

Increasing BME Participation at Level 2 and Above in the North East.



Leading learning and skills

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1. Introduction

This report is a review of the various activities undertaken as part of the BME Action Plan work that was carried out between 2008-09, with the aim of improving participation for BME individuals at level 2 and above. The BME Action Plan was developed in response to the Wood Holmes Report "Addressing Inequalities Research" March 2008, which can be supplied by contacting stuart.linden@lsc.gov.uk. LSC North East commissioned the "Addressing Inequalities Research" to explore issues and make recommendations for two of their 2008 Equality and Diversity Impact Measures (EDIM) Priorities:

- EDIM 1: Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) learners in the North East are far less likely to be learning towards a full Level 2 qualification or above than White learners.
- EDIM 3: Male learners are less likely to achieve in full Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications than female learners.

It was agreed to take forward the key recommendations concerning BME participation at level 2 and above, while reviewing EDIM 3 at a later date as, according to the EDIMs Review in 2008, this was no longer an issue. However, it was agreed to revisit this area to ensure that this inequality does not re-emerge. Should this be the case the LSC would then look to implement the findings in the "Addressing Inequalities Research" report concerning this issue.

The BME Action plan which was drawn up as a way of implementing the recommendations from the “Addressing Inequalities Research” had the following elements:

- **E&D Team to perform further analysis to breakdown BME Groups**
Carry out further analysis of the EDIM's data to break down specific BME groups and identify any positive or negative trends within the region and with particular providers. Should any specific area or provider trends be identified, work will be undertaken with relevant E&D leads within partnership teams to establish the reason for the trend, along with any other issues that need to be addressed.
- **Identify any BME engagement activity that could be taken forward with learndirect** As the “Addressing Inequalities Report” suggests that some BME individuals would like to have a more flexible curriculum and progression options that work outside the 9-5 hours, it was thought that there may be some benefit in teaming up with *learndirect* because of their 24hour virtual learning delivery model.
- **Identify any BME engagement activity that could be taken forward with UK-Online Centres** Because of the success of some previous Cultural Diversity events work that was done with *UK-Online Centres* in 07-08, it was suggested that *UK-Online Centres* could be asked to support this activity. In particular one of the key strengths of *UK-online Centres* seemed to be their ability to reach harder to reach/underrepresented individuals effectively as part of their goal of tackling digital exclusion. In addition to this, *UK-Online* and *learndirect* often have dual branded centres which offer jointly a digital inclusion curriculum, and then this is used as a platform to progress onto further online learning. This gave room for some co-operative work between these two organisations in tackling BME participation at level 2 and above.
- **Facilitated events with BME individuals and Providers** These events would be facilitated, and would be led by BME individuals. Providers would be invited to attend in order to listen to the issues that BME individuals have, and help to come up with practical solutions that enhance the providers' services.
- **Faith Related Activity** To ensure that BME learners are learning at level 2 and above there is also a need to assure ourselves that the lack of faith provision in colleges is not having a negative impact on this participation. As such, LSC North East agreed to continue to work with Connect NE (formally the North East Interfaith Forum) to inform them of the work regarding participation at level 2 and above for BME individuals. It was also agreed to look at where Connect FE could support this work.
- **Marketing Activity (LSC)** After initial discussion with the LSC North East regional Marketing and Communications Team it was agreed that much of this work needs to highlight BME within all the mainstream activity. In other words, rather than having a separate campaign for BME individuals, we needed to ensure that the current marketing activity is accessed by BME communities. It was agreed that we would explore ways of making mainstream marketing activity more BME focused and accessible.

- **Identifying, promoting and supporting role models within providers.** This was one of the key recommendations from the “Addressing Inequalities Research”, which stated there was a lack of mentors or aspirational figures that BME learners could work with or gain support from; suggesting this might contribute to the lower achievement cycle.
- **Formation of a Task Group and identification of any other activity which supports the aim of enhancing participation at level 2 and above for BME individuals.** While this was not a recommendation of the “Addressing Inequalities Research”, the LSC North East Equality and Diversity team wanted to have a support group that would help to keep the BME Action Plan and the activity within this on track. In addition this support group would be able to advise of any activity that they feel could contribute to the BME Action Plan, which would support the aim of enhancing participation for BME individuals at Level 2 and above.

