Barriers to the Employment of BME ex-offenders

A report for the ASCEND theme of IMPACT

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CONTENTS

SUMMARY

This report presents the findings on the barriers to the employment of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) ex-offenders. The research was commissioned by IMPACT and has been undertaken by the Criminal Justice Research Unit (CJRU) at The University of Manchester. The report includes findings from a review of the literature and from a recent employer consultation carried out by the CJRU, and makes a number of recommendations for interventions aimed at overcoming some of the identified barriers.

Findings

One of the most important findings to emerge from the available literature concerning the barriers to the employment of BME groups is that the majority of studies either concentrate on barriers to employment for BME groups or for ex-offenders but not specifically both.

The barriers facing ex-offenders and BME groups can broadly be placed in two categories: those associated with *employers'* attitudes and level of knowledge of relevant issues, and those associated with *employees'* personal skills and attributes. While some of the barrier types are common across BME groups and ex-offender groups, the extent and precise role of the barriers in the two groups of people may not be the same. As already mentioned above, since very few studies concentrated on BME ex-offenders, it is not easy to assess how exactly the barriers affect this particular population (see also further discussion below).
The main types of these barriers are summarised in Table 1. below:

Table 1: Summary of the types of barriers to the employment of ex-offenders and to the employment of people from Black and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds

	Barriers to the employment of ex-offenders	**Barriers to the employment of BME groups**
Employers: barriers related to knowledge and attitudes	Discrimination against ex-offenders (criminal record)	Direct and indirect discrimination (e.g. in the recruitment process
	The stage at which employers ask about previous convictions	Some employers seen as 'White employers'
	The hierarchy of offence types	
	Employer's lack of knowledge of the law on disclosure	
Employees: Barriers related to personal skills and attributes	Lack of qualifications	Lack of qualifications
	Lack of skills	Lack of skills
	Health issues including mental health	Health issues including mental health
	Accommodation issues	Accommodation issues
	Previous unemployment	Lack of work experience
	Gender issues	Gender issues
	Alcohol/ drug issues	Geographical concentration
	Low self-esteem	Cultural issues
		Religious issues

- It appears from the available research that employment history and offending are correlated, and that employment does have a positive role in desistance from crime. Therefore, employment should play a key part in the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders, and interventions aimed at improving the skills of offenders to increase their prospects of employment have an important role as well. Nevertheless, a significant lack of data still exists about offenders and employment. There is a gap in knowledge in relation to the effect of prison work on post-release employment prospects, even though prison work may be an important factor for providing offenders with the skills they need to gain employment.

- The literature stresses the importance employers give to criminal records which creates a set of difficulties for offenders in disclosing their records. Given the attitudes of many employers' towards criminal records, it is not surprising that they do not engage with offenders. However, those employers who have had experience of employing someone with a criminal record tend to view the experience in a positive light.

- In terms of the barriers to the employment of BME groups, firstly it has to be acknowledged that people from a BME background cannot be seen or treated as one homogenous group. The literature shows considerable disparities in the employment rate, the pay, the occupational attainment and the human capital of different ethnic groups. It tends to be Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black-Caribbean people who fare less well in these respects. There are also disparities between people by gender and geographical location. Generation is also important; second and subsequent generations of BME people may have different experiences and different issues than their first generation counterparts, whilst at the same time experiencing similar problems in relation to employment rates. Some employers are perceived by BME groups as being 'White' employers, that is employers who tend to employ predominantly White people. If this lack of diversity, or the perception of it within BME groups, is widespread, then this may have a significant effect on the employment rates of people from BME backgrounds.

- As suggested above, the literature in this area concentrates on either employment and offenders, or employment and BME groups. Therefore, we do not know with certainty how the different sets of barriers interact with each other. However, it has been suggested that BME ex-offenders may have more barriers in common with the ex-offender population. Furthermore, as certain similarities exist between the barrier types in ex-offenders and in BME groups (mostly in the area of personal skills and attributes), targeting barriers for ex-offenders should cover many of those barriers that may be faced by BME groups as well. However, BME ex-offenders can face additional barriers similar to those faced by people from a BME background, for example barriers arising from racial discrimination, which cannot be ignored either. The literature that considers those who have multiple disadvantages in terms of employment suggests that the effect of each disadvantage can be added together.

Recommendations

- Interventions targeting ex-offenders from a BME background should primarily be grounded in overcoming barriers to the employment of ex-offenders.
- Individually tailored intervention plans based on comprehensive assessments for ex-offenders from a BME background should be prepared.
- Assessments and subsequent interventions aimed at BME ex-offenders should be mindful of the fact that people from different BME backgrounds do not fall into one homogenous group.
- Structured assessments aimed at identifying the barriers to the employment of ex-offenders should contain an additional part with a range of questions which assess the existence of potential barriers specific to BME groups.
- Geographical, religious and cultural differences may need to be carefully considered in individual intervention plans.
- An assessment of the likely impact of the existence or lack of family and community support for the individual should also be considered.
- The needs of female BME ex-offenders and the barriers faced by them should also be specifically addressed both at the assessment and at the intervention stage.
- Any interventions that are developed should take into account the fact that first generation BME people may have different needs to those from second or further generations.
- More information about risk (e.g. different levels of risk, trigger situations), and the assessment of risk would be useful for employers.
- Information breaking down stereotypes, such as a perception of lack of motivation and trustworthiness when thinking about ex-offenders in general may also help in overcoming employer reluctance to view ex-offenders as potential employees.
- Employers also need to be liaised with to ensure that improvements to the skill and education levels of ex-offenders (both BME and non-BME) meet the needs of employers.
- Useful work experience for ex-offenders should be arranged during their time in prison as a way to help them engage and find positive employment when they are released.
- In conjunction with information about handling risk issues and the drawbacks of generalised perceptions, raising awareness of the advantages that result from having a diverse workforce and examples of the useful insights and experiences should be provided to employers.

INTRODUCTION

This report examines the barriers facing Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) ex-offenders in gaining employment. The research was commissioned by IMPACT and has been undertaken by the Criminal Justice Research Unit (CJRU) at The University of Manchester. The report includes findings from a review of the literature and from a recent employer consultation carried out by the CJRU, and makes a number of recommendations for interventions aimed at overcoming some of the identified barriers. In terms of IMPACT's work, an ex-offender is defined as someone who has been convicted of an offence and has served, or is still serving, a prison sentence for that offence.

It has been noted by Abdalla and Corrin (2005) that the use of the term 'barrier' has created a barrier in itself to the employment of people from a BME background. This is because the term is often referred to in a way that gives the impression that the barriers are not the responsibility of policy makers or employers, but are due to BME people's lack of skills and capabilities. Similarly, Hirst et al (2005) raised the idea that the blanket classification of 'multiple disadvantaged' may stigmatise those who have such characteristics.

This report consists of five main sections: barriers to employment for ex-offenders; barriers to employment for BME groups; barriers to employment for BME ex-offenders; potential barriers identified by employers; and conclusions and recommendations.

