

Draft Final Evaluation Report for

Learning & Skills Council North East

BME Role Models Programme

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WoodHolmesGroup
Positive action born of understanding





Learning & Skills Council North East

BME Role Models Programme

Contents

1	Introduction & Background	2
2	Methodology	7
3	Evaluation of the overall programme	17
4	Conclusions	34
5	Recommendations	34



1 Introduction & Background

1.1 Introduction

In October 2008 the Learning & Skills Council (LSC) North East commissioned Wood Holmes Group (WHG) to develop and deliver a role models programme involving Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) learners from four to six further education colleges in the North East region.

The BME role models programme is the second part (Strand B) of a two part project. During Strand A of the project, WHG ran two learning provider engagement events where strategies for increasing the participation of BME individuals in learning at Level 2 and above were presented and discussed, and commitment to such strategies was sought from learning providers. A separate evaluation report of this strand of the project was completed in February 2009.

1.2 Programme background

The LSC North East's mission for Equality & Diversity in this context is "To address inequality and promote diversity in LSC funded provision in the North East." To enable the LSC North East to achieve this, the LSC has identified some priorities, known as their regional Equality and Diversity Impact Measures (EDIMs). There are currently three of these, and they were derived through the following process:

- Statistical analysis of learner data
- The LSC's review of progress against its EDIMs for 2007/08
- Further consultation with LSC managers and external partners via the LSC's Equality & Diversity Steering Group.

The LSC identified a range of activities to address these measures and set aside funding for activity to address one of the measures:

EDIM 1: Black and Minority Ethnic learners in the North East are far less likely to be learning towards a full Level 2 qualification or above than white learners (even when English for Speakers of Other Languages – ESOL – provision is not counted)

As a result of this, in 2007/08 WHG was commissioned to gather information to help the LSC to identify and evidence possible solutions that may contribute towards increasing the numbers of BME learners learning at Level 2 and above. Following this research, the LSC North East developed an action plan to take forward some of the key recommendations made by WHG, of which the aims and objectives of this programme form a part.



This strand of the project had the following aim:

To work with providers to identify and support BME role models so that learners have sight of aspirational figures encouraging higher level participation in the North East.

The barriers that prevent BME individuals learning at Level 2 and above in the North East identified in our previous report were:

- Low prior educational attainment, including literacy, numeracy and English Language
- A lack of recognition of existing foreign high level qualifications by UK employers and learning providers
- Confusion over entitlement to ESOL training
- Lack of early intervention with refugees and migrants (due to legal restrictions for asylum seekers)
- Low understanding of the North East job market
- Inconvenient course times
- Social expectations of the family – increased commitment required for higher level courses
- Preferences and expectations for HE over FE from the family
- Learning styles that are at odds with the UK style
- Lack of provision for faiths
- Failures to challenge racist discrimination in schools and colleges
- Fear and isolation, particularly among first generation Bangladeshi and Pakistani married women
- A lack of confidence in engaging with colleges and other learning providers, and a lack of empathy and adjustment by providers' front of house staff
- Poor, or no, marketing to BME groups by providers.

Since the 2002 Macpherson Report into race equality, and since changes in policy regarding gender equality in 2007, there have been equality duties upon public sector organisations to promote equality between races and genders. However, the previous experiences of WHG and other organisations in the North East have demonstrated that there can often be poor engagement from education providers



with the equality and diversity agenda, particularly in actively promoting equality of opportunity, rather than simply having equality policies and “ticking boxes”, i.e. doing the bare minimum necessary to meet their statutory obligations to, for example, prevent discrimination.

The North East had one of the lowest percentages of BME population in England at the 2001 Census (2.4%). When monitoring BME group participation in learning, the low numbers of local BME populations and BME learners have inhibited providers from evidencing race inequality at their individual levels, and setting targets accordingly. This could partly explain providers’ lack of engagement with the agenda. Participation in FE above Level 1 by BME learners in the North East is also a complex problem, varying by ethnicity, migration status, English language skills, age group, geography, provision type and provider. In addition, there is some disagreement with positive action as a concept among some providers, which can easily be conflated with positive discrimination.

However, this small BME proportion of the North East population is increasing rapidly. The North East had the third highest international migration levels in 2005 in England, second only to the West Midlands and London. It is unclear whether providers are aware of this, and the implications for them in terms of marketing themselves, in terms of the benefits they could gain from more BME learners participating above Level 1.

BME individuals tend to be concentrated in “pockets” across the region. They are most efficiently engaged with through networking, firstly through voluntary and community sector organisations.

Role models can be effective in overcoming common barriers to various social progression paths for many excluded groups. They are believed by many stakeholders to successfully encourage individuals from deprived and excluded communities to take part in, among other things, learning, enterprise and employment. When a particular social group is under represented in a profession or learning programme, a common approach is to identify those who are present in that profession or programme, and support them to raise awareness of their success among their peers in that under represented group. If they are promoted to non target groups, this is thought to contribute towards reducing prejudice or discrimination among non target groups towards the target group.

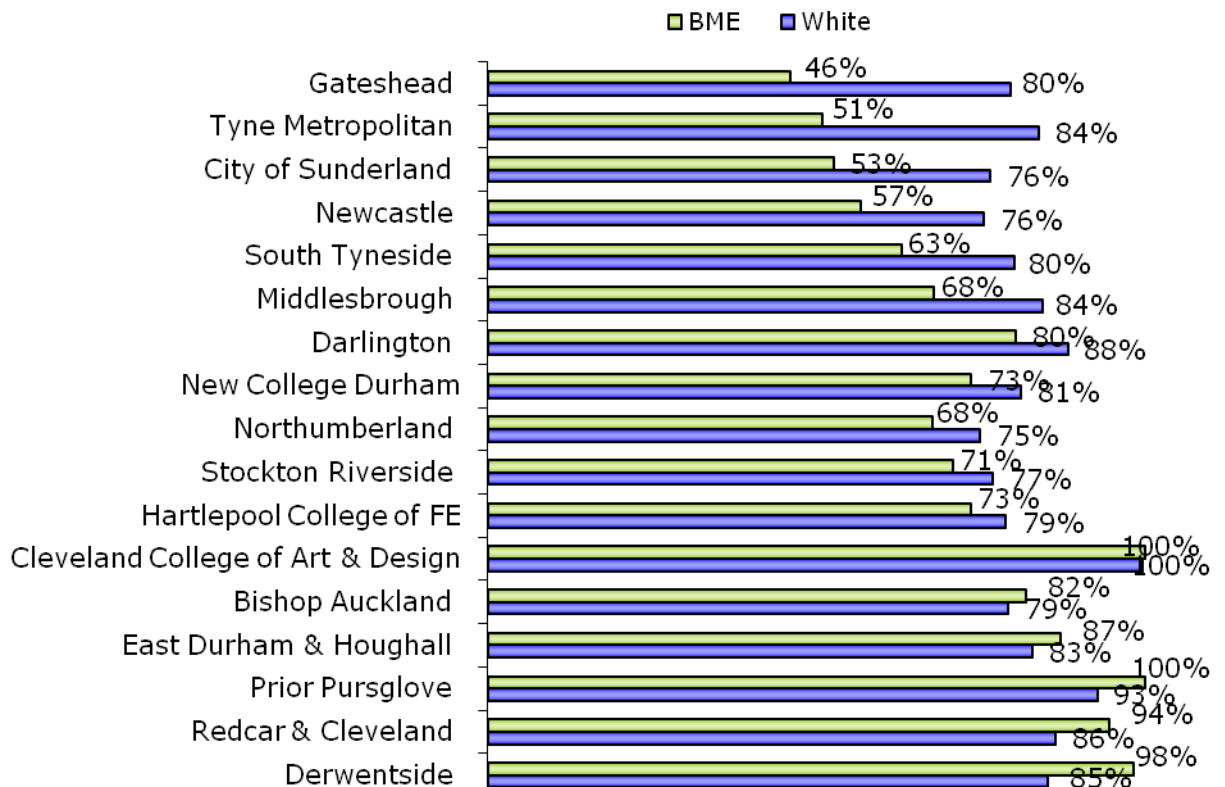
Role models are promoted and supported extensively within various professions. Many offer their services voluntarily, but more recently, particularly among the police force, evidence has emerged of role models feeling taken advantage of, and fatigued by the burden of their activities as role models. WHG therefore proposed a methodology for supporting role models that it believed can successfully motivate and retain role models to achieve an impact upon BME learner engagement in FE colleges above Level 1 within this context.