2. Review of Activities

This section of the report explores in detail the activity that was conducted as part of the BME Action Plan, as well as any issues and/or improvements that could be made.

a **E&D Team to perform further analysis to breakdown BME Groups**

The 2009 Equality and Diversity Impact Measures (EDIMs) Review carried out by LSC North East, looked in more detail at the different ethnic groups and not just the BME group as a whole. The review looked at Learner Responsive, Employer Responsive, Apprenticeship and OLASS Provision to discover if there were any barriers to learning which seemed apparent in participation and/or success for differing learner groups, at all levels of Further Education.

Where the review looked at the differing Ethnic Groups often it was difficult to identify a trend for the following reasons:

- The overall BME population for the North East is low, with pockets of different Ethnic Groups/communities being in different localities across the region.
- Due to the low numbers and complexities of the BME population for the North East, it is often very difficult to identify specific trends for individual BME communities.

Despite being unable to identify any specific trends by a particular Ethnic group the EDIMs review 2009 did identify the following BME priorities:

- 16-18 year olds from BME communities are less likely to undertake a full level 2 or 3 qualification than young white learners.
- Learners from BME communities are under-represented in Apprenticeships.

Recommendation: While the EDIMs review 2009 was unable to identify a specific trend by ethnic group within learning provision, it is recommended that any future data review continues to explore participation and learner success by specific ethnic group, as a clear trend may present itself in the future.

b Identify any BME engagement activity that could be taken forward with learndirect and UK-Online Centres

Uk-Online Centres and *learndirect* completed a joint project that had the following aims:

- A regionally based mini-network of 11 UK *online centres* with particular expertise in engaging with the BME community will have been established
- Partnership with *learndirect* providers will be strengthened and stronger progression routes to Level 2 provision established
- 10 engagement events will have taken place
- 100 people will have registered for a **myguide** account
- 100 people will have had access to Level 2 learning opportunities
- 50 progressing to further accredited learning
- 10 case studies will have been gathered
- An evaluation report will have been presented to LSC North East.

The Chinese International Centre won the UK-Online Centres bid to lead the activity while a number of smaller BME engagement events took place at the following centres:

- **South Region (Tees Valley/County Durham)**
 - Hope Foundation - TV
 - Hartlepool Adult Education Centre - TV
 - Hemlington Community Partnership - TV
 - Consett South Enterprise Association Ltd - Co Durham
 - St. Patrick's Hall Organisation - Co Durham
- **North Region (Tyne and Wear/Northumberland)**
 - Pegswood Community Project - Nland
 - Building Futures East - T&W
 - Active Development (Fitness Training) - T&W
 - Skills and Enterprise Centre - T&W
 - ENRGI Project - Nland
 - The Learning Shop - T&W

There were also two large roadshow events, one of which was at Captain Cook Square in Hartlepool and one at the Metro Centre Gateshead. After receiving the evaluation and providing feedback to both *UK-online* and *learndirect* the following findings emerged:

Smaller vs Larger Events

The smaller events run by centres within the newly established regionally based mini-network of UK online centres with particular expertise in engaging with the BME community were more successful at targeting this client group than the larger roadshow events. This was partly because the centres within the mini network were either working in, or very aware of the needs of, the communities this project was targeting.

In addition to this, more research could have been done to ensure that the larger road-show events were placed in an area that was likely to gain a higher volume of the target group, as opposed to just the general population of the area. Finally, the larger road-show events had a number of different learning providers promoting their learner offer, which was a good achievement for this project as evidence of partnership working.

Although it was clear that some were better at promoting/selling their offer to attendees than others.

Issues Regarding Joint Delivery between *UK-Online Centres* and *learndirect*

One of the key reasons for this venture between *UK-Online Centres* and *learndirect* was the complementary ethos of both these organisations. *UK-Online Centres'* mission of tackling digital exclusion and *learndirect's* ability to provide a flexible 24hour learning model provides a good platform from which to aid progression and achievement of BME individuals at level 2 and above. In addition many *UK-Online* and *learndirect* Centres are dual branded and are able to offer both these areas of provision.

Another reason for pursuing this joint activity was that we wanted to build upon the success of the "Cultural Awareness Event" activity that *UK-Online Centres* completed the previous year. It was clear that *UK-Online Centres* had the ability to target and reach underrepresented groups, and we were confident that this joint activity would be successful.

