

Moving on up? Ethnic minority women and work

Job seeking behaviour of ethnic minority students

Liz Speed

March 2007



EUROPEAN UNION
European Social Fund



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About the investigation

In October 2005, the Equal Opportunities Commission launched '***Moving on up? Ethnic minority women at work***', a GB wide investigation into the participation, pay and progression of ethnic minority women in the labour market. The overall aim of the investigation is to understand more about the diverse experiences and aspirations of ethnic minority women in relation to work, including barriers to progress, so that effective action can be taken to improve their labour market prospects. The focus is on women, as there is insufficient labour market evidence available that seeks to understand how gender, race and faith intersect in the labour market. The investigation focuses particularly, though not exclusively, on Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black Caribbean women. Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are included because they have the lowest rates of employment of any other ethnic group, and Black Caribbean women because they are under-represented in senior level jobs, despite being more likely than white women to work full-time. A focus on these three groups has meant that resources can be channelled more effectively for depth research and analysis, and in order to avoid over generalisations about ethnic minority women.

The EOC has commissioned new research and analysis to support the investigation, including the voices of women at every stage.

Moving on up? is a statutory investigation under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. The legislation gives the EOC the power to undertake general formal investigations into deep-seated issues of gender inequality or discrimination, and to make recommendations to those in a position to make changes, including Government.

This report is one of a series of research reports commissioned for the ***Moving on up*** investigation, which is supported by the European Social Fund. We will publish all the research on our website at www.eoc.org.uk. Please email bme@eoc.org.uk or phone our helpline if you require a printed copy of the interim report.

For more information on the investigation visit our website www.eoc.org.uk/bme

Contents

Key findings	2
1 Background	3
2 What resources do students have?	5
3 Work expectations	8
4 What do students expect from a company?	11
5 Conclusion	15
References	15

Graphs

1 Students' perceptions of their skills	6
2 Previous experience	7
3 Future plans	11
4 Expected salary in first career job	13

Table

1 Higher Education Initial Participation Rates for English (HEIPR) domiciled first-time entrants both full- and part-time to higher education course in universities and colleges, in UK, 2001/02	3
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KEY FINDINGS

Students of both sexes and all ethnicities had very similar attitudes towards certain aspects of their education and work expectations.

- The vast majority wanted friendly work colleagues, interesting work tasks and training opportunities in their first job. They also thought promotion opportunities, management style, starting salary, job security and job responsibility were very important.
- They agreed that although going to university cost a lot of money it was worth it, and that the value of their education was worth the debts they would incur. They used the same resources for careers information and tended to find the different resources of similar use.

There were some noteworthy differences:

- White students were more likely than others to have casual job experience but women from all ethnic groups were more likely than men to have been involved in volunteering/charitable work.
- A higher proportion of black and Asian students intended going straight into a career job after university compared with white students, 74 per cent of Asian women compared with 58 per cent of white British women, a sizeable minority of whom intended taking a gap year instead (19 per cent).
- Women from all ethnic groups were more likely than men to want a career that involved healthcare; the opposite was true of engineering.
- Asian students and black male students were particularly interested in a career in accountancy, finance or investment banking. White British students, especially women, showed the most interest in teaching/education, along with female Black Caribbean students.
- Ethnic minority students had higher salary expectations than white British students, especially white British women, whose expectations were considerably lower.
- For information about careers and prospective jobs, Asian and black women were the most likely to use placements and internships as a source.
- The groups who found recommendations/word of mouth least useful as a careers resource were black male and Asian female students; white male students were the most likely to find these of use.
- Asian and black women were particularly likely to expect to work fewer than 36 hours a week in their first job, illustrating the importance of good quality part time work opportunities.

1 Background

In 2004/05 there were just over 1 million students domiciled in the UK studying for a first degree, 17 per cent of whom were from an ethnic minority (HESA, 2006). A higher proportion of the young ethnic minority population is involved in higher education than the young white population, but the ethnic minority population does not participate in higher education in a uniform way. There are differences both by ethnicity and by gender, as the table below shows.

Table 1 Higher Education Initial Participation Rates (HEIPR) for English domiciled first-time entrants both full- and part-time to higher education course in universities and colleges, in UK, 2001/02

Ethnic group	Per cent		
	Male	Female	All
White	34	41	38
All ethnic minority	55	58	56
- Asian or Asian British	62	59	60
- Black or Black British	55	66	61
- Chinese or Other Ethnic	47	50	49
- Mixed Ethnic	35	44	40
All (with known ethnicity)	37	43	40

Source: Connor et al. (2004), Table 4.2 p.43

Note: See SFR 07/2004 for information about the calculation of HEIPR at www.dfes.gov.uk

Eighty-three per cent of white first degree students were studying full time, compared with 78 per cent of Black Caribbean, 90 per cent of Bangladeshi and 91 per cent of Pakistani students.