1.3 EDIMs of participating colleges

The chart below compares the participation rates of BME learners and White learners in Further Education courses at Level 2 and above, by college. It is based on 2007-2008 data supplied by the LSC to WHG in October 2008.

Proportion of BME learners and proportion of White learners that are studying at Level 2 or above in Further Education colleges, ranked by difference (White proportion minus BME proportion)



The chart shows that Gateshead College had the widest participation gap at Level 2 and above for BME learners, followed by Tyne Metropolitan and City of Sunderland colleges. However, Newcastle, South Tyneside, Middlesbrough, Darlington, New College Durham, Northumberland, Stockton Riverside and Hartlepool colleges were all experiencing a larger proportion of White learners on higher level courses than the proportion of BME learners on Level 2 and above courses. There was therefore a clear business case for all these colleges to attempt to encourage BME learners to progress beyond Level 1.

Several colleges were actually experiencing the converse situation in 2007/8 - a higher participation in FE courses at Level 2 and above for BME learners than for White learners. These colleges included Bishop Auckland, East Durham & Houghall, Prior Pursglove, Redcar & Cleveland and Derwentside. On the face of it, there was less of a business case for these colleges to engage with the role models



programme. However, meetings with the colleges and examining other data, such as the participation rate of BME learners against their occurrence in the local area population, unearthed other reasons why colleges would wish to get involved, as explained in their individual evaluations in Section 4 of this report.



2 Methodology

WHG anticipated that colleges could lack the experience or will to support role models initially. The methodology therefore placed the focus of delivery for this project on WHG, while WHG attempted to build capacity at colleges to deliver such support to BME role models in the future themselves.

2.1 Overview of project timeline

Due to the late commitment and starting of activity by many colleges, and requests from participating colleges, WHG requested an extension to the project closure date in February. The project was due to end at the end of March but the extension has now been granted until the end of July.

The structure WHG developed for this project involved the following stages:

1. Review of best practice in BME role model programmes
2. Analysis of the LSC's EDIMs data - based on colleges' Individual Learner Record (ILR) returns by college - and promotion of the business case for a role models programme to all Further Education colleges in the region
3. Contacting North East Further Education (FE) colleges to identify any similar activity to the programme already being undertaken
4. An initial meeting with interested colleges to discuss the suitability of the programme for their institution (the business case), and their preferences and priorities regarding target groups, activities and objectives
5. Supply of project background and specification information to college contacts so that they could seek internal approval for the programme from the principal and other relevant college stakeholders
6. Seeking of up to date data from participating colleges in the format of the EDIMs analysis
7. Guidance for the college on how to find role models within their learner base. This included supplying person specifications, promotional emails, electronic application questionnaires, and group information sessions
8. Once each college had identified several relevant, willing individuals, WHG undertook one to one interviews, and managed the selection process in partnership with the college coordinator
9. Training of role models in groups through two, half day sessions at each college, which included a homework task in between and resulted in individual action plans for role model activities over their first month



10. Remote monitoring, coaching and administrative support for role models on a weekly basis, via individual email and telephone contact to discuss actions taken and future plans, and to advise on specific focus and tasks, in partnership with the colleges
11. Set up and management of an online discussion and support group "BME Role Models North East," hosted on the social networking site Facebook
12. Collection of timesheets from role models on a monthly basis and payment based on hours worked and expenses (travel and subsistence)
13. Feedback to colleges on the role models' work, although the role models were encouraged to remain in close contact with the college themselves so this was often unnecessary
14. Evaluation of the project through monitoring and collecting outputs and outcomes. This included individual trainee evaluations of the training sessions through pre and post questionnaires, feedback from college coordinators and role models through project reviews and an independent evaluation, and recording of role model activity through detailed timesheets, monthly action plans and weekly conversations.

2.2 College recruitment

It was initially anticipated that some colleges would be recruited to participate in the role models programme in late October/early November 2008, and the remainder in mid January. The Strand A events held in mid November presenting the problem of low BME participation at Level 2 and 3 and possible solutions successfully served to recruit four providers (Northumberland College, Hartlepool College of Further Education, City of Sunderland College, and South Tyneside College). However, some providers were unwilling to commit to the programme until the second term in January and February 2009. In practice, only Northumberland College and City of Sunderland College were able to commence the role models programme in 2008. One provider mentioned that this was likely to be because learners and their tutors need time to settle into their academic routine for the year (timetables, expectations, peer groups, etc) before tutors would feel able to select individuals as potential role models with any confidence in their aptitude or personal qualities for the role.

As of the end of February 2009, nine of the 16 FE colleges approached by WHG had expressed a desire to join the programme and six had begun the programme, with representatives from each of the four sub regions. These included:

- Northumberland College
- City of Sunderland College



- Hartlepool College of Further Education
- South Tyneside College
- Bishop Auckland College
- Redcar & Cleveland College.

Newcastle College was initially interested in the programme after the Strand A events, but was obliged to pull out because of a restructure. However, the Equality & Diversity manager saw the use of role models as a valuable and innovative idea which the college would like to pursue independently of the project. New College Durham initially intended to discuss the programme at an internal monthly Equality & Diversity meeting, but the agenda was full of other competing issues and strands leading to a decision being delayed.

Unfortunately, in order to ensure that the project resources were not spread too thinly, two colleges (New College Durham and Tyne Metropolitan College) were turned away from the programme. The programme was filled with colleges on a first come first served basis due to the very slow uptake of the programme. WHG has, however, mentioned to the excluded colleges that this programme can be viewed as a pilot and there may be opportunities to use the evaluation of the programme as a model for developing their own BME role model programmes independently of the LSC and/or WHG, if they wish.

Middlesbrough College initially expressed an interest in the programme, and WHG met with the Equality & Diversity manager there to discuss the programme in more detail. The manager's principal concern was the level of internal college resources that would be required to set up and manage the programme. They discussed the programme with colleagues to identify whether the college could allocate such resource but have not yet replied, despite being followed up by WHG. WHG did not pursue this college since the project team reasoned that colleges struggling to resource this pilot would be unlikely to be willing to take on the programme fully once LSC/WHG involvement ends.

On consulting some colleges, it became apparent that some of the proportion of their learners who were classified as BME were not from their local catchment area but were full cost international learners, e.g. oil workers or shipping executives sponsored by their employers to come to the college. In other cases the BME learner population of the college was mostly made up of asylum seekers/refugees/recent migrants rather than UK born BMEs. This could mean that while some colleges appear to have good BME participation/success rates compared to their local populations, they are not actually drawing upon their local populations but from the global economy.