The first section considers barriers to the employment of offenders and the second section, barriers to the employment of BME groups. The review of the literature indicates that the existing body of research tends to focus on one or the other topic. Whilst it is possible to list barriers that apply to all or most ex-offenders, and the barriers that are likely to be additional for those from BME groups, substantial new research would be needed to investigate the two types of barriers in their interaction, and to ascertain the extent to which the barriers affect various sub-groups of BME ex-offenders.

The third section will consider the findings from the relatively small body of research focusing on certain groups of BME ex-offenders. In addition, some issues concerning those who face multiple disadvantages in terms of employment will also be discussed.

The fourth section of the report will discuss relevant findings from an employer consultation recently carried out by The University of Manchester in partnership with IMPACT on attitudes of employers to employing ex-offenders in general and that of various sub-groups, including BME ex-offenders. This is intended to further illuminate some of the barriers as seen from the employers' perspective. In the final section of the report conclusions will be drawn and the authors will make some recommendations on how some of the barriers identified may be overcome.

1. BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR EX-OFFENDERS

1.1 Background: employment and ex-offenders

Although the data on unemployment levels for offenders and ex-offenders is generally limited, and tends to be only available for 'captive' groups such as those in custody or under probation supervision (Rolfe, 2001), it is clear that the unemployment rate is substantially higher in these captive groups than in the general population (Mair and May, 1997; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; Niven and Olagundoye, 2002). The most recent statistics are from a Government Green Paper, 'Reducing re-offending through skills and employment' which estimate that 67% of offenders are unemployed compared with 5% of the general population (Home Office, Department for education and skills (DFES) and Department for work and pensions (DWP), 2005). Research findings vary as to the extent of the difference in employment levels between offenders and the general population; however this may be because of changes in the buoyancy of the labour market over time (Niven and Olagundoye, 2002). Rolfe (2001) also argues that figures on unemployment amongst prisoners and ex-prisoners may overstate the level of unemployment in the general offender population because those who were sentenced to prison may have lost their job as a result of being detained.

Variations in the employment level between different ethnicities of ex-offender exist. Calverley et al (2004) found that Black probationers were most likely to be unemployed (15 per cent), followed by mixed race (12.5 per cent), Asians (9.5 per cent) and then White probationers (5.5 per cent). Niven and Olagundoye (2002) found that Asian prisoners were the most likely and those of mixed ethnicity were the least likely to have employment or training arranged for release. Women prisoners were also found to be less likely to have employment arranged for their release.

Fletcher et al (1998) estimate that one-third of the working population are ex-offenders. Rolfe (2001) highlights the fact that by age 30 one third of men have been convicted of a recordable offence and therefore argues that offending cannot be a strong bar to employment. As the data on employment levels does not distinguish between sections of the offender and ex-offender population according to the type of punishment received, (e.g. ex-prisoners and those who received a fine), it could be that it is the sentence passed, especially a custodial sentence, which is an important factor in whether ex-offenders gain employment. However, there are a number of factors which impact on what sentence is passed, such as the offence type and seriousness of the offence, and it could be these that act as a barrier rather than the sentence by, for example, impacting on employer attitudes (this will be discussed in detail later). Therefore the specific barriers faced by those who have served a prison sentence are unknown. The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) (2004) however, acknowledge that serving a prison sentence increases the risk of social exclusion on release.

A body of literature has considered whether employment helps to reduce recidivism. It seems to suggest that there is a link between employment and reduced re-offending both at the general level and the individual level (Farrington et al, 1986; Uggen, 1999; May, 1999). Haslewood-Pocsik et al (2004) found that a more extensive criminal history and higher risk of reconvictions (as calculated by OGRS2 scores) had a strong *inverse* correlation with the length of last and longest jobs, and the number of

different types of past jobs. May (1999) found that in all the geographical areas of the research employment was significantly related to reconviction, for example, in Cheshire 52 per cent of those who had no problem with employment were reconvicted compared with 68 per cent of those with a problem.

Rolfe (2001) notes that "despite the shortage of reliable data, there is widespread belief that employment can play a role in rehabilitation" (2001: 245). In an attempt to provide an explanation as to why this may be so, Lakey et al (2001) argue that employment can be a key factor in helping offenders to change their behaviour "because it provides a different set of values and social contacts as well as an alternative source of income" (2001: 10). Rolfe (2001), on the other hand, highlights the notion that those offenders who get jobs may have been those who were less likely to re-offend anyway.

Uggen (1999) argues that the relationship between unemployment and recidivism is complex and that high quality jobs, apart from sales work, show the lowest proportion of recidivists. This is supported by Sampson and Laub (1997). Other studies stress the importance of a combination of factors in reducing recidivism, such as accommodation, health problems, drug and alcohol misuse, family relationships, finances and age (Mair and May, 1997; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002*;* Haines, 2005*).* Significantly, these factors are also raised as being barriers to offenders finding employment (Rolfe, 2001; Haines, 2005).

Research by Sarno et al (2001) shows the effects of probation employment schemes on re-offending. Offenders who participated were positive about the programmes especially as they were tailored to their individual needs and there was a slight reduction in re-offending compared with those who did not attend the programme.

1.2 Barriers associated with Employer attitudes

1.2.1 Disclosure of previous criminal convictions

The main rules governing the disclosure of previous criminal convictions are contained in the amended Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (ROA) 1974. In summary, the legislation sets out periods after which an individual's previous criminal convictions become 'spent' and he/she thus does not have to disclose them to most employers. Prior to a conviction becoming 'spent', an employer can request details of the conviction and take disciplinary action against the individual if the individual fails to disclose an unspent conviction. The Police Act 1997 enables employers to seek disclosures from the Criminal Records Bureau as to any convictions an employee or potential employee may have.

However, it seems that many employers are unaware of the legal provisions (Rolfe, 2001). One study found that just over half of employers knew about the provisions regarding 'spent' convictions and only 27% knew about the proposed criminal records checks (Buffery, 1998). Brown et al (2006) found that many companies, especially those without a dedicated human resources department, were unfamiliar with the ROA 1974. Fletcher et al (2001) concluded that basic disclosure from the Criminal Records Bureau will heighten discrimination against offenders in the labour market because some employers took spent convictions into account and some sought information on offences regardless of their relevance to the post (Fletcher et al, 2001).

Rolfe (2001) states that the stage at which employers ask about past convictions is an under-researched area. However, it is important because research has found that employers are more likely to consider the information on the criminal record more fully, and they are also more likely to weigh the criminal record against other considerations if a person is asked at the interview stage. On the other hand, a person is more likely to be rejected if they are asked at the written application stage (Metcalfe et al, 2001).

Other research points to the importance of how employers respond to the discovery of concealed unspent convictions (Fletcher et al, 2001). In 42% of such cases employers interpreted this as an indicator of a lack of honesty. However, more employers considered the reasons for non disclosure and took the individual's good employment records into account and decided to take no action (50%). Research carried out by the CIPD (2002) support this: it found that 83% of employers would consider the individual situation in a case were an employee has not been truthful about his/her criminal record.