Looking at these in more detail, 55 per cent of white full time first degree students were women, compared with 66 per cent of Black Caribbean students, but slightly fewer than half Pakistani and Bangladeshi students (48 per cent and 47 per cent respectively). Black Caribbean students were the most likely to be studying for a first degree part time and 71 per cent of these part timers were women, compared with 62 per cent of white, 51 per cent of Pakistani and 44 per cent of Bangladeshi part time students (HESA, 2006).

Ethnic minority students tend to be clustered in certain universities, generally those that were founded after 1992 and based in London (Connor et al., 2004). This is

largely due to the locality, the differing entry requirements of universities and the types of courses and subjects on offer.

Furthermore, ethnic minority students are over-represented on certain courses such as computer science, law and medicine, business studies and engineering, with lower than average participation in education and the humanities. Even within subject areas there are differences. Science, engineering and technology subjects (SET) attract a higher than average proportion of ethnic minority students, with the exception of Black Caribbean students. Indian and Pakistani students are particularly attracted to medicine and related subjects, which are also more attractive to females than males (Elias et al., 2006).

Students from ethnic minority communities tend to achieve lower degrees than their white counterparts: 60 per cent of white students were awarded a first or upper second compared with 35 per cent of Black Caribbean and 39 per cent of Pakistani and Bangladeshi students in 2001/02 in England (Connor et al., 2004). Female students perform better than males and this is also true by ethnicity, although the difference between the sexes differs by ethnicity from around 3 percentage points for Indian students to nearly 8 for Black African students. Other factors which influenced the degree awarded included age, type of institution attended, and entry qualifications. Indeed, prior educational attainment has been found to be a key indicator of the level of degree awarded.

It has been found that ethnic minority graduates have higher initial rates of unemployment compared with white graduates, while unemployment for female ethnic minority graduates, at 9 per cent, is lower than that of their male counterparts (14 per cent) (Connor et al., 2004).¹ Asian graduates in particular, are more likely than other ethnic groups to acquire further qualifications, whereas black graduates are more likely to seek career-related study or training. Connor et al. (2004) suggest that ethnic minority graduates are generally under-represented in the graduate intake of large companies, pointing to the importance of recruitment processes.

Hobsons data

It is with this backdrop that the EOC sought to explore further the situation of ethnic minority students. The rest of this briefing is based on data which originate from Hobsons Graduate Recruitment Review, carried out between November 2005 and March 2006.² The analysis described here is of responses by over 10,000 white British Nationals and nearly 4,000 ethnic minority undergraduates. This latter group included both British and other nationalities domiciled in Britain, plus overseas students. Overall 53 per cent of male and 48 per cent of female Asian students were other nationalities, as were 52 per cent of male and 33 per cent of female black

students. Thus although these data are not comparable with those from HESA, they provide an interesting insight into the attitudes and expectations of students in Britain.

Generally, findings are reported for the larger ethnic groups of Asian, black and white students. In places, findings are also reported for more precise ethnic groups of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black Caribbean students. However, the findings for these groups should largely be treated as indicative only, because of the small sample sizes.

2 What resources do students have?

Skills

Students were asked to select three skills from a list of eight which they thought represented their greatest strengths. Black, Asian and white British women were very similar in their responses. Around three-fifths of these groups chose 'supporting and co-operating' compared with around a half of black and Asian men and 44 per cent of white British men.

Women also rated 'organising and executing' highly; 57 per cent of white British and 54 per cent of Asian women selected this, followed by 46 per cent of black women. Men were less likely to chose this option with the lowest response from black men (37 per cent).