2.3 Role model recruitment

The review of best practice in role model programmes, and one college was particularly keen to use this method, was to use a “bottom up” approach where the scheme was completely designed and run by BME learners. While this would be the ideal situation philosophically, WHG anticipates that this would have taken significantly longer to achieve impact than the model used in this pilot.

The methods used to recruit BME learners were mostly informal through the use of tutor and staff networks. Northumberland College was an exceptional case because it had a very low number of BME learners, all of whom were known by the Equality & Diversity Manager, who was herself an Indian first generation migrant. This enabled her to pinpoint suitable individuals immediately without having to promote the programme internally to colleagues and await their responses. At Sunderland College, a more coordinated response was required. There was already a starting point in that the college coordinator (who is a White British male) had recently organised an Eid celebration so was fairly well networked with BME learners. However, there was a large number of BME learners and it was initially thought that the process should be more open and fair. The college investigated distributing application questionnaires through its learner database, filtering by BME group. This nevertheless yielded only a small number of applications.

The scarcity of applications to become role models was attributed by one college to the fact that many BME learners at Level 2 and above were part of the mainstream culture of the college and did not wish to be highlighted or singled out due to their race. This was particularly true of UK born BME learners, and therefore explains why the majority of role models are first generation migrants (10 of the 17 recruited). It is not possible to distinguish between BME learners who are UK born and first generation migrants in the LSC’s EDIMs data, so this bias towards recent migrants (who generally speak English as a second language) may or may not mean that role models are able to target those most in need from the general BME sub group.

The low number of role model applications has two implications. First, that the role models were pre-selected or pre-filtered before WHG interviewed them for the role, which could increase the quality of candidate. Second, and conversely, this presented WHG with a low base from which to select role models. Typically, between two and six potential role models were identified by each college to fill a maximum of three roles. This could therefore reduce the quality of the candidates. WHG made sure that role models knew that they would only be selected if they had the right skills and person specification for the role. This was to ensure that role models felt positive about undertaking the role from the outset to maximise their motivation. The selection process did, therefore, lead to some candidates being rejected. This was handled sensitively and often the applicants opted out themselves before formal rejection had to be undertaken once they understood the



role and its demands more fully. WHG ensured that this process went smoothly so that the programme did not impact adversely upon BME learners' self esteem or participation in college activity.

Role models were selected based upon the following broad attributes and experience. WHG arrived at many of these criteria from its previous analysis of various best practice examples of other BME role model programmes in the UK:

- Ethnicity (to ensure these were relevant to the local catchment area of the college)
- Learning at Level 2 or above at the host FE college
- Gender (to aim for a spread of male and female role models)
- Age (to aim for a spread of 16-19 year-olds and older learners. Colleges however tended to identify older learners, since they reasoned that the role required a certain level of maturity and resilience)
- English language competency (enough to perform the role adequately)
- Availability to perform the role (examining work and study commitments)
- Willingness to perform the role, not simply for financial gain but for altruistic and empathetic reasons
- Outgoing nature
- Positive attitude towards learning and employment
- Social networks in the local BME community.

While other questions were asked about religion, hobbies, jobs, other languages spoken, migrant status (e.g. refugee, asylum seeker), experience of giving presentations, marketing, teaching and mentoring or driving, these were only asked in order to allow WHG to tailor the training sessions and action plans (e.g. target groups) to the particular needs and strengths of the role models and were not criteria for selection.

A copy of the role model application questionnaire and interview guide is contained in the Appendix.

2.4 Training

All role models undertook two, half day training sessions at their host college prior to starting work. They were trained as a group of 2 to 4 so that they were aware of each other and could interact with other role models at their college for peer support during their role if they wished.



A presentation and notes pack was developed by WHG and given to each role model, containing a number of information giving sessions and various interactive activities to elicit current knowledge, develop the role models' own ideas, check understanding and give practical exercises in their acquired knowledge.

Between the first and second session, role models were all asked to develop a short presentation or informal talk that they could give to other BME learners at below Level 2 to introduce themselves and talk about their learning journey, the barriers they faced and how they overcame them. This was then rehearsed and delivered at the second training session and feedback given by peers and the trainers in a supportive way.

For the second session, the host college was asked to send individuals from its staff representing marketing, admissions, learner support and Equality & Diversity to introduce themselves to the group so that the role models could begin to develop working relationships with these departments at the college.

Role models were asked to complete a short form prior to beginning training giving their levels of confidence in key areas to be covered by the training. They then completed the same form a second time at the end of the training to assess the impact of the training. A copy of this feedback form is contained in the Appendix.

The training covered the following topics:

DAY 1:

- The aims of the programme and its target groups, e.g. the LSC's definition of BME (recent migrants and UK born; includes White East Europeans...) and why Level 2 qualifications are important factors in gaining employment and promotion
- How role models will be managed and supported in their role
- Types of activities role models could carry out in this role and behaviour required, including personal safety
- How to evidence their activity
- Presentation skills briefing.

DAY 2:

- Presentation skills practice
- Succession planning
- Networking skills



- Draft action plan for their first month.

Suggested activities that have emerged from our discussions with host colleges and role models include:

- Meetings with people who work for the college to discuss things they could do that would add value to existing college activity
- Researching potential audiences – e.g. through community/religious groups; local councils; tutors. In practice WHG has had to undertake much of this on the role models' behalf, particularly with the younger role models, those lacking confidence or IT skills, or those in more remote areas
- Presentations about their learning journey and/or the host college to groups of BME learners (e.g. ESOL groups; learners at Level 1 or entry level) and individuals from the community (e.g. religious groups, clubs and community organisations). This often leads to individuals coming forward for mentoring to support them in choosing courses, accessing the college (e.g. using public transport or accessing childcare), investigating funding options, being introduced to the relevant individuals at the college who can help them, or simply being shown around the college premises to demonstrate that it is a safe and friendly place to learn
- Making a case study of themselves to go on the college website (or other websites the role models knew of, for example a website for Thai people living in the UK) and be used in marketing materials to advertise the college and its courses in the local area
- Helping with college open days and school/parents events to ensure a BME presence
- Organising other activities that they would like to do to make BME learners feel more happy at the college and progress to learning at Level 2 and higher.

A copy of the training pack will be supplied to all participating providers and the LSC, together with the evaluation summary, in order to build capacity for colleges to continue or develop their own role model programmes.

2.5 Conceptualising and articulating the concept

The concept of a job that involves being a role model was difficult to articulate. The project involves making something (a positive role model) explicit and managed that is usually naturally occurring. The role models discussed it in depth during the training. However, the reality of what the role actually involved did not sink in until several weeks in action. There is an inherent difficulty in making sure the role models understand the role and can communicate this to those they engage with. A



part of the training session involved the creation of individual presentations showcasing the difficulties, successes and ambitions of the role models. These were intended to be used by the role models in a formal or informal way when meeting new mentees. This helped the role models to articulate their role better.

2.6 Management and support

Following the training sessions, WHG assigned a line manager to each role model and arranged for a weekly update telephone call or email to be made by WHG to each role model at a mutually convenient time.

These telephone calls cover:

- Progress against the action plan
- Any issues or questions arising from their activities
- Agreeing new targets and objectives for the coming week/month
- Guidance to ensure that role models kept their focus wide and did not spend too much of their time on any individuals, and enabled their learners rather than did everything on their behalf
- Ensuring that the role models were recording their activity adequately and submitting their expenses and pay claims correctly.