As the Cultural Awareness events that *UK-Online Centres* completed was a much smaller project and less targeted, it was important to ensure that there was plenty of support to make this venture successful, which is why the *learndirect* and *UK-Online Centres* partnership was encouraged.

While overall this partnership was successful it became clear throughout the project that *learndirect's* involvement was not as great as we had hoped, with *UK-Online Centres* taking the lead and making this work successful. With regard to *learndirect*:

- Much of the work that was completed was more on the initial engagement side which appeared to shift the project to a more *UK-Online Centre* focus. Therefore it was agreed between the two partners that *UK-Online centres* should take the lead.
- Within *learndirect* the Regional Managers would be expected to focus their efforts on projects with a much higher contract value and as such *learndirect* would have had to go through various processes and people to work specifically on this project, which it was felt would have slowed the work down in an already tight timescale. This is why ultimately *learndirect* agreed and welcomed *UK-Online Centres* taking the lead on this work.

Recommendation: Ensure that all partners are happy with what is going to be delivered before signing the contract, and that all delivery partners communicate clearly with the contractor regarding problems with committing time to the project as soon as possible.

Support given to the Chinese Centre – Newcastle

The Chinese Centre's application to be the Lead Centre in this work was very good, but despite the fact that the centre and staff worked very hard to make this a success, it became clear during the life of this project that they required support in:

- Written Communication
- Production of Marketing Materials
- Organisation Skills
- Presentation Skills

Some of the work carried out by the Chinese Centre was very effective, but occasionally they required much more one to one support in the areas listed above. Despite this however, they clearly have the ability to deliver and have developed as an organisation as a result of carrying out this work.

Key Achievements from the *UK-Online* and *learndirect* BME Engagement and Progression Activity.

This work had the following achievements:

- A regionally based mini-network of 11 *UK online centres* with particular expertise in engaging with the BME community have been established
- 15 Engagement Events were completed, 5 more than originally planned
- 193 people have registered for a myguide account, where the target was 100, and 168 of these were from BME background
- 67 individuals have progressed to further learning where the target was 50, and 48 of these were from BME backgrounds
- 10 Case Studies were produced as part of this project
- 124 individuals accessed Level 2 provision, and 105 of whom were from BME backgrounds

Follow-up work

Despite the apparent successes of this BME Engagement and Progression activity there is still one true test that remains regarding the impact of this work. *UK-Online Centres* have agreed to carry out some follow-up research on what the individuals that have been engaged with as part of this project have gone on to do. This will help us assess the true impact on BME Progression; this research will be completed by the end of March 2010.

Embedding and Continuation of the Mini-network Model by UK-Online Centres

As part of their core mainstream delivery UK-Online Centres nationally, now allows applicant smaller centres to apply to be part of a member of a mini network that aims to target and address the needs of underrepresented individuals, as a result of the success of this BME Engagement and Progression Activity. This is further evidence of the longer term impact of the BME Action Plan work.

c Facilitated Events with BME Individuals and Providers

This work was completed by Wood Holmes Consultancy as part of a two phased project for which they successfully tendered. The work saw the development of a number of BME advocates, who were either currently studying or have recently studied at college. These advocates were then supported at a Wood Holmes facilitated event where they explained their thoughts and experiences of accessing college provision. There were two facilitated workshops, one in the North and one in the South of the region, with the advocates and a number of providers attending either. The aim of the events was to get the BME individuals and providers to discuss what could be improved to get BME individuals to progress in future.

This work was again successful although there were a few difficult messages for providers. Those given the highest priorities at these events included:

- Ensuring sufficient feedback is obtained from BME learners
- Raising cultural awareness of staff and students, including the use of BME role models – this was thought to be difficult for small providers
- Ensuring that BME learners are welcomed and treated in a friendly and respectful manner at all times, through staff training and reminder systems such as “respect” messages on screen savers
- Ensuring that higher level courses are available in community settings and that these are adequately promoted to target groups
- Frontline staff focus
- Ensuring that signposting of learning opportunities was unbiased and adequate for BME learners
- Reviewing their offer against the funding available
- Provision of general “brushing/catching up” support for those who have taken maternity or cultural breaks from learning (this could apply to White learners also)
- Buddying system between different BME groups, except that this was a long term, high resource process, risking many dangers e.g. one to one mentoring
- Cultural forums. One provider had tried four times to set this up with little response. They felt that there needed to be events with no pressure that were “not just people sitting in a room”
- Provision of appropriate, independent Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) that encourages progression from the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to mainstream learning
- Cultural awareness raising of the White population was said to be important but problematic since providers struggled to engage students with no interest in other cultures, and few providers had sufficient staff with the time, energy and funding necessary. One provider recommended teaching materials produced by LSN for Citizenship classes for this purpose. However, only full time 16-19 students take Citizenship lessons or have tutorials
- Staff training – turnover is an issue for some providers, and for others their staff are too focussed on delivery of the learning outcomes for their curriculum
- Need for Equality and Diversity lead from the top, making such targets mandatory for staff, asking for updates and being firmer with furthering the BME agenda rather than accepting “nothing to report” at board meetings
- The Equality & Diversity advisors are often not in the executive group. One solution to this suggested by BECON was paying an independent BME representative to attend board meetings and be a critical friend to the provider