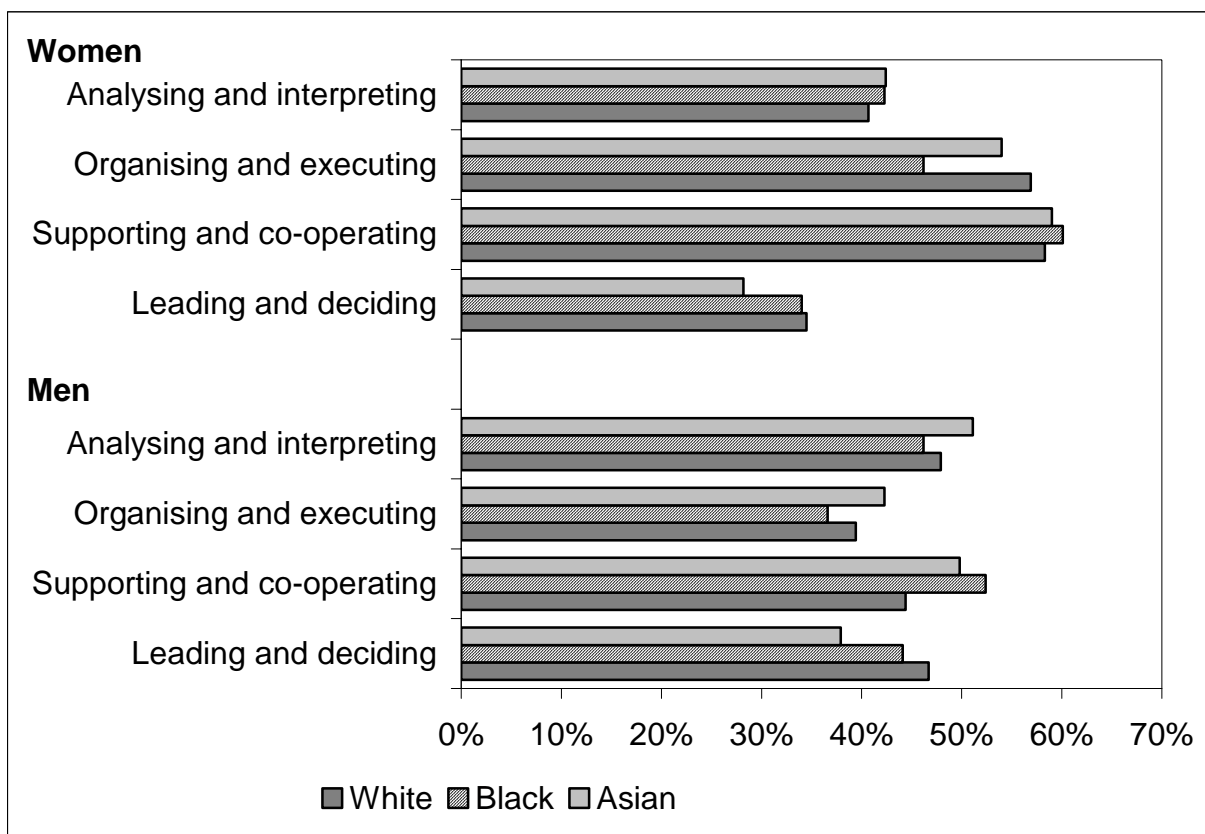
Bangladeshi women were substantially more likely than other groups to choose the skill 'interacting and presenting' (46 per cent as opposed to 28 per cent overall). They also rated their ability at 'adapting and coping' highly; 46 per cent chose this skill in contrast to 27 per cent of Bangladeshi males, and an average overall response of 39 per cent.

Men were far more likely than women to see themselves as 'leading and directing'. There were approximately 10 percentage points difference between men and women from the same ethnic group; 47 per cent men and 35 per cent women in the case of white British, 44 per cent and 34 per cent respectively for black men and women; 38 per cent and 28 per cent for Asian men and women. White British and Asian male business students were particularly likely to rate themselves highly on this skill whereas Asian women studying business or engineering were the least likely to do so.

'Analysing and interpreting' was also more popular with male students; 51 per cent of Asian, 48 per cent of white British and 46 per cent of black men chose this as one of

their three skills, compared with 41-42 per cent of women. Overall, white British men studying maths and IT or science were the most likely to see themselves as analytical, closely followed by white British women studying the same subjects.

Graph 1 Students' perceptions of their skills



Previous work experience

Over 80 per cent of white British students had casual job experience compared with around 70 per cent of black students and 62 per cent of Asian students; there was no difference by gender within ethnicity. In contrast, women across all ethnic groups had been involved in volunteering/charitable work to a far greater extent than their male counterparts, with the greatest difference between black women and men (54 per cent and 31 per cent).