As much as possible, WHG encouraged the role models to work with their host college rather than become reliant on WHG or work in silo from existing college activity and the other role models.

It was envisaged that the college coordinator had a role to play in ensuring that each of the 2 to 3 role models have differing foci so that their work did not overlap. However in practice the role models preferred contact with WHG and therefore WHG undertook this coordinating role.

In addition, the role models are encouraged to use the Facebook social network to communicate with other role models from different geographical areas to learn from their activities and resolve issues through peer support.

To date, 17 role models have completed the training – 8 by the end of March 2009 and a further nine by the end of April 2009. Role models were paid for their training sessions.

2.7 Online peer networking

WHG set up a peer networking group on the social networking site Facebook and encouraged role models to join it and talk to each other about their activities and



concerns. There was little evidence of many role models using this facility, although WHG is aware of a role model at Redcar who spoke to a role model at South Tyneside about what he was doing. There are other issues with social networking sites. The role models varied in age and level of traditionality/religiousness/sheltered upbringing vs liberal western upbringing. WHG monitored the group and found that some role models were putting up inappropriate, albeit lighthearted, comments of a rude or sexual nature that may have offended or frightened other role models. In addition, despite support with this, some role models were uncomfortable with the idea of creating a public profile for themselves on the internet, even under a pseudonym, and others were not confident with the technology. Therefore only about 70% of role models joined the group.

2.8 Balance of mentee search relative to mentee support

For the first three role models' training, WHG emphasised the activities they would be undertaking with learners. After a few weeks WHG noticed that one role model was tending to spend a lot of time on a relatively small number of learners. WHG discussed this with the role model and discovered that there was a lack of understanding of how to find new learners to work with. This was leading her to disenable the learners by doing too much for them rather than signposting them and advising then following up. WHG see role model activity to have a *one to many* focus rather than exclusively one to one. This is because WHG believes that a mentoring programme would require significantly more resources since the concept of mentoring is now becoming highly professionalised. This would not be a worthwhile time or funding investment for role models who are only working for perhaps one or two terms before they leave the college. WHG therefore advised the role model on some ways that they could engage with new BME learners and brought a new emphasis to this side of the role in the training, i.e. that the programme would expect them to spend approximately 50% of their time researching new learners and 50% actually engaging with them.

In addition, role models asked WHG for assistance in defining the limits of the mentoring they gave to their mentees. This was achieved by discussing individual cases anonymously between the college and WHG and helping the role model to decide when they had done enough and that it was now up to the learner to help themselves.

Ideally, the college coordinator or WHG would take on a more involved role of researching and engaging with local BME community groups to set up opportunities for role models to engage with BME individuals.



2.9 Evaluation

Throughout this pilot project, WHG was careful to record any outputs, outcomes, potential improvements and best practice/lessons learned that could aid in the successful design of future programmes of this kind.

The role models were supplied with a spreadsheet in which they recorded all their activity, including the learner names, activities carried out and resulting outcomes. They were required to follow up their activity with each learner to encourage progress and record results. This spreadsheet recorded the hours upon which their monthly pay was based.

The role models also discussed all their planned and executed activity with WHG during the weekly coaching contact and this was recorded by WHG.

Evaluation forms were collected from role models prior to and following the training sessions.

In addition, an independent researcher undertook in depth telephone interviews with college coordinators and role models in late June to evaluate the project. The transcripts of these conversations were anonymised and returned to WHG, who have summarised their results in this report, as well as including the original transcripts and discussion guide in the Appendix.

While WHG requested up to date EDIMs data from each college prior to their role model programmes starting, and intended to request the data once more at the end of July to track any changes in admissions, WHG found that some colleges do not have data management systems or expertise that can produce these precise statistics, despite WHG providing a pro forma to facilitate such data collection.



3 Evaluation of the overall programme

This section evaluates the overall BME role models programme. Evaluations of the individual college projects are included in Section 4.

This section is organised into the following themes:

- Profile of the participating colleges
- Profile of the role models
- Summary of programme activity
- Programme outputs and outcomes
- Strengths of the programme
- Areas for improvement
- The future.

3.1 Profile of the participating colleges

Six colleges took part in the programme, with a further four expressing an initial interest in the programme. This leaves seven colleges who did not engage in the programme – some of whom, according to the EDIMs data, could have greatly benefitted from the programme.

Some of the colleges who would have benefitted most were difficult to contact and secure engagement from. It is difficult to say what more WHG could have done to attract colleges to participate. Principals' offices and Equality & Diversity leads were contacted and followed up for each college in the region in November 2008 and January 2009.

The colleges who expressed an interest but were unable to participate were:

- Middlesbrough
- Newcastle
- New College Durham
- Tyne Metropolitan.

The detailed business cases for the programme for each of these colleges are in the Appendix. It was unfortunate that Newcastle, Middlesbrough and New Durham colleges were unable to participate, since these all had large BME populations in their catchment areas, as well as large BME learner populations and low levels of



BME progression to Level 2 and above courses. Tyne Metropolitan and New College Durham were keen to participate but unfortunately six colleges (the maximum) had already commenced the programme at the late stage at which they expressed their interest (March 2009).

The colleges who participated were:

- Bishop Auckland College
- Northumberland College
- Redcar & Cleveland College
- South Tyneside College
- City of Sunderland College
- Hartlepool College of Further Education.

Sunderland, South Tyneside and Hartlepool colleges seemed to have the greatest need for the programme, since they had low BME progression to Level 2 and above. About half of the participating colleges had a general need to attract more BME learners relative to the local area population. However, four of the six participating colleges had very low proportions of BME individuals in their local area populations and learner bodies, which created practical difficulties for the role models in terms of finding adequate numbers of individuals to engage with, and for the college in terms of selecting role models in the first place.

The business case used for each of the colleges who participated in the programme is presented in Section 4, to demonstrate their relative need to increase the proportion of BME learners at Level 2 and above. This includes the proportions of BME and White learners at different levels, learner numbers and the proportion of the local area population that is BME, together with WHG's findings and conclusions for each college. Please note that many figures are based on the LSC EDIMs data as of October 2008, apart from Northumberland College, which supplied more up to date 07/08 and 08/09 data.

3.2 Profile of the role models

- 19 individuals were selected by the six participating colleges – 14 of whom completed the training and 11 of these were still operating at the end of June 2009. They are due to finish their work at the end of July 2009
- Eight of the original 19 role models were UK born rather than migrants – three of the 11 remaining role models are UK born



- Five of the remaining 11 role models have African heritage, two were mixed race and seven were of Asian heritage. All those who dropped out of the programme were from Asian backgrounds
- Four of the 11 remaining role models are under 20, and five of the eight role models who dropped out were young people (aged under 20)
- Seven of the 11 remaining role models are women, and three of the eight role models who dropped out are women
- Five of the 11 remaining role models have English as a first or mother tongue, and seven of the eight role models who dropped out have English as a first or mother tongue.

These drop out trends suggest that the programme as it stands appears best suited to role models who are migrants with English as a second or other language. It appears that older role models are more likely to persevere with the programme, as are women.

3.3 Summary of programme activity

The main activities which form the BME role models programme are outlined below.

3.3.1 Written case studies and PR activity

- WHG provided each college and the LSC with written case studies for their role models showcasing their background, achievements, ambitions and the FE courses they had undertaken, for use in marketing and PR campaigns
- Some college marketing departments photographed the role models for inclusion in their new prospectuses and for PR purposes.