- Providers discussed how staff could be “won over” to the diversity agenda through disability, gender, poverty and other issues that are more relevant to them, before ethnicity is tackled
- Independent (i.e. not college staff) support workers for BME learners who can seek feedback and champion their issues
- Linking the role models programme into the REES programme for black managers.

Recommendation: The providers involved in the BME facilitation event need to take forward some of the suggestions, particularly those that could be easier to implement e.g. staff BME awareness training.

Recommendation: Providers need to ensure they promote and make best use of IAG services to ensure that this aids increased participation of BME individuals at level 2.

Recommendation: Providers should make the most of any outreach activity available that would allow them to work within BME communities (see earlier *UK-Online* and *learndirect* section)

Full details of the facilitated sessions, key messages and how the BME individuals were supported can be found in the Wood Holmes “Evaluation of Strand A – BME facilitation and provider seminars” report, December 2008. A copy of this is available by emailing stuart.linden@lsc.gov.uk.

The work was very successful in supporting BME individuals involved and encouraging providers to explore what barriers may be preventing BME progression within their own provision. This work alone has not managed to gain insight as to what providers are going to do or have done differently as a result of taking part in these events.

Wood Holmes did manage to ask the providers who attended what action they would explore to aid increased BME participation at level 2 and above, but it remains to be seen what they have actually achieved as a result of this work. Despite this, the BME Progression issue was always going to be a longer term area of consideration, so while we have no firm evidence of this work’s impact to date, this is not a failure of Wood Holmes and perhaps is something that will need to be assessed later. It should also be noted that this piece of work was part of a larger project that Wood Holmes have been completing in this area. (See Role Models section)

Recommendation: Further work should be done at a later date to establish what providers have done to implement the suggestions from the facilitated sessions, and evaluate the impact that this has had on increasing BME participation at level 2 and above.

d BME Integrated Employment and Skills

In order to address BME integrated Employment and Skills, the LSC North East Equality and Diversity team have been working closely with the LSC Regional Skills Team, and the North East Equality and Diversity Partnership, which was originally established by One North East (Regional Development Agency).

Recent work has developed as a result of addressing the BME Employability recommendations from the 'Closing the Ethnic Employment Gaps' Report completed by the Centre of Public Policy at Northumbria University. This report was commissioned by the Evidence Task Group, which is a sub group of the North East Equality and Diversity Partnership. The aim of the Evidence Task Group is to look at the evidence base and address gaps in Equality and Diversity information for the region.

The overall aim of the Closing the Ethnic Employment Gaps research was to review and inform the development of key regional labour market policies aimed at strengthening economic inclusion for ethnic minority groups. In doing so, the research has sought to work within the context of the Regional Employability Framework and the Tyne and Wear City Region Employment Consortium policy approach, with four key objectives:

- To inform better understanding of the way in which labour market disadvantage affects different ethnic minority groups in the region
- To improve understanding of the barriers for specific groups of people (i.e. by race/faith, gender and age)
- To assess the effectiveness of interventions in overcoming disadvantages
- To inform the development of regional labour market policies to quicken the pace in reducing labour market disadvantage for the North East's ethnic minority groups.

A full copy of this research can be obtained from the North East Regional Information Partnership (NERIP) website:

<http://www.nerip.com/library/view.aspx?id=663>

On January 29th 2010 to address some of the recommendations of the 'Closing the Ethnic Employment Gaps' report, the LSC North East supported and contributed to a Department for Work and Pensions regional half-day conference on the ethnic minority employment challenge in the North East. It was aimed at helping local authorities, local strategic partnerships and other stakeholders to develop strategies to improve sustained job outcomes for workless people in ethnic minority communities and promote equal opportunities.