A TUC (2001) report suggests that many ex-offenders do not disclose their criminal record when they apply for a job because of the worry that employers discriminate against people with a criminal record. This is supported by other research that found that many offenders expect potential employers to react negatively to their record (Metcalfe et al, 2001; Lakey et al, 2001; Brown et al, 2005). NACRO (1998) suggested that it may be best if employers did not know about past convictions because if a person can prove that they are trustworthy and good at their job and it later transpired that they had a past conviction it would probably make no difference.

Home Office, DFES and DWP (2005) suggest that guaranteed job interviews for offenders may be a possible way forward to motivate offenders to apply for jobs. However, Fletcher et al (2001) found that employers felt offenders should not be covered by Equal Opportunity policies because they were undeserving of this; offending was deemed to be a choice. Fletcher et al (1998) also argued that initiatives to reduce the unemployment of ex-offenders need to be multi-faceted and they stress how encouraging employers to consider recruiting ex-offenders on individual merits may be an important component of all strategies.

Recent research into the willingness of employers to employ offenders has shown them to be fairly positive about this (Conalty and Cox, 1999). The CIPD (2002) found that 42% of organisations would consider somebody with a criminal record. This varied depending on the size and industry type. Research conducted in America has found that employers tended to be on the whole negative about employing offenders, but became more positive if the offenders had increased their level of education while incarcerated (Albright and Denq, 1996). It seems that those recruiting to posts involving contact with the public were less likely to recruit offenders. Small employers and those with recruitment difficulties were more likely to consider recruiting ex-offenders (Fletcher et al, 2001). Few employers have experience of knowingly employing an offender. Of those that have, research has found that the experience was generally positive (CIPD, 2002; Brown et al, 2006).

1.2.2 Offence Type

It is clear from the literature that employers are less likely to employ people who have committed certain offences. The CIPD (2002) found that 57 per cent of employers felt that when it comes to employing people with a criminal record it depends on the nature of the crime. According to Rolfe (2001), one of the most striking findings to emerge from the literature was the hierarchy of offences. Studies have found that employers are more understanding towards perpetrators of civil, traffic and alcohol offences, whereas sex offenders and violent offenders were the least likely to be considered for employment (APEX, 1991; Conalty and Cox, 1999; Brown et al, 2005).

The type of offence appears to have more influence on employers' attitudes than the severity of the offence (APEX, 1991) and that employers' attitudes are determined by their own moral code (Conalty and Cox, 1999). Brown et al (2005) found that other reasons for not wanting to employ certain types of offenders were: the perceived risk to staff and customers, a negative reaction by staff and possible negative publicity.

1.2.3 Informal recruitment

Fletcher et al (2001) found that recruitment procedures often disadvantage offenders because informal recruitment channels are often used to fill low paid and low skilled jobs. However, this method is closed to some offenders as it relies on personal recommendations and contact with those in employment which offenders may not have.

1.3 Ex-offender characteristics that reduce employability

Many authors have highlighted characteristics common in offenders that reduce employability (Mair and May, 1997; Fletcher et al, 1998; Rolfe, 2001; Home Office, DFES and DWP, 2005). These common characteristics include previous unemployment, early school leaving age/ exclusion, high levels of truancy, having no qualifications, having alcohol and drug problems, low self-esteem, having health problems, including mental health problems and accommodation problems. Prison Statistics show that prisoners have low levels of literacy: 27 per cent of prisoners have a reading level below that of an eleven year old and 39 per cent have a writing level below this level (Rolfe, 2001). Over half of prisoners have no qualifications at all and 49 per cent of prisoners were excluded from school, compared with 15 per cent and 1 per cent of the general population, respectively (Home Office, DFES and DWP, 2005). The misuse of drug and alcohol among those under probation supervision is estimated at 45 per cent (Rolfe, 2001).

Haslewood-Pocsik et al (2004) reported that most offenders not in employment interviewed for a survey (92 per cent) said they possessed some employment-related skills, but for about a fifth of them the reported skills were so-called 'soft' skills (e.g. social skills). Just over one-third had some level of qualification related to their employment-related skill.

NACRO (1998) noted that the employment focus of offenders in the past was often towards unskilled occupations concentrated in sections of the labour market that are probably shrinking. In the recent Government Green Paper (Home Office, DFES and DWP, 2005) the Government sets out how through improved skills and employment

for offenders they aim to reduce re-offending. Also, any interventions aimed at improving offenders' skills has to meet the demands of the employers.

Despite this, studies have shown that offenders can have a strong work ethic which should increase employability. Lakey et al (2001) assert that young people often had a strong work ethic. Brown et al (2005) support this, as their research found that all the adult sex offenders interviewed expressed a willingness to work. Most offenders interviewed by Haslewood-Pócsik et al (2004) also expressed a willingness to work. However, it was also found that interviewees tended to differ in how far they could plan ahead, and how firm their plans were. About a fifth of the sample said they would consider taking any job in the short term.

1.4 Female ex-offenders

Female ex-offenders can potentially face additional barriers to those faced by male ex-offenders. Hamlyn and Lewis (2000) argue that female offenders are more likely than their male counterparts, and the female population in general, to have limited work experience and to have dependent children. Therefore they may have specific needs in relation to finding work. On release women are very likely to face personal problems such as accommodation, family, and financial isues, as well as depression and drug problems. It was found that drug use for female offenders was often exacerbated by being inside prison (Hamlyn and Lewis (2000). Women interviewed in this study felt that there was a need for support in re-adjusting post release before they could begin to find employment. Hamlyn and Lewis (2000) followed up the females they interviewed and found that contrary to their expectations, few women had managed to secure employment on release, and the reason for not securing employment was commonly the fact that they had a prison record.

1.5 The link between prison work and employment post release

McGregor (2005) argues that the treatment of people in custody is linked with how they will react to services and authority in the community, especially in terms of employment. This notion is generally supported by Calverley et al (2004) who confirms that negative experiences within the Criminal Justice System can affect perceptions of the legitimacy of the system and this in turn can affect motivation and compliance.

Robins (2006) highlighted the impact of positive employment whilst in prison on finding employment upon release. Robins (2006) discussed a pilot study of prisoners being paid the minimum wage for their work whilst in prison, the idea being that low wages (the average prison wage currently stands at £7-£12 per week) give prisoners the impression that they will never earn much, and that crime pays better. Smartt and Vagg (2004) support this notion of ‘rewards’ and suggest the current system in prisons needs to be rethought. The argument is also put forward that if prisoners are paid more they should also have to contribute to their living costs to teach them about responsibilities (Robins, 2006). Despite this, Smartt and Vagg (2004) point out that there has been a lack of research into the impact of, or possibilities inherent in, prison work.