3.3.2 Engagement with internal college staff and current college BME learners

- Most role models, at WHG's request, were introduced to relevant college staff, including marketing, learner support, Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) and Equality & Diversity, so that they were able to signpost and introduce the BME individuals that they worked with to the correct staff, as well as source relevant marketing materials such as prospectuses. However, due to no resources being made available to fund internal college staff to support the role models, college leads and other support staff had very little time to support the role models
- At some colleges, at WHG's request, college staff made efforts to identify current BME learners who could benefit from engaging with the role models, for



example, through announcements at staff meetings and internal emails sent to staff

- Some colleges arranged for the role models to make presentations to the college's current ESOL classes to encourage progression beyond Level 1. These were well received and widened learners' awareness of the different college courses and support that was available to them.

3.3.3 Contacting local organisations and networks

- Few colleges had time to assist role models with contacting local community organisations to engage with BME individuals to see whether any referrals or support could take place with their customers. However, those that did so were successful and this led to new contacts that the role models could mentor, and in some cases new enrolments. Some college marketing teams included the role models in their community outreach activity, e.g. Northumberland College's "learning bus"
- WHG undertook some engagement with local councils and community/religious organisations to ask whether the role models could work with their beneficiaries. This was time intensive and did not result in high levels of referrals or opportunities. Given more dedicated time resource, more could be achieved
- The more mature and confident role models were able to engage with community organisations directly. One set up a relationship with the local Citizens Advice Bureau whereby BME residents would be passed her contact details. She also spoke to staff and customers at a local charity shop that she volunteered in, and approached BME people she met in the street, on public transport and in libraries
- Most role models initially engaged with their immediate social networks, such as BME family, friends and acquaintances. For some, this included wider virtual networks, e.g. a forum for Thai women moving to the UK
- Some role models also contacted previous ESOL learners whom they had studied with and befriended, in order to find out whether they had progressed with any other learning. They found several BME people this way who were interested in further learning and encouraged them to visit the college. They also identified demand for ESOL classes that the college was not aware of.

3.3.4 College open evenings

- Some role models attended college open evenings, when WHG arranged with marketing staff for this to take place. At these events, role models were able to shadow marketing staff and assist with answering potential learners' questions about the college, and the courses and facilities they had experience of.



However, those who attended the open evenings were mainly White and many BME learners who attended were not at Level 1 or below but looking to enroll on Level 3 or 4 courses

- Some role models attended the UK Online BME engagement events held at various North East venues in June 2009. However, the role models engaged with very few new BME learners through these events because attendance at the events by BME learners was low.

3.3.5 Mentoring

Once the role models had presented themselves to BME individuals, they made arrangements to follow up the contacts they had made if the individuals were interested in further learning. These relationships were monitored and advised upon by WHG coaches. The mentoring activity included taking BME individuals through the college prospectus (either online or in hard copy), showing individuals around college premises, introducing the individual to college support staff, e.g. IAG, admissions, learner support, and in some cases helping BME people with the enrollment process, e.g. filling in forms.

3.3.6 Future enrollment and induction activity

- Some colleges intend to use the role models to engage with BME learners at future promotional, enrollment and induction events.

3.3.7 Overcoming barriers

- Some of the younger role models lacked confidence. WHG therefore advised some role models to work in pairs
- Many role models lacked their own transport. While some were confident using public transport, others were limited to their local area that they could reach on foot. This sometimes meant that local BME communities could not be effectively reached by the role models.

3.4 Programme outputs and outcomes

The table below shows an overview of the statistics collected by WHG to date from the role models to evidence their activity through their timesheets and weekly discussions from April, May and June 2009. Please note that some role models have not submitted timesheets and have proven difficult to contact regularly, so may well have undertaken more activity and achieved more outcomes than WHG has been able to evidence here. In addition, if the role model has lost contact with a mentee, there may have been an enrollment outcome that WHG was unable to capture. Many college leads do not expect high levels of enrollments as a result of



the programme in the short term – they see it as a more long term initiative for which it will be difficult to attribute causality to the role models.

The programme at the end of June 2009 had achieved 25 new BME learner enrollments. Please note that these include some ESOL enrollments. WHG believes that this is due to the ways in which BME individuals were engaged with. BME individuals with no ESOL, literacy or numeracy requirements are more mainstreamed and therefore difficult to identify and engage with.

The 11 role models had worked a total of 212 hours, and engaged with or presented themselves to a total of 230 BME individuals, of which 73 people engaged with the role models on a more intensive basis to receive advice, coaching and support with finding and choosing courses, visiting the colleges and enrolling.

This equates to an average of 19 hours per role model over an average of 3 months; an average of 21 individuals engaged with per role model; an average of 7 mentees per role model, and an average of 2 enrolments per role model.

Approximately a third of BME individuals who met the role models (“presented to” below) took up further support from the role models. A third of these went on to enroll in courses at an FE college, which equates to approximately 11% of BME individuals presented to by role models going on to enroll in FE courses.

College	Total hours worked	Role models	Presented to	Mentees	Enrolments
Hartlepool	*	2	12	*	0
Northumberland	113	2	100	35	15
South Tyneside	45	2	40	21	4
Sunderland	26	1	60	7	0
Redcar & Cleveland	18	2	8	0	0
Bishop Auckland	10	2	10	10	6
Total	212	11	230	73	25

*This role model has not submitted any timesheets to WHG or been successfully contacted by WHG in June, so WHG does not have this information yet.



3.5 Programme strengths

The strengths of the role models programme, identified by college leads, role models and WHG, are explained below. Areas for development follow this section.

3.5.1 Role model experiences

Most role models are enjoying the work, are optimistic that it will result in the desired outcomes, and would recommend it to others.

"I like the role model job because I am meeting a lot of people now. I feel it is a privilege – it makes me feel happy to encourage others and I feel useful. It is not easy because a lot of people give a lot of reasons, like I can't leave the children or I have to work. But if we keep doing it then it may work." (Role model)

Some of the younger or less confident role models were hesitant about working alone in terms of outreach and meeting strangers. WHG therefore suggested and encouraged some role models to work in pairs. This approach appears to have been fairly effective in Redcar, where the role models are both 19-year-old females. However, it does impact upon the value for money of the programme, since in effect two role models are being paid to do the job that potentially only one need do.

3.5.2 Incentivisation

WHG's review of best practice for BME role model programmes identified that offering financial incentives to role models could be problematic, since this produced a different dynamic to alternative incentives such as altruism, spontaneity and informality. Some psychological studies show that if something is conceived as "work" or a "job", individuals can inject less enthusiasm into the task than when they are undertaking it voluntarily. However, the review also identified that a key issue regarding such programmes was role model fatigue. Especially in areas or organisations with low BME populations, those BME individuals who are successful are often over-consulted and over-requested to participate in activities to influence their peers, which can contribute towards a lack of motivation, cynicism and disappointment. During this project, role models were paid £7 per hour, based on hours worked to engage with and mentor BME individuals rather than on results. WHG's experience from this project indicates that the financial incentive played a part in ensuring the continuous participation of at least some role models. The role model job is difficult in that the results or outcomes are long term and role models can doubt their impact or success when they do not see immediate enrollments by their mentees as a result of their efforts. The payments based on focused effort rather than results, together with the regular coaching and mentoring from WHG and support from colleges, reinforced the role models' sense that what they were doing was valued and worthwhile and sustained their motivation.