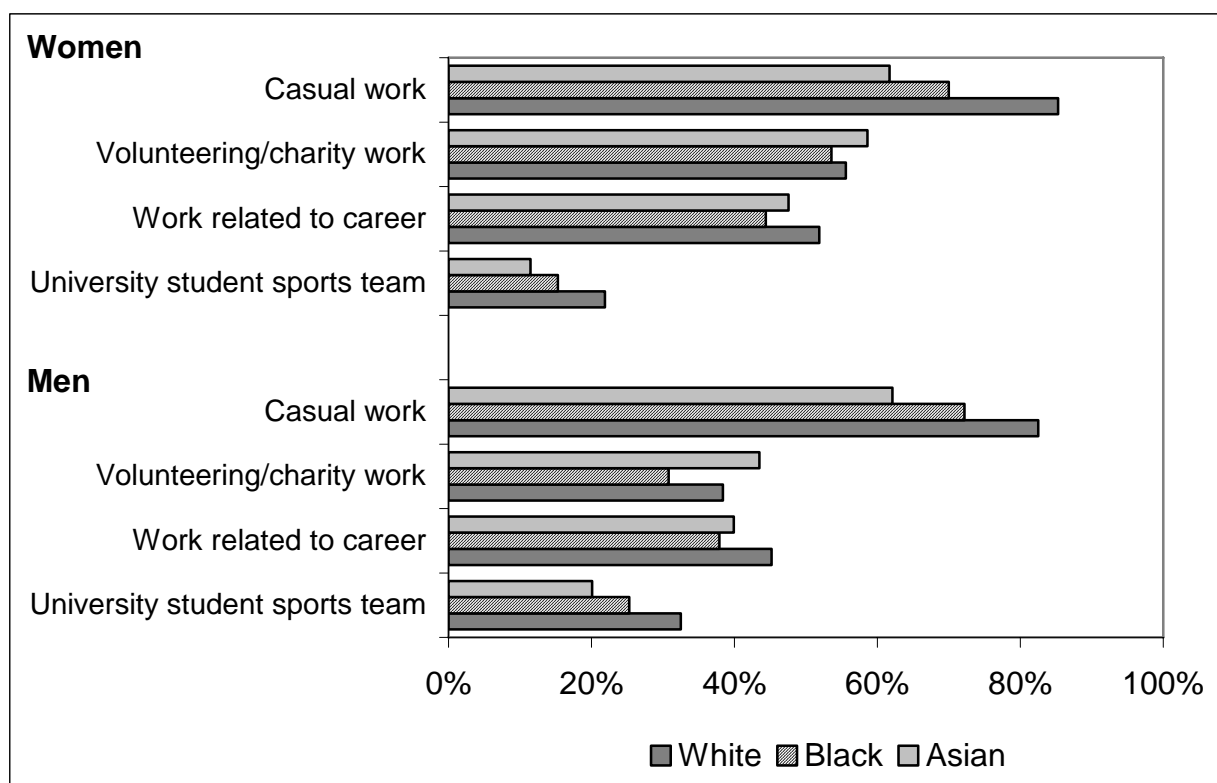
London-based Asian and white British women were more likely to have been involved in volunteering than women from the same ethnic groups who were based elsewhere. There was also a strong link between rates of volunteering and the number of UCAS points³ students had for both white British and Asian women and men. The higher the number of UCAS points, the higher the proportion of students who had been involved in volunteering and charity work.

Furthermore, women were more likely than men of the same ethnic group to have work experience related to their course or area of study. However, this differed by subject area and medical students, irrespective of gender and ethnicity, had more work experience than those studying other disciplines. In contrast, men were more likely than women in the same ethnic group to be involved in a student sports team.

Similar proportions of white British and Asian students, regardless of gender, had participated in a placement or internship (around a third), but there was a considerable difference between the experiences of black women (36 per cent) and men (26 per cent).

Bangladeshi, Pakistani and black students of both sexes had travelled less than other students. Only 9 per cent of Pakistani and 11 per cent of Bangladeshi female students had travelled extensively, compared with 29 per cent of white British females. London-based black and white British students had travelled more than those based outside of London, as had students attending Russell group universities compared with their counterparts in non-Russell group institutions.⁴

Graph 2 Previous experience



University debt

Expectations of debt on leaving university differed significantly by ethnicity but not by gender. Of those who answered this question, 72 per cent of white British students

thought they would owe between £5,001 and £20,000, compared with around 45 per cent of Asian students, and roughly 58 per cent of black students. A higher proportion of Asian students than students of other ethnicities thought they would owe less than £5,000: slightly over one third compared with around 1 in 5 white students. However, 1 in 5 Asian students expected to owe in excess of £20,000 compared with 1 in 20 white British students.