Smartt and Vagg (2004) also discuss basic principles that would support the development of a good prison work programme. They assert that the nature of the work has to be depicted as positive and normalising, but at the same time prisoners

should be aware of the fact that a great deal of work outside of prison is basic and tedious. Brown et al (2005) found that the sex offenders in their study accepted that they would probably work in low status employment. Authors also point to the importance of co-ordinating employment into other parts of the regime such as education and training so that all the needs of the prisoner are met (Webster et al, 2001; Smartt and Vagg, 2004). Currently, it seems that female prisoners do not feel that the work they do whilst inside will help them find employment on release, mainly because prisoners are not interested in the type of work they do in prison and because it is seen as too menial (Hamlyn and Lewis, 2000).

There are of course practical issues when it comes to offering employment in prisons with the growth of the prison population leading to fewer opportunities for employment being available. It has also been suggested that overcrowding has led to neglect in developing prison industries (Smartt and Vagg, 2004). Webster et al (2001) point out that prisons being short-staffed means that prisoners may miss employment programmes because keeping the prison running and security considerations are given priority.

2. BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC GROUPS

In 2001, 7.9 per cent of the general population in the UK were from BME groups (4 per cent were Asian, 2 per cent Black and 0.8 per cent Chinese or other) (Census, 2001). The age structure of the ethnic minority groups is comparatively young (Strategy Unit, 2003). This has resulted in a steadily growing ethnic minority population, which means that during the next ten years ethnic minorities are projected to account for over half the growth in Britain's working age population (Strategy Unit, 2002). However, Berthoud (2003) identified ethnic group as a characteristic associated with non-employment, although he acknowledges that there is disparity between ethnic groups and it is only some groups that remain disadvantaged.

2.1 The labour market achievement of Black and Minority Ethnic groups

The Strategy Unit (2003) suggested that ethnic minorities' labour market achievements can be measured using four key indicators: employment/ unemployment rates; earning levels; occupational attainment/ progression in the workplace; and levels of self-employment.

In 1995/ 96 the *unemployment rate* for White people was 8 per cent and for BME groups the rate was 18 per cent (CRE, 1997). In 2000 the *employment rate* for ethnic minority groups was 58 per cent compared to 75 per cent for the population overall (Strategy Unit, 2003). This shows that over time there has consistently been a gap between the employment rates of Britain's BME groups and Britain's White population. However, as we can see below unemployment rates vary between different ethnic groups.

Table 2: Unemployment rate of men in Britain by ethnic group

Ethnic Group	% men Unemployed 1992	% men Unemployed 2000
White	**11**	**6**
Chinese	**7**	**5**
Indian	**14**	**7**
Pakistani	**25**	**15**
Bangladeshi	**27**	**17**
Black Caribbean	**29**	**20**

(Data taken from Strategy Unit, 2003)

The above figures show that although over time the unemployment rates for all groups have fallen, the disparities between different ethnic groups still remain. Heath and Yu (2005) point out that changes in the buoyancy of the labour market affect BME people as much as White people, a notion which the above data supports.

Unemployment also tends to be more long term for certain ethnic groups; 38 per cent of Bangladeshi and Pakistani people are unemployed for 36 months or longer compared with 10 per cent of White people (Cuneo, 2001). This is especially noteworthy when it is considered that legislation aiming to increase efforts to secure fair treatment for BMEs has been introduced since 1968 and therefore it may be expected that this would lead to improved fortunes for all BME groups in Britain (Heath and Yu, 2005).

There are also *disparities in earnings* between BME and White people. Bangladeshi and Pakistani men have the lowest earnings (CRE, 1997; Strategy Unit, 2003). In 2000 the average net weekly pay for Pakistani men was £145 compared with £300 for White men. At the other end of the scale, Indian men in 2000 earned 3 per cent more than White people did (Strategy Unit, 2003).

Although over time there have been increases among all ethnic groups in terms of *occupational attainment and progression* it is Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black Caribbean men that are least likely to be in professional or managerial posts (Strategy Unit, 2002). In 2000 the figures were 16, 13 and 13 per cent, respectively, compared to 26 per cent of White men (Strategy Unit, 2002).

Self-employment rates tend to be high among ethnic minorities (CRE, 1997; Strategy Unit, 2003; Social Trends, 2003). For example, 22 per cent of Pakistani people in employment were self-employed in 2001/ 02 compared to 11 per cent of White people (Social Trends, 2003).

Heath and Yu (2005) suggest that ethnic entrepreneurship using 'bonding' social capital (where members of an ethnic group link with each other) is key to self-employment. It is Pakistani and Bangladeshi people who tend to be geographically concentrated minorities and therefore gain entrepreneurial advantages within their ethnic group. The Strategy Unit (2003) explained this in terms of pull and push factors. The former encompasses ideas such as cultural disposition, whereas the latter includes factors such as the anticipation of and possible experience of discrimination in employment. Cuneo (2001) believes that Pakistani people are more likely to be pushed into self-employment following low wages and discrimination and are therefore less successful than those who are pulled into self-employment.

2.2 Differences between black and minority ethnic groups and the labour market

It is clear from the previous section that BME groups cannot be viewed as a homogenous group when it comes to labour market achievement, Berthoud (2003) said that "it is clear that 'ethnic minority' is not appropriate as an all-embracing category in labour market analysis" (19). Whereas certain ethnic groups are narrowing the gap with White people, others are not. However, it seems that overall people from certain ethnicities are less likely to be in employment than their White counterparts, and those that are, tend to earn less and fewer are in managerial posts. It tends to be Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean people who constantly fare the worst.

2.2.1 Differences according to gender

Abdalla and Corrin (2005) acknowledge that BME women face gender issues as well as race equality issues in terms of gaining employment. When BME women are compared with White women the differences in employment rates are vastly different. Seventy per cent of working age White women were employed in 2000, compared with 65 per cent of Black Caribbean, 50 per cent of Black African, 60 per cent of Indian and just 26 and 20 per cent of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, respectively (Strategy Unit, 2003). In terms of progression however, certain groups of women have experienced more rapid progress than others: 29 per cent of working Chinese women were in professional/ managerial jobs in 2000 as opposed to 16 per cent of Indian, 15 per cent of White, 13 per cent of Black Caribbean, 9 per cent of Pakistani

and 8 per cent of Black-African working women (Heath, 2001). Black Caribbean women have consistently been close to White women in terms of occupational attainment, the reason for this being the deliberate attempt during the 1950s of Black nurses into the NHS (Heath, 2001; Strategy Unit, 2002).

Abdalla and Corrin (2005) found that there were five key reasons that inhibited the employment of BME women. The first factor was language needs and skills, and the second a lack of UK experience, UK training and UK qualifications. This latter reason was seen by the authors as a hidden barrier used to justify acts of inequality. The third factor identified was inequality and institutional barriers including racism, the fourth a lack of awareness of where to access employment services, and a lack of confidence and proper steer, and finally gender issues, including childcare problems.

The Strategy Unit (2002) stresses that cultural factors as a means of explaining a difference in employment rates are of particular consideration in the case of Asian women. Services that provide training or career guidance find it difficult to reach Asian women for reasons such as they often have to ask permission from their families to access such services.