One role model was unable (by law) to be paid directly for her work since her application for asylum in the UK was still being processed. She had been in the UK several years already, and showed significant potential. WHG therefore arranged to pay her for her time in the vouchers of her choice.

3.5.3 Impact on role models themselves

While WHG was ultimately aiming to influence the number of BME individuals enrolling on Level 2 and 3 courses at FE colleges, indirectly WHG aimed to achieve a positive impact on the role models themselves, and there is already evidence of this happening. While for some role models, simply being selected for a paid role with such responsibility and altruistic aims has boosted their confidence, the training offers them strategies and skills that they can use themselves to further their learning and careers. The role also offers them work experience of informal mentoring, marketing, networking, IT, etc that can further their careers. WHG used these points to promote the role to role models and the host colleges, and also offer a reference for those who successfully complete the programme.

Interestingly, some role models commented that the role model programme enabled them to network with other BME individuals, which they did not feel able to do before. One role model said: "I didn't know many people at the college but it seemed silly to walk up to someone else and introduce myself just because they are also African. Now I have a reason."

The programme has had indirect impacts upon role models themselves, increasing their confidence through being selected and training, and showing them how to present themselves, which has led to some achieving university places or jobs.

"She kind of got out of her comfort zone of just being in her community and gone out and made presentations, which has helped her own confidence. Now the college has realised that they would love to have people from ethnic backgrounds because they are good and can do presentations and they can help in our marketing." (College lead)

3.5.4 Role model training

While college leads saw the potential for including role models in their learner ambassador schemes or other training programmes which had high levels of training and support, the role models themselves were happy with the level of training and support they received across all topic areas. The evaluation of training in the Appendix shows how the training achieved increased knowledge and confidence in all areas. Coupled with weekly remote coaching conversations from WHG, the role models were able to achieve a number of outcomes.



3.5.5 Ability for role models to network between colleges

WHG set up a peer networking group on the Facebook website, for which role models were encouraged to sign up. Eight of the 11 role models signed up to the group – some of whom had never used online social networking sites before. WHG encouraged role models to ask each other for advice. While WHG was unable to monitor this chat between role models, one role model told WHG how she had exchanged ideas with a role model at a separate college and had found this helpful.

3.5.6 Impact on enrolments and engagement of BME learners

Colleges working longer term have seen definite enrolments – 15 at one college over six months.

"What I really like about the programme is that it stops my students just stagnating. Usually they come to us for ESOL and somehow they don't have the confidence to go and do other things in college, yet they are all quite capable of doing it. The college is also a bit wary of anyone who is foreign because they worry that the learner will not understand the teacher and may not cope with the course, etc. So on both sides there is a bit of reluctance to deal with ethnic minorities. But this role model programme has worked both ways, it has helped the college to see how good people from other countries can be and that they can do it. On the other hand it is also helping those from ethnic minorities." (College lead)

3.5.7 Programme start timings

The timings of the programme suited some colleges well. College leads saw after Christmas is a good time to start the programme because learners are settled and staff are well-acquainted with all learners so are in a better position to select role models. It also could ensure that, with an annual programme, the levels of activity and confidence of the role models are sufficiently built up prior to the open evening season during the summer term and the enrolment period in September.

3.5.8 Potential to apply the concept to other under-represented groups

Many college leads saw the potential for widening the concept/programme to include other under-represented or disadvantaged groups, e.g. White working class.

3.5.9 Integration with existing BME engagement activity

One issue that may arise with this type of programme is a possible duplication of activity carried out by existing community workers or BME organisations. WHG therefore encouraged role models to primarily work on progression of current learners at their college and to engage with local BME organisations and community



groups in their work. WHG expected BME organisations and community groups to identify whether the role model work would add value to their existing activities.

3.5.10 LSC's pilot approach

College leads generally thought that the LSC's approach of piloting the programme to demonstrate what it could achieve to colleges was right, and many were keen that the LSC continue to lead and fund the programme.

"It would be nice to see lead bodies like the LSC. The college is undoubtedly committed to development in this particular area but often it needs a bit of pump priming and I think when there is a central push that helps colleges to get involved." (College lead)

3.6 Areas for improvement

3.6.1 Time poor role models

The nature of the individuals that the LSC and colleges wished to be selected as role models, i.e. successful, progressing, ambitious learners who provide a good example of participating in mainstream learning, logically means that there is a risk of the role models becoming over-committed to their various activities, e.g. their course, voluntary work elsewhere, work experience placements, other paid work and family commitments. One role model from Northumberland College had to resign from the programme as he was finding it difficult to juggle all his commitments, another role model achieved a place at Newcastle University to study for a degree during the programme and was preoccupied with moving house and finding childcare. In addition, the exam period was during the latter half of the programme (May-July). WHG therefore ensured that role models were only expected to work approximately two hours per week to minimise the impact upon their success in other areas.

In addition, the role models did find it difficult to set themselves targets and manage their time so as to not exceed the time allocated to them or fail to undertake enough activity. They require managerial/coaching support in order to help them achieve this.

3.6.2 Difficulty in managing the role models remotely

Most role models were not accustomed to remote management, and some were not able to be reliably contacted on a regular basis by the colleges or WHG. This made managing such role models very difficult and made it almost impossible to capture the outcomes and impact of their activity. A dedicated member of the college staff



would be more appropriate as a manager for the role models as they can regularly meet with them face to face.

3.6.3 Impact of life events on role model availability and motivation

The role model learning and employment journeys are far from complete. Therefore their effectiveness (i.e. the positivity of the stories they could tell about their progress and their attitudes towards mainstream educational culture) could be impacted upon at any point during their role. Of the three role models at Northumberland College, for example, one has resigned due to other commitments, another has resigned from her paid job which may result in her gaining a new role that does not allow her the time to continue her role model role, and the third has recently been selected for her first job, which again could inhibit the time and energy that she can dedicate to being a role model. In this situation, WHG developed detailed case studies of each role model (and agreed these with the role model) which the college and the LSC could use to promote the idea of BME learner progression without effort from the role models themselves. These have been used in college web sites, prospectuses and other marketing materials, as well as promoted to the local media by Ann Barnes at the LSC. They are contained within the Appendix.

3.6.4 Difficulty matching BME sub groups to role models

There is a school of thought emerging from WHG's review of best practice that role models are most effective when they match the ethnic group, gender and migration experience that they are attempting to target. This is logical, since the whole concept of a role model involves the target group of learners being able to identify with the role model on many levels (visually) in order to develop their belief that they are capable and the system is welcoming of their participation and success. However, the objectives of this project and the context (low numbers of BME population from a variety of different ethnic groups and stages of citizenship) are more general in that one role model will need to reach out beyond their own ethnic group, gender and migration experience.

WHG reasoned that it would make sense for UK born BME role models to work with recent migrants, albeit with sensitivity regarding the different barriers recent migrants may face to them, and with support from the college and relevant contacts from the local authority and/or refugee groups. However, WHG decided that recent migrant role models were less likely to be effective when targeting UK born BME individuals and therefore are advising them to focus on recent migrants or those otherwise excluded from the mainstream, e.g. Bangladeshi women who have young children. In addition, WHG has tried to obtain a spread of ages and genders, with a bias towards adult (aged 20+) learners, since pragmatically, for example WHG was unsure what the likely influence a 17-year-old girl is likely to have upon a 40-year-old man.