Analysis of detailed ethnic group showed further differences, with 23 per cent of female Bangladeshi and white British students both expecting to owe less than £5,000, compared with 37 per cent of female Pakistani students.

There were some differences by area of study. A greater proportion of Asian engineering students, both women and men, and medical students of both genders and all ethnicities expected to owe at least £20,000, as did students based in London. The difference was particularly great between white British students based in and outside of London, regardless of gender. Asian students in Russell group universities also expected to owe more than those in non-Russell group institutions.

It should be remembered that many of the ethnic minority students were from overseas, so higher costs for some groups may be associated with this status. The converse is that many ethnic minority students domiciled in this country attend local institutions, thereby reducing their overall costs.

3 Work expectations

Preferred career areas

Students were asked to choose up to three career areas or tasks that they would like to do in their first job. In some cases these choices differed by gender, in others by ethnicity.

Women from all three broad ethnic groups were around 10 percentage points more likely than men of the same ethnicity to want career tasks that involved healthcare. Looking at the ethnic groups in more detail, 34 per cent of Bangladeshi and 25 per cent of Pakistani women wanted a career involving healthcare compared with 15 per cent of white women.

In contrast, men were around 15 or more percentage points more likely than women of the same ethnic group to want tasks that involved engineering.

Other career areas which showed a distinct gender bias were law (predominantly women, particularly Pakistani and black women), marketing/advertising/PR (Black

Caribbean and white British women) and IT telecommunications and IT consulting (predominantly men).

Some careers were especially attractive to certain ethnic groups. Both female and male Asian students and black male students were considerably more likely than white students and female black students to want a career in accountancy, finance or investment banking. White British students, particularly women, showed the most interest in teaching/education, along with female Black Caribbean students.

Job factors

Students were asked how important a number of factors were when searching for their first career job. Regardless of sex and ethnicity, the vast majority of students rated the same things as important/very important.

At least nine out of ten students thought: friendly work colleagues; interesting work tasks; and training opportunities were important or very important. At least eight out of ten thought the same of: promotion opportunities, management style, starting salary, job security and job responsibility. There were some variations in response: white men, for example, were the least likely to rate job security as important/very important but even then, 85 per cent did so.

Over three out of five students thought that flexible working hours were important or very important. Women of all ethnic groups were slightly more likely than men of the same ethnic group to say this, for example, 68 per cent of Asian women compared with 61 per cent of Asian men. Flexible working was of greatest importance to black women (74 per cent) and of least importance to white men (55 per cent). A higher proportion of Asian and black students compared with white students felt that company innovations and attractive products or services were important and there were no gender differences within ethnic groups, whereas Asian and black women were particularly keen on a city location.

White men were the least concerned about corporate social responsibility; 59 per cent rated this as important/very important compared with 67 per cent of white British women, 77 per cent Asian women and 78 per cent black men.

Attitudes to university and careers

Around nine in ten students or more agreed or agreed strongly that 'going to university costs a lot of money but it's worth it'. A slightly lower proportion agreed that the value of their education was worth the debts they would incur; around 80 per cent of white students and 70 per cent of Asian students, with no differences between the sexes. Black men were particularly likely to agree that their degree would prepare

them for the workplace: 84 per cent compared with 65 per cent of white women and men.

Nearly four in ten white students, both male and female, felt their A levels did not prepare them for university study and a sizeable proportion of students, ranging from 21 per cent of black females to 33 per cent of Asian men, would choose a different degree to study now they know more about career and job opportunities. Despite this, few would choose to go straight into work rather than attend university if the clock was turned back: approximately 10 per cent of all groups except Asian men, where the proportion was 17 per cent.

Asian and white women (58 per cent) and Asian men (57 per cent) were the most likely to agree that it would be hard to find a career job when they graduate, compared with black and white men (44 per cent and 46 per cent respectively).