2.2.2 Differences between generations

Heath and Yu (2005) compared the experience between first generation and second generation BME people in Britain. Second generation BMEs have substantially caught up with British-born Whites in terms of education and in some cases overtaken them, and nearly all second generation BME people are fluent in the English language. However, it was found by Heath and Yu that in terms of employment rates, gaps still remain between BME and White people in the second generation. Heath and Yu argue that once the acquisition of human capital has been taken into account, it seems that the gap between BMEs and Whites have in some sense got worse, and racial discrimination has to be considered as an explanation (this will be discussed later in more detail).

Heath and Yu (2005) also note that when it comes to those working in secure/ privileged positions, the situation may be different. For example Indian people in these positions in the second generation have overtaken British-born Whites and reversed the gap, and other ethnic groups have also closed the gap with White people.

The Strategy Unit (2003) support the idea that second-generation BME groups are faring somewhat better than the first-generation in terms of access to professional and managerial work and earnings. However, when it comes to employment levels, the gap remains between BMEs and Whites. This notion is supported by Cuneo (2001) who suggests this means that the current patterns of employment rate differences between BME groups and Whites are likely to continue over the next 20 years.

2.2.3 Differences according to type of employment

The Strategy Unit (2002) explained differences in career progression in terms of the industries certain ethnic groups tend to work in. For instance, a relatively large proportion of Bangladeshi men tend to work in the restaurant industry (one third are cooks/ waiters) and many Pakistani men tend to work as a taxi driver or chauffeur (one in eight). In both of these industries there is little opportunity for progression.

On the other hand, a high percentage of Indian men (5%) work in the medical profession where there are opportunities for progression.

2.2.4 Differences according to geography

Ethnic minorities are concentrated in certain areas of Great Britain. The Strategy Unit (2003) state that just under half of all ethnic minorities live in London, 13.6 per cent live in the West Midlands, 7.6 per cent in Yorkshire and Humberside, and 6.8 per cent live in the North West and Merseyside. However, there are differences between different ethnic groups with the Black population being relatively concentrated in London while the Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups are more widely dispersed (Strategy Unit, 2003). This is supported by the National Employment Panel (2005) who in their recommendations for the 2005 budget suggested that resources and efforts be concentrated in the five cities where the majority of BME people live. This was one of ten recommendations made by the National Employment Panel (2005). Other recommendations included ensuring that the public sector becomes a role model of best practice in promoting race equality and diversity in the workplace, and having strong involvement from employers which in turn should ensure the skill and employment requirements of such employers can be met by BME people.

There are regional disparities when it comes to the gap between the employment rates of BME and White people depending on how prosperous an area is (CRE, 2005). The gap is just 10% in prosperous areas such as the South East and South West, and 20% in less prosperous Northern areas.

As BME groups tend to be concentrated in the most deprived areas of the country (Strategy Unit, 2002) in such areas there are more likely to be poor public services, including employment services. This may help explain why Government outreach programmes reach disproportionately fewer ethnic minorities than White people (Strategy Unit, 2002). It is also more likely that such areas are more likely to have poor childcare services (Strategy Unit, 2002) and therefore this may prevent certain BME people from being able to go out and work.

People from certain BME groups also tend to be more likely to live in unfit dwellings. The Strategy Unit (2003) report that over three times more people of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin live in unfit housing compared to their White and Indian counterparts.

Another factor concerning where BME groups live is that they may face more barriers to physical mobility than Whites, as they tend to rely more on public transport and are therefore geographically limited as to where they can seek jobs (Strategy Unit, 2003). This reflects the fact that most BMEs tend to live in inner city urban areas. However, the Strategy Unit (2003) points out that these areas are not as attractive to businesses, and so the economic shift into peripheral areas has acted against BME groups.

2.2.5 Differences according to religion

Cuneo (2001) and the Strategy Unit (2003) both suggest that religion is a significant means of analysing the gaps in employment levels between certain groups. Cuneo (2001) discussed this in relation to the South Asian population and showed that the differences in their economic performance are only partially captured by conventional ethnic groupings, and that religious groupings may influence the relative disadvantage of minority groups. The Strategy Unit (2002) provides data to show that being

unemployed varies significantly by religion: Sikhs and Indian Muslims are twice as likely to be unemployed and Pakistani Muslims three times more likely to be unemployed than Hindus.

2.3 How an employer is seen by BME groups

It appears that certain employers are perceived as 'White employers', while others are seen as 'BME employers' by BME people looking for work. The Strategy Unit's findings (2003) support this notion. This pattern can also be reversed as certain employers and industries see themselves as employers of White people and "have come to view ethnic minorities as being outside their recruitment pool" (Strategy Unit, 2003: 38). This has led to concentrations of certain ethnicities in certain types of employment.

Asda was until recently seen as a White employer by BME groups which acted as a barrier, because BME groups tend to distrust such employers (Basu, 2001). This was overcome by Asda when they opened a store in Hulme (Manchester) and worked closely with community groups and the CRE. They now have a national policy to recruit locally and reflect the local population. An advantage to employers of employing a diverse staff is that this can attract a more diverse customer base which in turn may increase profits (Basu, 2001).

Basu (2001) argues that if companies want to be successful in attracting more BME staff then the message has to be seen as coming from the top. Other methods that seemed to be successful in showing that a company is not a 'White' employer is to have multi-cultural staff in the recruitment brochure and having senior BME staff as role models (Basu, 2001).

2.4 Characteristics that may reduce employability

2.4.1 Human capital

The characteristics that tend to reduce employability are known as supply side characteristics. These are often human capital factors[1] such as levels of skills, knowledge, experience and education and they affect the quantity and quality of ethnic minority labour available in the job market (Strategy Unit, 2002).

Education is seen by the Strategy Unit (2002) as the primary component of human capital. There are clear variations not only between generations but also between ethnic groups in terms of educational achievement. Cuneo (2001) showed that compared with 1992, Indian and Chinese students were doing better at GCSE level in 2000, and had overtaken their White counterparts. Pakistani and Bangladeshi students were also doing better, but the gap between them and Whites has widened (Cuneo, 2001). The Strategy Unit (2002) reinforced the finding that it is Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black children who are less likely to achieve 5 or more GCSE grade A*-C. Participation in higher education was also considerably higher in 2000, particularly among non-Whites: 28 per cent carried on with their education compared

[1] Human capital in the employment sphere can be defined as those factors than impact on a person's ability to be able to do a job. Human capital may be made up of: core skills, such as literacy and numeracy; work related skills, such as vocational qualifications; and personal skills, such as the ability to form work based relationships or work as part of a team.

with 15 per cent of Whites (Cuneo, 2001). Again, there are variations between groups: Black Caribbeans are less likely, and Chinese people are more likely to stay on in education post 16.