In addition to this the LSC North East Equality and Diversity team have developed a paper 'Taking the IAG Recommendations from the Closing the Ethnic Employment Gaps Report Forward' which outlines where the LSC can help in addressing the IAG recommendations where possible and practicable. A Copy of this paper can be obtained by contacting stuart.linden@lsc.gov.uk

Recommendation: The North East Equality and Diversity Partnership should continue to ensure that the recommendations within the 'Closing the Ethnic Employment Gaps' report are implemented where possible and practicable.

Recommendation: The partners that were present at the 'Ethnic Minority Employment Challenge' half day conference need to consider the points made at this event when developing strategies to help Ethnic Minority Workless people into sustained Employment.

e Faith Activity

The E&D Team originally wanted to link the BME Action Plan into some of the work the LSC North East had done with Connect FE (formally the interfaith forum), as Connect FE could have had a real input into the work around BME participation and success at level 2 and above. However, as they were fully occupied with what the LSC wanted them to achieve as part of the work they were already doing, it was considered inappropriate for them to have any major involvement in the BME action plan. Nevertheless, Connect FE was kept up-to-date with progress as it was important to continue to allow them to input any suggestions they might have.

Recommendation: Connect FE (formally the North East Interfaith Forum) should look to evaluate the impact they are having on the providers they have been working with around the faith agenda. In particular this research should establish whether increased faith provision within providers has had an impact on participation and progression.

f Marketing Activity (LSC)

As part of the last Adult Skills Campaign 2009, which focussed on those who did not have a level 3, the E&D team have worked with the regional Marketing and IAG teams to ensure that some of this campaign was directed towards BME community organisations. Fawthrop McLanders (a design, marketing and digital agency based in Newcastle) sought a number of leads and *nextstep* providers then provided the IAG, some of which was delivered at the point of engagement. The BME element of this work had the following aims:

- Promote the whole learning offer to BME individuals including support available to help learners achieve.
- Promote the different learner styles to help individuals achieve
- Encourage progress to level 2 and above
- Work with community groups as a means of accessing BME individuals
- Inform marketing of what had been attempted in terms of engagement activity to highlight what worked and what did not, informing future marketing activity.

While the total number of BME leads generated was 265, only 57 had been followed up by *Nextstep* Providers. There were problems with the wider Skills campaign due to *CfBT* (the lead provider for the nextstep service) failing to follow up leads, although it was thought that this was mainly due to process issues rather than a lack of willingness. The LSC Skills Team continue to work with *CfBT* (the lead provider for the nextstep service) to address processes to ensure a timely follow-up of leads in future.

The lack of follow-up was considered particularly damaging for the BME individuals targeted as once engagement has been established with an underrepresented individual and follow-up is agreed, then failure to do this reduces the likelihood of being able to target this individual again. Therefore it was important to continue to work with and support the community groups that were approached as part of this Skills campaign, especially since otherwise many of the good links that were made within community groups would be wasted.

To ensure that links with community groups were maintained the LSC E&D Team and the Skills Team have been working with the Careers Advice Plus (CAP) element of the IAG service (currently managed by Newpathways) to ensure that they continue to work with and support BME Community Groups and individuals.

To summarise, the campaign operated by Fawthrop McLanders working in community areas across the region to generate leads, and then *nextstep* provider staff carried out one-to-one interviews with individuals where possible. Where an interview was not possible, either because of time constraints for *nextstep* or because the client did not have time to wait, Fawthrop McLanders would take an individual's details for *nextstep* to follow up at a later date. As a result of the way this partnership worked, there were the following issues:

- As already highlighted *nextstep* struggled to follow-up leads and many were not contacted until 8 weeks after the initial engagement – when the leads had gone cold.
- *nextstep* felt that some of the leads that were generated by Fawthrop McLanders were inappropriate and were not the target group the campaign was trying to reach.
- There was a feeling from *nextstep* that this campaign was something that was being done to them and not something that they had been involved with right from the start. Therefore the LSC colleagues needed to continually reinforce to *nextstep* that this was something that they had been involved in from the beginning and that this work was supporting their goals and targets.
- It had become clear when reviewing this work that the *nextstep* lead (*CfBT*) had mismanaged this project and, as a result, this brought about a staffing change.