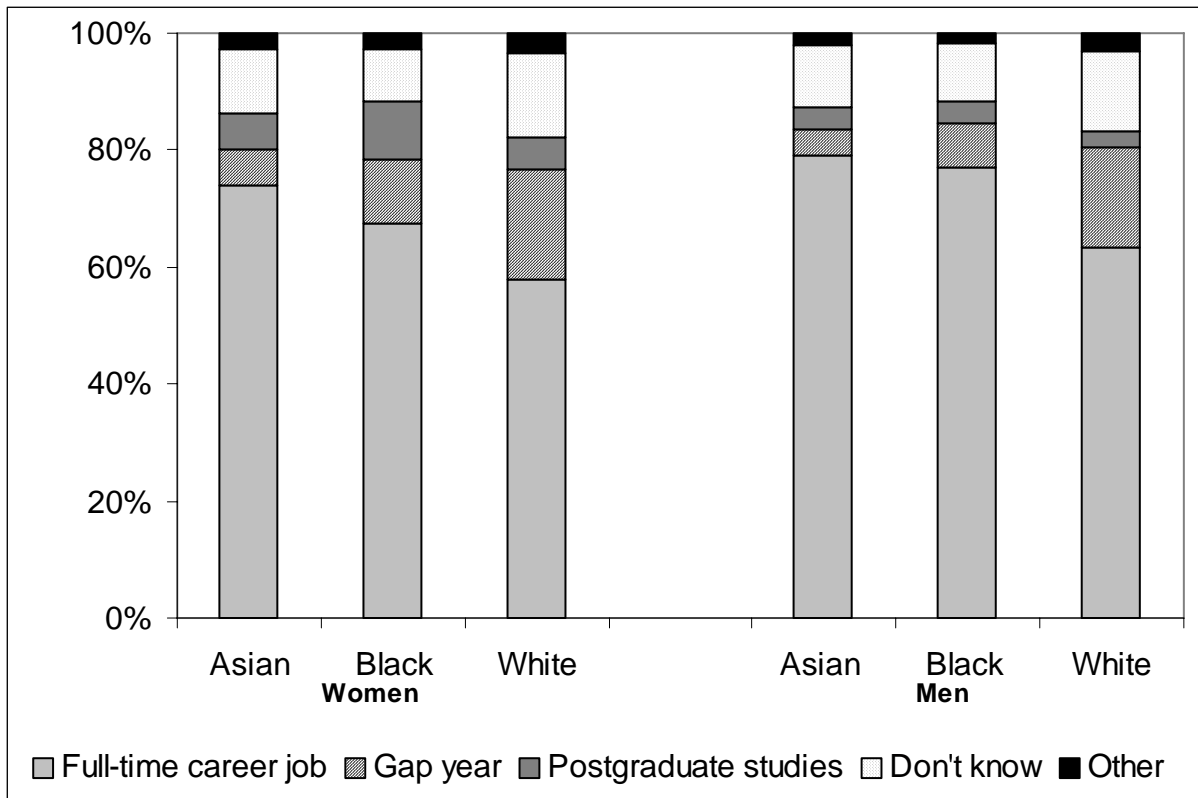
Future plans

Although the majority of students of both sexes and all ethnic groups expected to go into full-time work when they left university, there were considerable differences in intentions. Looking at female students first, 74 per cent of Asian and 68 per cent of black women intended to go into a full-time career job compared with 58 per cent of white British women. This latter group was the most likely to expect to go on a gap year instead, 19 per cent compared with 11 per cent of black and 6 per cent of Asian women.

Similarly, British white men were the least likely to say that they intended to go straight into a career job (63 per cent) compared with black (77 per cent) and Asian (79 per cent) male students, and the most likely to say they intended to take a gap year: 17 per cent compared with 5 per cent of Asian men. Going on to study for a postgraduate qualification, either in this country or abroad, was more popular amongst women than men; 10 per cent of black women and 6 per cent of Asian and white British women said they would be taking this path compared with between 3-4 per cent of men.

Students on vocational courses were more intent than other students to go straight into work, particularly those studying engineering or medicine, regardless of gender or ethnicity. UCAS scores had some effect on the intentions of some students, in that the higher the points, the lower the proportion of white British women who expected to go straight into a full time career job whereas the reverse was true for white British men and Asian women and men.

Graph 3 Future plans



4 What do students expect from a company?

Desirability

Students were asked which three companies they would most like to work for, and, for each company, the main reason they wanted to work for them. The reasons given were very similar by both sex and ethnicity, illustrating that most students are attracted to companies for very similar reasons. Reasons ranged from good promotion opportunities to attractive products and services to a high starting salary.

Only a couple of differences in attitude emerged. Of all the responses, around one in four of those given by white women and men were that they were attracted to a company because of the interesting work tasks it offered, in contrast to around one in eight of the reasons given by Asian and black students of both sexes. The latter groups were more likely to opt for a company which showed a high level of success within its industry – between 25 per cent and 28 per cent. Female white and Asian students were marginally more likely than male students to be attracted by a company that offered good training opportunities.