Despite certain BME groups' apparent success in education, the Strategy Unit (2002) concludes that BMEs have disproportionately low skill levels in fields which are important for career progression. For example, only 28 per cent of Bangladeshis and 39 per cent of Pakistanis are qualified to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3 or above, or its equivalent, compared to more than 50 per cent of Whites (Strategy Unit, 2002).

One element that was seen as impacting on *first generation* BMEs was the fact that when people came to Britain their work experience was based in their country of origin (Heath and Yu 2005). Similarly, non-UK qualifications were not as valued by employers as British qualifications (Strategy Unit, 2002). Fluency in the English language is another important factor, as those who are fluent have on average wages about 20 per cent higher than those who are not (Strategy Unit, 2003).

2.4.2 Health including mental health

Poor health is a barrier to work and it seems that people from Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities are one and a half times more likely to suffer physical ill-health, and Caribbean people are three times more likely (Strategy Unit, 2003). This again may be linked to people from a BME background being over represented in deprived areas where healthcare services are poorer (Strategy Unit, 2002). Certain BME groups are more likely to suffer from mental health problems. The Strategy Unit (2002) states that African Caribbean men are more likely to be schizophrenic than White men, and that there are high rates of attempted suicide among young Asian women.

2.4.3 Drug and alcohol misuse

A self-report study by Sharp and Budd (2005) investigated illegal drug using the classification of the drug, across the whole population. This study reported that after controlling for the difference in age structure between ethnic groups, white respondents self-reported a higher than average rate for any drug use in the last year, with Asian and Other respondents being below the average and the rate for Mixed and Black respondents being no different from the average. The findings were the same for Class A drugs, the only exception being that Black respondents also fell below the average. These findings tend to be supported by Calverley et al (2004) who investigated crime-prone characteristics among those under probation supervision and found that drug and alcohol misuse was higher among white offenders than Black, Asian or Mixed heritage offenders.

2.4.4 The importance of class

Aspects of the notion of class are explored by Heath and Yu (2005) when discussing the impact of associating with those from the same ethnicity on human capital; this is the idea that people are not only influenced by their own characteristics but that of their peers. Black Caribbeans tend to have more social interactions with White British groups than other ethnic groups do; therefore the authors conclude that it may not be the co-ethnic human capital that is important but that of the White working class in which they are embedded.

2.4.5 Discrimination in the workplace

The National Employment Panel (2005) concluded that discrimination, both overt and indirect represent a major barrier to employment for BME and faith groups. As discussed before, Heath and Yu (2005) also asserted that discrimination is likely to be a major component of the remaining disparities that persist after taking account of measurable personal factors that BMEs face.

No systematic research evidence is available as yet on discrimination and Berthoud (2003) claims that discrimination is not easily demonstrated. Therefore the term 'ethnic penalty' has been used by authors (Heath and Yu, 2005; Berthoud, 2003) referring to all the sources of disadvantage that ethnic minorities face in the labour market. Heath and Yu (2005) describe this term as "a broader concept than discrimination, although discrimination is likely to be a major component of it" (7).

Nevertheless, The Strategy Unit (2002) claimed that there were several types of evidence that could be put forward that established the existence, extent and nature of racial harassment and racial discrimination in the workplace. According to the Strategy Unit, unemployment rates, pay differences and a lack of BME progression reflect discrimination in the labour market. They go on to cite discrimination tests which have shown that discrimination does occur when deciding which applicant to give posts to (Strategy Unit, 2002). However, these tests involved a fairly small sample, so they alone do not prove that discrimination is widespread in the labour market.

Heath and Yu (2005) identified field experiments that have shown employer discrimination, and argued that the validity of these is high, as they are based on applications made to real employers for real job vacancies. These field experiments found discrimination against Black Caribbean and Indian job applicants.

Employment tribunals can also help to provide evidence of discrimination during employment. The most recent figures available through the CRE (1997) are from 1994/ 95, during which there were 72 successful cases of racial discrimination and 325 cases were settled out of court.

Heath and Yu (2005) also considered self-report surveys and answers to the question, 'Have you personally ever been refused a job for reasons of race or colour'. It seems that Black Caribbeans are more likely to self-report discrimination than Asians, whereas field experiments show that Asians experience just as much discriminations as Black Caribbeans. Between 1974 and 1994 there has been an upward trend in the proportion saying they had ever been refused a job because of their race or colour, across all ethnic minorities (Heath and Yu, 2005).

Heath and Yu (2005) discussed reports by British-born Whites about their own level of prejudice. They found that there was more prejudice among managers and employers in small businesses than among professionals and employers in large organisations.

Some authors have acknowledged that there may be indirect discrimination in the recruitment stage with the use of psychometric tests disadvantaging certain ethnic

groups (Basu, 2001; Strategy Unit, 2002). The Strategy Unit (2002) describes how preference given to experience over qualifications at the recruitment stage can exclude ethnic minorities who are less likely to have the social networks around them that are often utilised to get work experience.

Black and Minority Ethnic prisoners interviewed in the McGregor study were suspicious about the use of ethnic monitoring forms alongside job application forms, as they felt they would be used to "screen them out rather than to ensure services were operating impartially". (2005: 24). Therefore, there was a perception that there would be discrimination in the recruitment process.

2.4.6 Informal recruitment and the shadow economy

Heath and Yu (2005) believed that it is possible that there are higher levels of discrimination when informal methods of recruitment are used. The Strategy Unit (2002) also asserts that recruiting through informal processes can disadvantage BME groups who may not have the social networks to be made aware of such jobs. Authors have referred to this link between members of a group to society as 'bridging' capital' (Heath and Yu, 2005). It is Black Caribbeans that are more likely to be competing for manual jobs where informal methods of recruitment are more prevalent (Heath and Yu, 2005).

There is also a lack of protection against racial discrimination in the shadow economy by the very nature of it. This maybe why Black Caribbeans are more likely to self-report discrimination in the workplace when asked in research studies.

3. BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC EX-OFFENDERS

3.1 Research on BME ex-offenders and barriers to employment

As pointed out earlier, employment, training and education-related studies focusing on BME ex-offenders are few and far between. However, a few notable points from the available literature are discussed below.

Calverley et al (2005) have pointed to the drawback of using general BME studies when considering BME offenders. This is because BME offenders may face a substantially higher level of social disadvantage than BMEs in general. This level of social disadvantage may be similar to or higher than that experienced by White ex-offenders, as "Black, Asian, mixed heritage and White probationers all show substantial evidence of disadvantage" (Calverley et al 2005:58).

It also has to be acknowledged that BME groups are over-represented at every stage of the Criminal Justice System from stop and search to arrests to prison. In 2003 among the British male prison population 11.6% were Black, 2.7 per cent were Asian and 2.7% were Chinese or other. Within the female estate 13.3 per cent of British females in prison were Black, 0.6% were Asian and 3 per cent were Chinese or other (Home Office, 2004). These figures show that the proportions in prison significantly exceed the proportion of such groups in the general population. Therefore, a higher proportion of people from a BME background face being an ex-offender as a barrier to employment.

