaches the target group
- **Transparent diversity policies** are important- some young people look at the policies before applying. Important to feel confident that it's something that matters to the organisation. Wouldn't stop them from applying if there wasn't one to hand, but if there was a choice between an organisation that had one and one that didn't, they'd apply for the one with the policy.
- With transport employers in particular make it known that travel can be paid: huge incentive to take away the barrier of commuting costs

4. Create appropriate roles for young people

- **Entry level jobs** needed for people with little or no experience.
- **Structured training programmes** are interesting and important to young people – giving them **real skills** and useful knowledge
- **Work experience** opportunities available to people with no experience crucial
- Understanding target audience – **wages have to be able to help young people live independently**

5. Support for young people

- **Mentors** can provide advice and information, as well as progression support and raise awareness of the issues that young people face at a more senior level
- Don't exploit young people – ensure experience is valuable and make sure that young people know what **structured progression** looks like. This is important to make people feel valued
- Being committed to and better at handling complaints about racism. Improve transparency and visibility of the process could help

6. Modify application process

- **Personality rather than qualifications** should play an important role for suitable opportunities

SUGGESTIONS FOR SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE

- Knowing how to take advantage of contacts is difficult – **training on using contacts** this would be helpful
- **Pre-employment courses** should be related **to tasks and specific knowledge** that employers are looking for – otherwise you've got nothing new to put on your CV.

Invest in "selling yourself" /
Inspiring people

For them to
Suggest what role
you may be good for

Feedback
Brief but
helpful
!
(don't expect
long response)

Cover
Expenses

Local opportunities
for local people
via local projects

~~Advisory~~
Many BAME people not
from affluent background.
Can't afford low wages for a
long period.

Salary progression

Decently waged
opportunities

Opportunities to earn
extra through extra responsibility
or over time, etc
(initial year(s))

Getting into out
to the right people

Taster
at location

Days
Speak
to employees
More accessible
for a wider range
of people to
speak with employers

Gives employers
opportunity to spot
raw talent (informal)

Understanding target audience

Speak to young
BAME people

Speaking in schools /
colleges / universities

(In smaller / intimate
groups)

Help SMEs
advertise jobs.

1. BETTER PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN ORGANISATIONS AND SCHOOLS.
 2. INTERNAL EMPLOYMENT TEAMS THAT SCOUT AND REACH OUT TO MORE PEOPLE
 3. MORE ORGANISED SCHEMES FOR EMPLOYEES.
 4. BEING MORE FLEXIBLE WITH PERSONALITIES AND EXPERIENCE.
 5. VARIED WAYS OF INTERVIEWING AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES.
- KEEPING THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS LOCAL.

Paying Expenses