Recommendation: In future marketing/targeting campaigns the organization developing this work needs to ensure all partners have the capacity to deliver.

Recommendation: Future marketing activity should ensure that all partner aims are aligned/supportive of each other.

Recommendation: Ensure from the outset that all partners are happy with the goals of any future campaign.

Recommendation: Partners must inform the contractor/s of any issues so that these can be addressed speedily to avoid damaging the overall campaign.

g Identifying, Promoting and Supporting Role Models, within Providers

This was the second phase of the activity completed by Wood Holmes and was a key element of the BME Action plan. The aim of this pilot project was to develop learner role models, with the aim of supporting and mentoring other BME learners in achieving Level 2 and above. This programme was very well received and the following providers took part:

- South Tyneside College
- City of Sunderland College
- Bishop Auckland College
- Redcar and Cleveland College
- Northumberland College
- Hartlepool College

A number of press releases were also produced regarding this project and it attracted much positive attention. The providers involved liked the fact that this was a pilot project which they could input to and many could see the positive impact of this work, even in the initial stages.

“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)

The key success behind this work was the level of support and training that Wood Holmes provided to the learner role models, many of whom have now progressed into employment or further learning as result of the role models’ work.

Wood Holmes ensured that an independent evaluation for this work was completed and, unlike phase 1 of Wood Holmes work, it is clear that some of the providers will carry on by continuing to support their role models programme.

For the details of the main findings of the independent evaluation of the Role Models project please see the Appendix.

Recommendation: Further work should be done to establish who has carried on with or established Role Models programmes and to evaluate their impact. This recommendation could either be taken forward by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and/or the North East Equality and Diversity Partnership. The LSC North East Equality and Diversity Team should suggest this to relevant partners in the remaining time of the LSC.

Following the success of the Role Models programme the LSC commissioned further work from Wood Holmes to create and disseminate a Role Models Toolkit that could be used with other providers who were not involved in this pilot programme. In addition this toolkit can be used to support other Role Models/underrepresented groups apart from BME individuals.

To download the toolkit:

Internet Explorer users click this link: <http://tinyurl.com/lsc-role-models-toolkit-zipped> then save the zip file which contains the PowerPoint slideshow, extract and run.

Firefox or Chrome users click this link: <http://tinyurl.com/lsc-role-models-toolkit> then save file and run or click OK and go straight into the toolkit.

h Formation of a Task Group and Identification of Any Other Activity Which Supports the Aim of Enhancing Participation at level 2 and Above for BME Individuals

The BME Action Plan aimed to create a BME Task Group that would help to ensure the relevant activities were completed. This group was also to support the overall aim of aiding increased participation at level 2 and above, by helping to identify what other activities may help to achieve this goal. BME Task Group members were as follows:

- Stuart Linden – LSC (Lead)
- Hassan Kajee – LSC (Skills Team)
- BECON
- Equality North East
- Marketing (LSC)
- Janice Gerard - LSC (Partnership Team Representative Area North)
- Helen Crawford – LSC (Partnership Team Representative Area South)
- *UK-Online Centres*
- *learndirect*
- Wood Holmes Group

While this group was successful in helping to keep the BME work to plan it did not really offer any suggestions for what other work could be done to further achieve the goal of increasing participation and progression at level 2 and above. However, this group provided a lot of guidance to the BME Action Plan lead, which allowed for many of the successes of this work, and the members of this group have been thanked for their support.

At the start of the BME Action plan we also sponsored a BME Careers Fair organised by Tousensemble CIC, which took place in Fenham, Newcastle in August 2008; we gave our space at the event to *nexstep* providers who received a small number of leads. However, despite efforts and feedback by the LSC, this event was poorly organised with venue changed at the last minute. Feedback was given to the contact at Tousensemble who has not responded to date.

3. Budget and Finance Information

The total budget for the BME Action Plan was £97,637

Activity	Spend
BME marketing activity that linked into the Adult Skills Campaign	£20,000
<i>UK-Online</i> and <i>learndirect</i> BME and Progression Activity	£32,375
Sponsorship of BME Careers Fair 2008	£2,500
Wood Holmes BME Role Model Activity	£14,450
Wood Holmes Facilitated Session Activity	£13,870
Total for Wood Holmes' work with 5% discount as both areas were commissioned	£26,832
Wood Holmes' expenses, covering role model incentive and travel	£9,221
Contract VAT	£6,309.28
Total for Wood Holmes Contract	£42,362.28
Total Spend	97,637

4. Conclusion

Clearly there have been some lessons learned from the BME Action Plan work and this report has outlined what activities were completed as part of the action plan, and how this was achieved. What is not clear yet is what has been the bottom line impact on participation and progression of BME learners at level 2 and above.