However, Haslewood-Pocsik et al (2004) found in their survey of ex-offenders under probation supervision who were not in employment that the proportion of non-White offenders who gained employment in the three-month follow up period of the study was 39 per cent compared with 23 per cent among the Whites. The largest proportion of ex-offenders in the non-White group were of Asian origin. As the size of the BME sample was small, the difference was not statistically significant. However, this finding underlines the need for caution when developing working methods with BME groups of ex-offenders based on certain assumptions of likely labour market performance.

The link between employment whilst in prison and gaining employment on release (as mentioned above) was found to be especially true when it came to BME ex-offenders as concerns were expressed among BME prisoners around favouritism and racism in the allocation of prison jobs, which could therefore affect them negatively upon release (McGregor, 2005). There appears to be a history of unfair treatment in the allocation of work in prisons. A study by Genders and Player (1989) found that 71 per cent of White inmates reported that they had exercised some choice over their job compared with 56 per cent of Black and 31 per cent of Asian inmates. Genders and Player (1989) also found an over-representation of minority ethnic inmates in 'unpopular' jobs, for example workshops and cleaning. In contrast, there was an under representation or no representation of ethnic minorities in 'popular' jobs, such as orderly tasks and kitchen work. Therefore they concluded that a "racial imbalance is present within the labour allocation process" (Genders and Player, 1989: 127).

Although Siyunyi-Siluwe's study (2005) did not concentrate specifically on employment, it identified good practice in engaging BME women ex-offenders. One of the suggestions emerging from the study was that organisations should involve more BME communities and BME women to find out the issues that affect them. Services that are available should be advertised in appropriate communication tools to increase awareness. These services should consider ways to increase retention levels; they should also consider being one-stop shops or work alongside each other; be culturally sensitive; and staff should develop their language skills to communicate in the same language as the BME women. She went on to suggest that BME women find women-only provisions useful, firstly because those that have been abused find this safer, and also because Muslim women in particular may not be comfortable with mixed-gender groups. Siyunyi-Siluwe concluded that combining different groups of disadvantaged women reduced the risk of stigmatisation and isolation for BME women offenders.

Small scale research study on female BME ex-offenders suggested that they may face additional barriers, such as not accessing services which help them gain employment because of the shame or a fear of being recognised by members of their community and being stigmatised (Siyuni-Siluwe, 2005). This research was particularly in reference to women, but the same may also be true for male BME ex-offenders, however, research is lacking in this area. Haslewood-Pócsik and Kaur's (2006) small scale study reported that some Asian employers considered that they had a cultural and moral duty to support ex-offenders from their communities into employment and back into the community.

3.2 Multiple Barriers

Black and Minority Ethnic ex-offenders potentially face multiple barriers to employment. A number of studies that have examined multiple barriers have relevance when considering common BME and offender characteristics.

Berthoud (2003) considered the job chances of 550 000 individuals. He found that there were six characteristics associated with non-employment. These were older people, those with no partner and no children or single parent families, people with low qualifications and skills, those with a disability, those who live in regions with a high unemployment rate, and those who belong to an ethnic group (especially Black, Indian and Pakistani/Bangladeshi). Berthoud found that the more disadvantages an individual faced, the more likely he/she was to be non-employed. Berthoud also found that among those with no disadvantages just 4 per cent were non-employed, whereas amongst those with six disadvantages 91 per cent were non-employed. Berthoud called this the *additive* model where the effects of each disadvantage can simply be added together. Berthoud also looked at specific combinations where the risk of non-employment is higher than might have been expected from adding up the influences of the characteristics. One such combination is that of older Pakistani and Bangladeshi people with low qualifications and skills, who have an 82 per cent risk of non-employment. However, Berthoud acknowledged that the evidence for the combination theory is not as strong as for the additive theory.

Hirst *et al* (2005) argued that using Berthoud's (2003) findings the scale of the problem can also be estimated because the numbers of people in each of the six

disadvantaged groups are high. For example, Hirst *et al* estimated that about one in four of the total working age population belong to multiple disadvantaged groups with two or more disadvantages. According to the Berthoud (2003) study, among those with two disadvantages 28 per cent were non-employed. Therefore, the scale of the problem was considerable.

Hirst et al (2005) also added to Berthoud's list of disadvantages other factors that were widely associated with multiple disadvantaged groups: those with drug/alcohol addictions, those whose first language is not English, ex-offenders, refugees, the homeless and care leavers. A problem with these added factors is that there is relatively little data available on them. However, Hirst et al asserted that these factors should be included in the count when considering multiple disadvantages even though they cannot estimate what difference they would make on their own.

4. POTENTIAL BARRIERS IDENTIFIED BY EMPLOYERS

4.1 The research

This section will analyse the issues that employers identified as potential barriers to the employment of ex-offenders from a BME background. Altogether, the analysis is based on the contributions of 46 employers who commented on the barriers (and sometimes also the positives) to employing ex-offenders from a BME background.

The University of Manchester and IMPACT carried out a consultation with employers across the North West of England in early 2006. The two main methods of the consultation were a postal survey distributed to a broad range of employers, and consultation events specifically targeting Black and Minority Ethnic employers in two locations. Altogether, 205 postal questionnaires were returned, and 33 questionnaires were completed by employer representatives at the two BME consultation events.

The questionnaire contained a section asking employers what positives and/or barriers they might see (if any) in employing particular ex-offender groups whom IMPACT works with. Space was then allowed for separate comments in respect of each group of ex-offenders: males under the age of 21, males over the age of 50, working age women and people from a BME background.

Most of the 46 employers who provided comments about the barriers to employing ex-offenders from a BME background did so in a way that applied to all or several groups of ex-offenders the questionnaire asked about. Specific barriers relating to BME ex-offenders were listed in a minority of comments (approximately one in five). This on the one hand appears to support the claim of Calverley *et al* (2005), that the barriers BME ex-offenders face may be more similar to those faced by ex-offenders than those faced by people from a BME background in general. On the other hand, employers sometimes perceived barriers that were related to some other characteristic, such as being inexperienced, which was related to age, and applied to individuals both from BME and non-BME backgrounds.

As the present report's main concern is the barriers to the employment of BME ex-offenders, this section will mostly discuss the issues that were raised as potential barriers by employers. A number of additional comments by employers enumerated the advantages of having BME employees in the workforce and mentioned no potential barriers.

4.2 Potential barriers to the employment of ex-offenders

A number of themes can be identified among the comments related to *all or several groups of ex-offenders*, including those from a BME background.

4.2.1 Barriers associated with being an ex-offender

The first theme is centred around the fact that the potential employees in question are ex-offenders.

a) One group of comments voiced concerns about personal characteristics such as *trustworthiness, reliability, motivation and maturity*.

