

A BME PERSPECTIVE

Submission of evidence to Economic Inactivity Review

Preamble

This submission of evidence focuses on the topic from the perspective of black and ethnic minority (BME) communities in Wales. BME communities have a clear interest in this Review because of their concentrations in the urban areas of Swansea, Cardiff and Newport.

This submission centres around issues of :-

- 1) **Skills levels** amongst certain BME communities, both in the sense of formal qualifications and “soft” skills i.e. personal skills and qualities e.g. communication, confidence, career development, motivation etc.
- 2) the **Spatial aspect** - the race dimension to the phenomenon of areas of deprivation situated right next to prosperous areas.
- 3) Role played by **ill health**

Information sources

In the late summer of 2003, I conducted in-depth interviews with a small number of professionals experienced in working with BME communities in Cardiff and Swansea, on behalf of AWEMA. The information collected is presented below.

The agencies involved were:

1. South Riverside Community Development Centre (Training and Regeneration Project), in the area of South Riverside in Cardiff. *where an experienced community development worker provided feedback. The ethnic profile in the ward of Riverside in Cardiff is 23.3% BME. Thus the Centre has substantial experience in serving BME communities.*
2. Riverside Advice Centre, also in the South Riverside area of Cardiff *The Centre provides Welfare Benefits and Housing advice to the Community Legal Service Specialist Quality Mark standard.*
3. JobCentreplus (JCP) in Swansea, *where an Action Team Employment Advisor with responsibility to target Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) customers in the Castle ward of Swansea, a locality with relatively high BME population, compared with other areas of Swansea.*

Addressing the Terms of Reference for the Review:

- i. Factors influencing economic activity rates amongst BME communities can be divided into

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1. Skills factors
2. Spatial factors
3. Ill health

1. Skills Factors

At the Riverside Advice Centre it was seen that where certain BME families were uneducated (and tended to be male dominated) the females in the families are expected to stay at home, from the age of sixteen. Also inherent in this family structure is the attitude that “girls are not expected to work anyway”. Therefore making this already economically inactive group more disadvantaged.

However the trend observed is that more [Pakistani] girls are working because the community has realised that this must be done. If girls are not working, they cannot obtain permission for their husbands to join them from abroad.

At the South Riverside Community Development Centre the experience has been that communities have high economic inactivity rates where there are basic skills needs; or if individuals have no transferable skills; also, if a person’s status is semi-legal. Cardiff Research Centre has mapped the fact that BME women in South Riverside have especially high economic inactivity rates. Perhaps for reasons such as those just mentioned. With BME communities, lack of access to training opportunities is reported to be a feature.

In Docks, Cardiff, it has been noticed that young men, particularly those of Bangladeshi, Somali and Yemeni descent, were unsure about what they wanted to do. Furthermore, a community development worker experienced in the social and employment problems persisting in the Gurnos estate in the South Wales valleys, thought that a level of depression pervaded the aforementioned groups, which could then lead to the congregation of gangs. So much so that the problems in Butetown, Cardiff have been likened to the social and employment problems of the Gurnos.

The Cabinet office’s Strategy Unit report of 2003, Ethnic Minorities and the Labour market, found that “individuals from some ethnic minority groups, such as Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Black Caribbeans, disproportionately lack the education, skills and qualifications that are essential for success in the labour market.” In Cardiff, the Somali community would also be included amongst the aforementioned groups.

The abovementioned report details how certain ethnic minority groups persistently under-attain at school. Social class problems manifest themselves very differently for different ethnic groups therefore more target-oriented efforts are needed to close the educational attainment gap. Basic skills levels are also lower for Black Caribbeans, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis than the White population.

The report goes on to set out that fluency in English is a particular problem for some groups. Lack of fluency in English has a significant impact on the employability of first-generation Asian women in particular: over 3/4s of Bangladeshi women over the age of 25 do not speak fluent English. With 1st generation men, non-English speakers

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comprise over 40% of the Bangladeshi and Pakistani cohorts. For men these language difficulties correlate with unemployment; for women it relates more to economic inactivity rates.

2. Spatial factors

Examples of the phenomenon of areas of deprivation situated right next to prosperous areas are: Butetown in Cardiff and Pillgwenlly in Newport are amongst the 20 most deprived wards in Wales according to statistics from the year 2000. Butetown and Pillgwenlly have Black & Minority Ethnic(BME) populations of 32.4% and 24.9% respectively. In the Butetown ward of Cardiff(a Communities First ward) economic inactivity rates top those for the whole of Wales at around 50%;.(from 2001 census figures).

In Swansea, Castle ward is home to 6.1% BMEs, where the single largest ethnic grouping is Bangladeshis(comprising over 35% of the 6.1%). For all people aged 16 to 74, whereas 6.26% had never worked or were long-term unemployed, the equivalent figure for the Bangladeshi community in Castle was 29.44%.

Another spatial feature is that in deprived communities BME people tend to have transport problems on top of other social disadvantages.

With BME communities, there is suspected underclaiming of correct welfare benefits(JCP report this). An acting manager of a community Jobcentre (situated in Grangetown, Cardiff,(resident population 22.9% BME) adjacent to Butetown). His impression of customers “through the door” is that a majority of people are neither working nor claiming.

3. Ill health

In relation to the question mark around morbidity and economic inactivity rates, the Action Team advisor from JCP has encountered low levels of acknowledgement and recognition of disability. There are disproportionate numbers of BME people who are receiving the wrong benefits, e.g. receiving Job Seekers Allowance but are actually disabled and not able to seek work.