This does not mean that this work will not have a positive impact on level 2 and 3 participation and success for BME learners, merely that it is too soon to see the overall impact. **As Learner Data for 2009-10 becomes available, an impact may become apparent and therefore it is recommended that any subsequent data review (as outlined in Recommendation A) looks carefully to see if there are any early signs of improvement.** The issue of BME progression is more long term and therefore it is unrealistic to expect to see immediate short term improvements for this learner group. However successes have been achieved from the BME Action plan, as can be seen from this report, and if current momentum and focus is maintained, this will continue to have a positive impact.

5. Recommendations

This section looks at the recommendations this report has made and tries to identify in more detail how these might be implemented. The recommendations are as follows:

- a While the EDIMs review 2009 was unable to identify a specific trend by ethnic group within learning provision, it is recommended that any future data review continues to explore participation and learner success by specific ethnic group, as a clear trend may present itself in the future.
 - This level of data review should be completed as part of any ethnicity data analysis which looks at BME participation and/or progression within learning.
 - Main stakeholders that would be carrying out or involved in such data analysis, include Learning Providers and Colleges, the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) the Young Peoples Learning Agency (YPLA) and Local Authorities.
 - This level of data analysis should be monitored at least annually

- b When working with partners via a contracting arrangement, it is good practice to ensure that all are happy with what is expected before signing the contract. It is also good practice to ensure that all delivery partners in such an arrangement communicate clearly with the contractor regarding problems with committing time to the project prior to final contract negotiation.

- c The providers involved in the BME facilitation event need to take forward some of the suggestions, particularly those that could be easier to implement, e.g. staff BME awareness training.
 - This could be part of their staff development, as many of the suggestions that were made as part of the facilitated sessions concerned providers having a good understanding of all of the community they serve, which makes good business sense.
 - Providers themselves could trial the suggestions from the BME facilitated sessions and then evaluate the impact of implementing these, one year after implementation.
 - Providers who trial any initiatives aimed at aiding participation and progression; this should be reviewed at least annually.

- d Providers need to ensure they promote and make best use of IAG services to ensure that this aids increased participation of BME individuals at level 2.
 - Providers can achieve this by making maximum use of partners and the IAG services
 - It should be remembered that the welfare of the individual is paramount
 - From early engagement with a BME learner there should be a clear emphasis on progression.

- e Providers should make the most of any available outreach activity that would allow them to work within BME communities. (see earlier *UK-Online* and *learnirect* section)
- Outreach activities can be part of enrichment as well as set enrolment activity, using every opportunity to promote the learning offer and explain how this will support the targeted individuals.
 - Providers and all provider representatives as part of outreach activity must effectively “sell” their learning offer.
- f The North East Equality and Diversity Partnership should continue to ensure that the recommendations within the ‘Closing the Ethnic Employment Gaps’ report are implemented where possible and practicable.
- This work is being taken forward by the Employment Skills and Enterprise Group and the Evidence Task Group which are both subgroups of the partnership. The LSC North East have representation on these groups
- g The LSC North East in its remaining time should implement the recommendations of the paper ‘Taking the IAG Recommendations from the Closing the Ethnic Employment Gaps Report Forward’. Where recommendations are longer term, the LSC should advise how either the SFA and/or partners can support this work.
- This work is being completed by the LSC North East Equality and Diversity Team, who is working closely with the regional Skills Team and IAG provision to ensure that this is addressed.
- h Connect FE (formally the North East Interfaith Forum) should evaluate the impact they are having on their current provider contacts regarding the faith agenda. In particular this research should establish whether increased faith provision by providers has had an impact on participation and progression.
- Connect FE should continually review the impact that their work is having on the providers they are working with, to ensure that they are meeting either the providers’ or individuals’ needs.
 - Providers who have been working with Connect FE and looking at their faith provision should also evaluate the impact and effectiveness of this. Any such review/check should be carried out bi annually as a minimum, as this gives time for any provision to embed.
- i Any organization developing or completing marketing/targeting campaigns the organization developing this work needs to ensure at the outset all partners have the capacity to deliver.
- This again is merely good practice and is something that may need to be communicated very clearly, especially when managing complex projects.
 - Ensure all involved parties buy into what a project is trying to do and are honest about their commitment and involvement.
 - Partners must inform the contractor/s of any issues so that these can be addressed speedily and do not damage the overall campaign.