Essential company factors

Students were shown a list of 15 factors and asked to choose up to five which they felt they needed to know about a prospective employer before they decided to apply for a job. The most frequent factor chosen by both sexes and all ethnic groups was, not surprisingly, salary level; overall nearly seven in ten (68 per cent) chose this option.

Knowing about training opportunities and the qualifications and experience needed for the job were of greater importance to women in the three main ethnic groups than to their male counterparts. 56 per cent of Asian women mentioned training whereas it was of least importance to white British men (44 per cent); 61 per cent of white British women and 53 per cent of Asian women mentioned the qualifications and experience needed compared with 51 per cent of white British men and 42 per cent of Asian men. In contrast, white British and Asian men were more likely to be interested in the promotion opportunities within the company (51 per cent and 47 per cent respectively) compared with women of the same ethnicity. Over 3 in 10 Asian and black students were particularly interested in knowing how successful the company is, compared with around half that proportion of white British students.

A little over one third of white British women and men and Asian women felt that the location of the company premises was something they needed to know in advance. Knowing about other issues such as flexibility of working hours (28 per cent) and management style (15 per cent) showed a lot of similarity across ethnicities and genders.

Salary and working hours

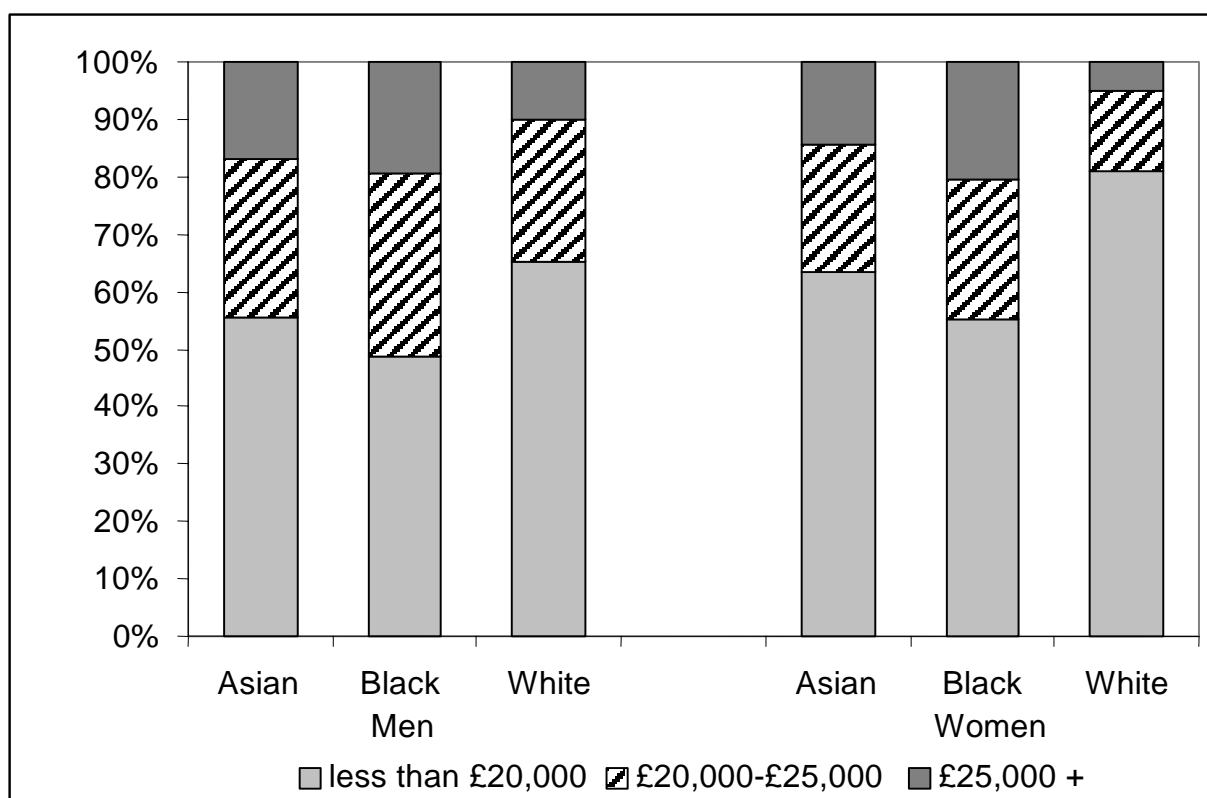
Across all ethnic groups, men had higher salary expectations than women, and white British students had lower salary expectations than other ethnic groups. 81 per cent of British white women expected to earn £20,000 or less in their first career job compared with 63 per cent of Asian and 55 per cent of black women. The percentages for men were 65 per cent, 55 per cent and 49 per cent respectively. Around 1 in 5 black students, both male and female, expected to earn in excess of £25,000 compared with around 1 in 7 Asian students, 1 in 10 white British men and only 1 in 20 white British women.