There is an inherent difficulty in ensuring that the role models only targeted those BME groups who they are most likely to influence because they have overcome the same barriers as the BME group has experienced. For example, younger role models are less likely to influence older individuals, mixed race role models who have had a highly liberal western upbringing or who may not “look” BME (such as the Redcar role models) are less likely to influence purely BME individuals or those from very traditional or religious families, recent migrants are unlikely to influence UK born individuals, African role models could be less likely to influence Asian individuals, etc. However, regarding the latter point, the African role model based at Bishop Auckland College (an asylum seeker whose second language is English) has successfully engaged with a variety of recent migrants who have had ESOL requirements.

WHG encountered some mainstreamed, UK born BME individuals who did not wish to work as role models because they did not understand the barriers of BME individuals who were not mainstreamed. Mainstreamed individuals had never sought or felt that they needed extra support in order to achieve equal outcomes with their White peers, so they struggled to understand the barriers and how they could help to overcome such barriers.

3.6.5 Appropriateness of role model networks relative to college catchment area

The role models are initially encouraged to work with individuals that they are already acquainted with through their social networks, e.g. family members, friends and other contacts, in order to boost their confidence prior to engaging with strangers. In one case a role model in Bishop Auckland wished to work with someone who lived in Sunderland. WHG consulted the LSC on this and the conclusion was that this was feasible. Since the role model was in effect employed by WHG with funding from the LSC, rather than directly employed by their host college, the role model need not only signpost learners to their host college, but could assist learners to make an informed decision based on the most suitable college/course for them. Since the role model did not have networks or knowledge in Sunderland this could be more difficult and it may be more effective for the role model to refer the learner to the Sunderland-based role models if appropriate.

A further role model at South Tyneside College met BME individuals who lived in the Gateshead area and supported them to identify relevant courses and enroll at Gateshead College, since this was more convenient to where they lived. However, this did not assist her host college to achieve enrollments and Gateshead College was not participating in the programme.

3.6.6 Short programme length

The programme would benefit from being in action ready for the main enrolment season in September in order for the role models to play a role in the marketing



and induction process. The timings of the pilot (October to July) were considered too short by many college leads, who would prefer a programme of a complete year or longer. The late start of programme (after Christmas) also means that some role models can leave the college quickly on completing their courses and maybe therefore be less able to continue the role.

3.6.7 Succession and sustainability

As many role models are current learners at their host college, this presented a succession issue. Some will complete their courses this summer and will leave the college. WHG has tried to develop a role model programme that is sustainable in that colleges will be able to adopt the model once the LSC funding and WHG involvement ends this July. To this end, WHG encouraged role models to develop strong relationships with their college. WHG also intend to supply the general evaluation report to all participating colleges, with individualised evaluations for each college, so that the college coordinators have the means to demonstrate the programme's impact and promote it to their colleagues in the hope that resources from the colleges will be allocated to allow the programme to continue, if it is found to be effective.

3.6.8 Achieving few college resource contributions

The programme was a hard sell with some colleges, making it necessary for WHG to give the impression that the programme would not have a large impact upon the college's resources. In fact, for the programme to do well, a certain level of buy-in was needed from the colleges and this was a surprise for some.

"Wood Holmes have been very good. When the programme started they said they would do everything and in fact we were much more involved, but that is maybe not a bad thing." (College lead)

College leads need greater encouragement to introduce the role models to internal staff, facilitate shadowing sessions, ensure role model participation in marketing activity, etc.

A minority colleges volunteered support with resources on request from WHG, e.g. access to IT, the Internet/Facebook (which was sometimes a banned site at colleges), mobile phones/landline access, diaries, address books and business cards. These were all potentially useful in professionalising the attitudes of the role models and making their job easier. However, we would not consider them essential since other role models with fewer facilities have achieved better results.

A more pressing concern is the request from some colleges for financial resource from the LSC in order to fund a secondment/project for a member of their staff in order for them to be dedicated to the role of managing the role models and paying their wages. Some of the colleges involved in the pilot felt that they could not



sustain the programme without this extra funding, and others were unwilling to commence the programme without such resourcing. WHG has costed the amount of time that it has spent managing the role models per college in order to give colleges and the LSC and interested colleges an idea of the amount of time and other expenses the role model programme potentially takes to run using our current model. The costing table for this is included in the Appendix.

3.6.9 Difficulty recruiting role models

The colleges found it very difficult to recruit suitable role models. The process of identifying suitable learners against the specification supplied by WHG (in the Appendix) was time-consuming. In addition, explaining the programme to potential role models and finding volunteers was not easy, since the role required significant time input from those who were already studying a course and/or working part time, some of whom had families or did voluntary work. In addition, the programme is vulnerable to role models dropping out as their circumstances change or they do not find they enjoy the role.

"When individuals see the commitment that's necessary their commitment diminishes somewhat." (College lead)

Many colleges would have preferred more role models but were unable to identify sufficient candidates in the timescales.

Most colleges found it difficult to identify and recruit role models. This resulted in some role models not having a high degree of suitability for the role in terms of their personality, skills and experience, and in some cases their background. For example, a minority of role models had had a predominantly if not entirely liberal western upbringing. These were draw backs, since other BME individuals in the local community will experience different barriers to the role models, including English language difficulties, family and religious traditions that inhibit learning or careers. BME individuals may not therefore see the role models' achievements as achievable by themselves and the role models may struggle to understand other BME learners' barriers. WHG addressed a wide variety of BME barriers during the role model training, where the role models were informed about the BME barriers to learning and progression which WHG found during their research, and responses to overcoming such barriers were discussed.

3.6.10 Difficulty identifying beneficiaries

Many of the participating colleges had very few BME learners at Level 1 or below whom the role models could work with. There was therefore a need to engage with local communities, which was a more time-intensive and difficult task.



3.6.11 Unrealistic expectations of role models

Some college leads and others felt that the programme asked too much of the role models, and gave too little training and support in the skills required.

"It is not an easy thing to ask them to go out into the community and engage with agencies and organisations and do a presentation. It's a big, big thing to do and ask...and it doesn't happen overnight, it takes time to build relationships and build up that process." (Community worker who assisted role models)

There are opportunities for the colleges to train the role models in skills required such as coaching, promoting the college, and presenting through access to its own in house courses and learner ambassador programmes, but these were not taken up.

3.6.12 Limited BME experience and backgrounds of role models

As a result of the difficulty in recruiting role models, some of the role models that the colleges selected were considered unsuitable as they were not adequately embedded in the BME community, which limited their understanding of the barriers they would encounter, as well as their opportunities to meet BME individuals.

"They have barriers like not knowing the demographics of the area or knowing where the communities live and knowing where to go to access the BME community, knowing who to contact, knowing travel arrangements. They are not barriers that can't be overcome but they are barriers." (Community worker who assisted role models)

For example, some role models had little knowledge of BME culture and faiths, which some involved in the programme felt that could limit their impact.

"If you don't have an awareness of the issues, how can you put it across to other people about how you overcame the barriers and relate to other BME people in relation to those barriers." (Community worker who assisted role models)

In addition, some role models did not visually appear to be BME, and therefore lacked their maximum potential impact.

"People might not see them as BME because they have grown up in white culture and may not look BME." (Community worker who assisted role models)



3.6.13 Lack of regional network for college leads

One college lead suggested that the programme needs more structure and more involvement on a regional basis - perhaps setting up a network between the colleges. WHG did set up an online peer networking group on Facebook for role models, but college leads were not included.

3.6.14 Expensive programme relative to outcomes

Some colleges did not see the programme as good value for money. However, they were willing to continue with the programme if it is externally funded.