- j Further work should be done to establish who has carried on with or established Role Models programmes and to evaluate their impact. This recommendation could either be taken forward by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and/or the North East Equality and Diversity Partnership. The LSC North East Equality and Diversity Team should suggest this to relevant partners in the time remaining to the LSC.
- This suggestion could be made in a broader context by suggesting further evaluations of Role Models programmes generally, and not just an evaluation of LSC's North East approach.
 - This suggestion would also allow for the inclusion of the National Apprenticeship Service's (NAS) work with Role Models via the Diversity in Apprenticeships Programme.

6. Appendix

Wood Holmes Commissioned, Evaluation of Wood Holmes Role Models Approach

The main findings of the evaluation of the Role Models programme were:

- **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. Wood Holmes 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.

- **Incentivisation**

Wood Holmes’ 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 enrolments by their mentees as a result of their efforts. The payments being based on focused effort rather than results, together with the regular coaching and mentoring from Wood Holmes and support from colleges, reinforced the role models’ sense that what they were doing was valued and worthwhile and sustained their motivation.

- **Impact on role models themselves**

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 own learning and careers. The role also offers them work experience of informal mentoring, marketing, networking, IT, etc. that can further their careers.

- **Role Model Training**

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, and the role models themselves were happy with the level of training and support they received across all topic areas.

- **Ability for Role Models to Network between Colleges**

Wood Holmes set up a peer networking group on the Facebook website, and encouraged role models to sign up. Eight of the eleven, some of whom had never used online social networking sites before, elected to do this.

- **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)

- **Programme Start Timings**

The timings of the programme suited some colleges well. College leads identified January as a good time to begin because learners are settled and staff are well-acquainted with them so are in a better position to select role models.

- **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.

- **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. Wood Holmes therefore encouraged role models to work primarily on progression of current learners at their college and to engage with local BME organisations and community groups in their work.

- **LSC's Pilot Approach**

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

The areas highlighted in the evaluation, which could improve for this programme further were as follows:

- **Role Models' Lack of Time**

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.

- **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 Wood Holmes. This made managing them very difficult and made it almost impossible to capture the outcomes and impact of their activity. It would be more appropriate to have a dedicated member of the college staff as a manager for the role models as they can regularly meet with them face to face.

- **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, 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.

- **Difficulty Matching BME Sub-groups to Role Models**

There is a school of thought emerging from Wood Holmes' 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 their participation and success.

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. 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 ESOL requirements.

- **Appropriateness of Role Model Networks Relative to College Catchment Area**

The role models are initially encouraged to work with individuals with whom they are already acquainted 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. Wood Holmes consulted the LSC on this and the conclusion was that this was feasible. Since the role model was, in effect, employed by Wood Holmes 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.

- **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 contribute to 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.

- **Succession and Sustainability**

Many role models are current learners at their host college and this presented a succession issue. Some will complete their courses this summer and will leave the college. Wood Holmes recommends that the programme is not simply open to current learners, but also to recent learners of the participating colleges. In addition, Wood Holmes has tried to develop a role model programme that is sustainable so that colleges will be able to adopt the model without further funding.

- **Achieving Few College Resource Contributions**

The programme was hard to sell to some colleges, making it necessary for Wood Holmes to give the impression that the programme would not have a large impact upon their 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)

- **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 Wood Holmes 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.

- **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.

- **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.

- **Limited BME Experience and Backgrounds of Role Models**

As a result of the difficulty in recruiting role models, some of those 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.

- **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. Wood Holmes set up an online peer networking group on Facebook for role models, but college leads were not included.

Due to the successes of this role models pilot the LSC North East E&D Team asked Wood Holmes to develop a role models toolkit which providers could use to develop their own role model programmes within their provision without additional funding. This work was completed outside the BME Action Plan work.

The role models toolkit is built on much of the support materials which Wood Holmes developed as part of the BME pilot role models programme. This work has now been extended to enable application to other underrepresented groups.

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