UCAS score appeared to have an impact on expected salary in that students with fewer points (under 240) expected a lower starting salary than those with 360 points or above. Similarly, a greater proportion of students attending a non-Russell group university expected to earn £20,000 or less compared with their Russell group counterparts, irrespective of gender and ethnicity. The opposite was true of students attending an institution in London, a greater proportion of whom expected to earn in excess of £25,000. Subject also had an impact on expectations; for example, the

salary expectations of students studying medicine and women studying engineering were higher than average.

The number of hours students expected to work weekly in their first job differed by ethnicity and gender. In general, women expected to work fewer hours than men with a higher proportion of women stating that they expected to work for less than 36 hours: 14 per cent of white and 20 per cent of Asian women. Looking at ethnic groups in more detail showed that a third of Bangladeshi and one quarter of Pakistani and Black Caribbean women expected to work fewer than 36 hours a week, although these findings are indicative only due to small sample sizes. Interestingly, 29 per cent of Bangladeshi men also responded in this way, compared with 10 per cent of white men. These findings support the need for good quality part-time employment.

Graph 4 Expected salary in first career job



In contrast, male Chinese students were the most likely to expect to work in excess of 45 hours a week: 30 per cent, compared with 20 per cent of white men and 9 per cent of Bangladeshi men. The majority of students of both sexes and all ethnic groups expected to work for between 36 to 45 hours a week.

Expected time in first job

Students were then asked how long they expected to remain in their first career job. Women did not expect to stay as long as men of the same ethnicity: the largest group of women for each ethnic group expected to move on between 13 months and 2 years. Although this was often true of men, they were also more likely than women to state that they would stay for 3 to 4 years, or 5 years or longer. However, over a quarter of all students including a third of black males, did not know how long they intended to stay.

Sources of careers information

The resources students had used for information on careers and prospective jobs were also explored. There was much similarity in responses, regardless of gender and ethnicity. The most popular sources were careers websites, recruitment events and exhibitions (particularly popular amongst business and engineering students), the university careers service, and company websites. Approximately 6 in 10 students or more, depending on gender and ethnic group, used each of these sources, closely followed by careers directories and emails.

There were some noteworthy differences. Asian students, both female and male, were significantly less likely than British white and black male students to access information through national newspapers. Asian male and black male and female students were less likely to acquire information through word of mouth or recommendation. In contrast, Asian students were more likely than British white students to access company presentations, and Asian and black women were the most likely to use placements and internships as a source of information. This was particularly popular among engineering students.

Students who had used the various careers resources were asked how useful they had found them. Again, there was great similarity about who found what of most assistance and no clear patterns emerged. Around two-thirds of students found company websites of use and a slightly lower proportion found university careers services, placement experiences, careers websites and company presentations of use. Black males rated careers emails and national newspapers substantially more useful than other groups but were less enthusiastic about recruitment events and exhibitions. They were also the least likely, with female Asian students, to find recommendations/word of mouth useful; white male students were the group most likely to find these of use, followed by white females and Asian males.

5 Conclusion

In general, these findings illustrate the similarities between women and men and between ethnic groups whilst highlighting some noteworthy differences. Students want the same things out of an employer and have similar expectations about the work they do. Despite some self-reported skills differences between the sexes, women exhibit similar skills regardless of their ethnicity; also true of men.

But there are differences in other aspects. Expectations about their future salary and working hours vary, illustrating the importance of good quality, skilled part time work and the need for flexibility in the workplace. Employers may like to consider ways in which they advertise employment opportunities to maximise recruitment from ethnic minority students.

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Endnotes

¹ For further statistics on ethnic minority women and men including education and qualification data, see Equal Opportunities Commission (2007) *Moving on up? Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black Caribbean women and work. Key statistics*. Available at: www.eoc.org.uk

² See www.hobsons.uk.com for further information about Hobsons.

³ Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) points - this is a system which allows qualifications to be converted into points e.g. an A at A level is worth 120 points, a B is 100 points etc. A given number of points may be required to gain entry to a course e.g. 300 points.

⁴ The Russell Group is an association of 20 large research-intensive British universities. They account for the majority of research grant and contract income.