However, Riverside Advice Centre reported that in recent years there are fewer BME people requesting help with signing on but more appear to need help with sickness and disability problems. There is an increase in the numbers of young people wishing to claim disability benefits. The advice workers interviewed had no reason to expect any improvement in this trend.

Structural factors/wider economic conditions

With house prices in Cardiff being so prohibitively high, people [who may have a choice, because of some ill health factor] are carefully weighing up working against not working. Where in the past, it was possible for those earning modest incomes to eventually buy their own property, now that property prices are so inflated, those on equivalent earnings are unable to afford to buy their own house, the incentive to work may be less, in some cases.

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ii. Suggested policies & recommendations

Positive Action Training

Although it is a hard task for post-compulsory education to compensate fully for poor attainment in school, there is an important role for Positive action training schemes. I would suggest an expansion of positive action training opportunities.

Generic training projects such as the Women's workshop in Cardiff can complement the above positive action training opportunities, and so should continue to be resourced.

Connecting people with work initiatives

To acknowledge the fact that deprived areas are sometimes situated right next to areas of relative prosperity, is to acknowledge that this phenomenon needs special attention. Local JCP projects are reported to have positive effect.

For example the JCP's BME Employment advisor (Action Team initiative in Swansea). She has been able to work a little flexibly, helping BME clients from wider catchments than Castle ward, although the official remit of the project is to work only with Castle ward residents. As a relatively new project, most of the officer's time is spent doing development work. But it needs more resources and expansion. For example she cannot effectively meet groups of [Muslim] men (in her development role) as this would be culturally inappropriate. More resources to employ male staff could address this. Also, she has been advising equal numbers of Castle ward and non-Castle ward clients, although the project is strictly limited to assisting beneficiaries. This suggests that there is strong demand for a BME advisor to deal with customers not residing in Castle ward. This officer states that there is a need for more advisors from BME backgrounds.

Another successful Action Team project is that situated in the abovementioned Pillgwenlly ward of Newport. Generally, jobshop-type projects, where they develop excellent links with employers and within BME communities, are successful. Cardiff South Enterprise Centre in Grangetown, Cardiff, is another such example.

However, the lack of continuity (due to short-term funding) undermines the long term success of projects. Sustained i.e. long-term work is needed. Careers Wales and JCP could play a greater part in community development. Effective partnership working between complementary partners is also needed.

Targeting young people and their families

Riverside Advice Centre advocates targeting young people as soon as they leave school, in families where parents are uneducated and tend to be male-dominated. Community workers should target families where parents are uneducated and tend to be male-dominated for working with them, in order to gradually bring about attitude change.

Government programmes which afford cash-only help to create a culture of dependency. Therefore community development and training aspects are needed also.

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In carrying out community development work, the approach to be taken should be one of not challenging cultural norms; and if these are to be challenged this must be done within the culture. Educational opportunities need to be presented in a culturally acceptable way to communities. Community workers could help communities to manage change. By means of community development work, e.g. linking individuals in need with a variety of services (girls club for a young Muslim teenager) so options can acceptably be brought to the attention of those socially isolated individuals.

Ways of expanding community interventions could include a project that established a rolling programme of placements of at least 3 months duration over a 2 year period. The project would, for example, see JCP Employment Advisors, going into a community setting. However, this would need an independent and separate source of funding. Such a project would create a good foundation for mainstreaming to occur.

Policies to Increase levels of human capital

Given that the single most critical determinant of lifelong human capital levels is the quality of schooling a person receives, the abovementioned report, Ethnic Minorities and the Labour Market, states that a strategy is needed to improve the attainment of ethnic minorities in schools.

Social class problems manifest themselves very differently for different ethnic groups. Therefore the abovementioned report advocates more targeted efforts to close the educational attainment gap. The report makes detailed conclusions at pages 66 to 71, and then at pages 74, 76 & 81 in relation to improving BME school attainment, and I strongly recommend close study of same.

The following recommendations are based on the aforementioned report:

1. the Welsh Assembly Government is indirectly responsible via local education authorities, for a number of projects directly and indirectly targeted at closing the attainment gap between low-achieving ethnic minority groups and the White average. If despite these programmes, new data sources reveal persisting and disproportionate attainment gaps between ethnic groups, the Welsh Assembly Government should factor ethnicity into education floor targets.
2. Where differential achievement between ethnic minority groups is of serious concern, Estyn should identify this as a weakness of the school in its summary report to parents.
3. Systematically sharing good practice based on evidence of what works in successful schools with strong records of tackling ethnic under-attainment and discrimination. As a first step, though, a review should be carried out of schools' use of information on best practice methods of raising ethnic minority educational attainment, focusing particularly on the lowest achieving schools with a view to improving access to guidance and advice.
4. Focusing work with particular ethnic minority groups that have significant low attainment problems by ensuring that schools' parental engagement processes take ethnic specific factors into account by
 - i. helping teachers and schools to identify ethnically related drivers of disengagement;
 - ii. using methods of engagement which are tailored to specific employment, religious and cultural needs; and

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- iii. encouraging schools to monitor and analyse parental engagement by ethnicity, to see if some ethnic minority communities are consistently disengaged.
5. The Welsh Assembly Government should conduct research to answer several key questions:
- i. to what extent do different ethnic minority parents know the basic structure of the education system and how to “work” it, through and understanding of school interaction, league tables, school assessments, streaming and so on?
 - ii. Are there still signs of ethnic minority pupils being placed in lower sets than their prior attainment would suggest was just?

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