3.6.15 College lead doubts about the programme's validity

One college lead thought that small training providers and large colleges may be good at different things, i.e. smaller providers at the edge of communities could be best at entry level qualifications and large colleges could be best at higher level provision. He believed that there was a need to agree what different types of provider are best at on a national basis, for example if the LSC evidenced research that showed learners progress best at Level 1 with small local providers. Even if this view is correct, a programme to ensure that BME learners progress from level 1 community based learning to higher level college based learning would still be necessary – if not even more so.

One college lead was irritated by the way public money has been used to 'bombard providers with money to get BME and Muslim learners into courses', instead of recognising research he had seen that shows that this is hard to do and that there are cultural issues that cannot be overcome. This comment shows a certain pessimism about the likelihood of the role models programme to improve equality between BME and White learners.



3.7 The future

Most college leads thought the programme had the right approach.

Some college leads regretted that they and their staff had been unable to devote sufficient time resource to managing and supporting the role models, and would like to build the programme into something more structured and embedded, through a dedicated secondment of an internal member of staff rather than remote management by an external organisation. These colleges suggested that funding from the LSC could be necessary in order for such a thing to happen.

Some colleges were happy for the current role models to continue working, but felt it was unlikely that the college would have the funds to pay the role models for their time. However, these colleges were generally willing to provide reactive support for the role models who wished to continue.

Two colleges said that they intended to continue to support the remaining role models for at least another year, even if LSC funding does not continue.

Almost all colleges stressed that the programme needs to be over a longer time period – i.e. more than one year – in order for it to work well.

Many college managers had concerns about positive action schemes, such as creating reverse discrimination towards White learners and falling into tokenistic gestures, and were happy that an external organisation was implementing it for them. This has implications for the programme's long term sustainability since it implies that colleges are unwilling to undertake positive action schemes independently.



4 Conclusions

Although the participating colleges were not the most in need of BME progression or had the most chance of impact, the programme has achieved some success in increasing the number of BME learners enrolling in FE college courses – both generally and at Level 2 and above. However, it has been difficult to target activity towards specific levels rather than taking a blanket approach to BME engagement because BME individuals are difficult to identify and engage with in an area where there are so few BME population. In addition, it is likely that the impact of the programme will be felt over a longer period than the period in which WHG was able to collect data.

The programme has had positive benefits for many of the role models themselves, and may result in knock-on effects such as the role models eventually being recruited to the college staff. Their experiences as a semi-member of staff have given them a deeper insight into how colleges work and some have enjoyed the mentoring/marketing role and found that they have an aptitude for such work.

College leads vary in their evaluations of the programme. However, only one of the colleges had doubts about the programme's validity or likelihood of success. Many had been impressed with WHG's work and the amount of engagement achieved with the role models.

It is difficult to assess the "value for money" of the programme relative to other programmes, since WHG does not have access to evaluations of similar schemes. The programme as is with some minor improvements would cost £6,000 per year for four role models at one college. WHG would suggest that colleges take into account the outcomes achieved, the costs involved in this model (the assumptions and breakdown are given in detail the Appendix) and consider the programme's merits against alternative ways of increasing BME participation at Level 2 and above.

There are a number of weaknesses of the programme. Many of these are a result of insufficient timescales and funding. The programme was, however, intended as a pilot and for lessons to be learned in its execution. WHG has recorded the methodology, strengths and weaknesses of the programme in order that future schemes can be designed in a way that can achieve maximum impact. Our recommendations below outline some of the best practice we would recommend.

5 Recommendations

5.1.1 Target the programme at colleges that can achieve greatest impact

It would be more effective to target colleges with large local BME populations and learner bodies which have a large gap in participation at Level 2 and above rather



than colleges who do not experience the problem so acutely. It is, however, difficult to secure the involvement of some colleges and it is important that the programme remains voluntary in order to maximise buy-in and results achieved by colleges.

Alternatively, the funding and model could be made available for colleges to achieve the objectives that are most relevant to them. The programme design (selection of under-represented groups to be targeted, objectives and profiles of role models) could be undertaken on a college by college basis, rather than based on overall regional trends/objectives, which can be irrelevant at individual provider level.

5.1.2 Increase the timescales for programme activity

Ensure that future role models programmes are over longer time periods, i.e. at least one year. This will increase college commitment and capture more outcomes from activity, and thereby achieve greater value for money.

5.1.3 Apply strict criteria to role model recruitment

This project had to compromise on some of the role model selection due to the short timescales. A longer programme should, in order to achieve the greatest possible impact, ensure that future role models:

- Have their own transport, or are confident using public transport to visit new places
- Are highly confident
- Are visibly BME
- Have strong networks with their local BME community, and the ability to form new networks
- Are from the BME group that requires most intervention
- Have a strong BME background, e.g. faith, family, and upbringing, so that they understand the barriers other BME groups face.

5.1.4 Widen the criteria for role models beyond simply current learners

The model works best when role models are slightly more mature and have achieved more life goals. The criteria should therefore include recent learners rather than just current learners. This will give the opportunity for role models to be recruited who have seen the fruits of their learning being turned into something positive such as a fulfilling job or the completion of higher education, and are therefore much stronger advocates of FE learning at that college.



5.1.5 Support role models extensively

Coaches or managers will need to support role models to ensure they achieve their personal goals, e.g. fulfilling employment, in order to maintain their motivation and advocacy for FE learning.

We would recommend continuing the current level of support as a minimum in terms of training and support (at least fortnightly) to help the role models achieve their outcomes. Ideally, the level of training would be increased through allowing role models access to free college training in essential skills such as presentation skills and community development, and shadowing marketing and support colleagues.

Role models could also be encouraged to document the barriers they come across and share responses and counter-examples to these that they are aware of or have used to develop future role models.

The LSC could also develop and manage a regional network for college leads participating in such programmes to share best practice.

WHG would recommend that the LSC advocates funding the hourly payment of role models based on effort rather than results, although targets and action plans will need to be agreed.

5.1.6 Investigate applying the role model concept to other under-represented groups and challenging stereotypes

College leads were enthusiastic about the concept and model, and believe that it could encourage other under-represented groups to participate in FE at higher levels, such as disabled learners, women in engineering, BME mothers, etc.

Role model activity could also be targeted towards overcoming the prejudices of White learners, employers and other stakeholders, creating a “push and pull” effect where BME learners are more confident that they can achieve things and employers are more willing to take them on work placements and training contracts.

5.1.7 Identify appropriate funding streams

Some colleges appear unable to pursue the programme if further funding is not provided. There may be alternative methods of funding the programme other than the LSC’s Equality & Diversity budget. One college lead suggested the use of government migration impact funding to fund the programme, should the LSC be unable to do so.

It is worth looking into ways that colleges could build a role models programme into the curriculum, thereby motivating current learners by non-financial means such as



the opportunity to learn skills that will make them more employable and undertake work experience. This could reduce the costs of the programme.

Alternatively, the LSC could fund secondments of internal college staff to manage the role models for each college. Costings for this are given in the Appendix and an external organisation such as the LSC or WHG could either manage college coordinators or simply train college coordinators in the role.

5.1.8 Circulate the evaluation to participating and non-participating colleges

WHG will forward evaluations to each college for their individual role model projects and seek permission from these colleges to circulate their individual evaluations to other colleges. We would recommend that at least this report (*excluding Section 4*) be shared with all college principals and Equality & Diversity leads in the North East, as well as with Equality & Diversity leads in other English regions and beyond.