Some employers mentioned 'maturity and reliability' or 'trust issues' directly, while one indicated 'attitudes towards work environment', and another 'work experience especially for recidivists' as a potential barrier. A comment raised concerns about 'lack of commitment', and another perceived that ex-offenders 'may no longer be motivated [through] bad work/life experiences but may have stronger work skills'. One employer considered a potential ' reluctance to work on pay scales', referring to the pay available through work compared with possible gains through crime.

b) *Past offending and a risk of reoffending* were also identified by some as potential barriers.
One employer named 'risk of reoffending' as a barrier directly, while another noted that s/he 'would not want to put any other staff or visitor at risk in any way'. One employer balanced 'helping an ex-offender who wants to be helped back into society' against 'the risks of getting it wrong'. The 'nature of the offence' was a potential barrier for more than one employer, while another comment expressed concerns about 'dishonesty' and 'inability to change' within this context.

Working with vulnerable individuals was a sub-theme within barriers associated with offending. This potential barrier was identified by a number of respondents in similar ways: 'the protection of very vulnerable people', 'nature of care work (vulnerable adults)' or 'the ability to satisfy an enhanced CRB' or 'OFSTED criteria'.

The only comment related to the topic of offending made by a BME employer that related specifically to ex-offenders from a BME background expressed concern over 'customers perceptions about working with offenders'.

2. The second theme encompasses the necessary *skills, experience and qualifications* for employment, the lack of which are likely to form barriers.

a) Employers most often simply identified *'lack of work experience'* or lack of experience in the type of work they provided as a barrier. This was mostly mentioned as an issue relating to younger male ex-offenders but it was indicated that this applied to those from a BME background as well.

b) Similarly, *'lack of skills necessary'* was most often mentioned across all groups of ex-offenders. An employer made this explicit when spelling out barriers for BME ex-offenders: 'none relating to their ethnic background, only to do with skills'. One employer mentioned numeracy and literacy and the ability to work unsupervised as potential barriers.

c) *Qualifications* were mentioned as a barrier by fewer employers compared with the lack of skills and experience. This confirms the finding from already existing research that employers tend to attribute a comparatively higher importance to work experience than to qualifications (see section 2.4.5). However, a few comments raised this issue, in two different contexts. One employer noted the 'relevance of experience and qualifications to nature of post' across the board for all groups of ex-offenders. Two employers referred specifically to BME ex-offenders in this context. One of them, while mentioning the 'diverse life experiences and understanding of social issues' as a positive, added that the organisation had difficulty 'attracting suitably qualified experienced staff' from a BME background'. The other employer, who was a BME

employer, noted that 'some people from BME groups are not very educated', while as a positive added that people from this background 'can speak different languages and know the cultural differences between groups'.

4.2.2 Potential barriers relating to people from a black and minority ethnic background

A much smaller group of barriers were mentioned *specifically* in respect of BME ex-offenders.

a) A potential *language and communications* barrier was identified by a number of employers: 'language may pose a barrier to employment', '[a barrier] can be communication both verbal and written'.

- Possible *cultural differences* and *a cultural divide among staff* was raised as a potential issue by a couple of employers. For one employer a barrier was 'ensuring no cultural divide in the [workplace]', and for another 'if cultural differences could have a negative impact with other employees'.

- 'Possible *lack of information* on [the applicant's] past if not originally from Britain' was mentioned by one employer as a potential barrier.

On the positive side, all three groups of the above potential barriers were often placed side-by-side with advantages arising from a workforce incorporating employees from a BME background. More than one employer mentioned the positives of a 'diverse workforce to serve a diverse customer group', 'cultural richness' or the ability to provide 'ethnically sensitive care' to a client group.

A number of employers commented that race, colour, minority status was not an issue, although they did not at present employ any workers from a BME background. Others added that they would welcome the opportunity to have BME employees but failed to recruit suitable BME candidates.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

One of the most important findings to emerge from the available research is the fact that the majority of studies looking into barriers to employment either concentrate on barriers to employment for BME groups or for ex-offenders. The barriers facing both ex-offenders and BME groups can broadly be placed under two headings: those associated with employer attitudes and those associated with personal skills and attributes.

In the longer term, more research would be useful to investigate how the two sets of barriers interact. Without considerable new research we cannot be certain whether the barriers to BME offenders are similar to those for BMEs in general or to those for offenders in general. However with the research on multiple barriers showing that those with two or more disadvantages have a higher likelihood of being unemployed, it is probable that this applies to BME ex-offenders as well, and therefore they are at least as likely as, or more likely than, ex-offenders from a non-BME background to be unemployed.

It has been suggested that the barriers facing BME ex-offenders are likely to be more similar to those facing the general ex-offender population because BME offenders may face a substantially higher level of social disadvantage than people from a BME background in general, and this level of social disadvantage may be similar to or higher than that experienced by White ex-offenders. The research on potential barriers identified by employers supports this, as the majority of employers identified barriers that applied to all or more than one sub-groups of ex-offenders, not only to those from a BME background. However, additional barriers specific to BME ex-offenders may also be important, especially issues around racial discrimination.

When considering both BME groups and ex-offenders, it is clear that within both categories there can be similar disadvantages, for example, low levels of education, a lack of work experience, and accommodation problems. These can be both barriers to finding employment and barriers to reducing re-offending.

When looking at BME groups, there are considerable variations in terms of employment and salary levels and work progression. These variations can occur by ethnic group, by gender, by geography, by employment type and by generation. Therefore, we are looking at a very complex picture and cannot over-emphasise the need to be careful not to assume homogeneity. Despite this, it is clear from the available evidence that the unemployment rate for most BME groups has been consistently notably higher than for Whites. When we consider that second generation BME people are doing better educationally, with some groups outperforming their white counterparts, and are now more fluent in English, then it seems that the gaps in some way are less justifiable and more obviously discriminatory in nature than before.

A definite need exists to find ways to overcome barriers that people from BME groups face in gaining employment, as they will contribute to half of the growth of the working age population over the next ten years. As Jobs for the Future (2004) acknowledge, failure to address employment barriers that these groups face will have

severe economic and social costs. Importantly, initiatives cannot just be aimed at increasing the human capital of offenders and BMEs, they also have to consider engaging employers so that they see such groups as real candidates for employment.

It is also evident from existing data that a greater proportion from some BME groups are likely to be ex-offenders, and therefore are more likely to be affected by the barriers to ex-offenders gaining employment.

Research on ex-offenders tends to group all of them together, although there may be significant differences between the characteristics of some sub-groups. Ex-prisoners may be seen as one such specific sub-group. When it comes to employing ex-offenders, it appears that offence type is also significant in determining whether or not an employer would offer employment.

The discussion around the impact of prison work on employment after release is also noteworthy. Work in prison needs to be both realistic in terms of what the prisoners can expect to be doing upon release, and co-ordinated with prisoners' other needs.

Recommendations and useful points for consideration

On the basis of the findings in the present report, two basic sets of recommendations and useful points for consideration can be offered. The first is about interventions directed at BME ex-offenders and the second is related to action directed at employers.

5.1 Interventions directed at BME ex-offenders

5.1.1 Barriers common to ex-offenders

- Generally, it appears from the research that the fact that people in the target group are ex-offenders may be a matter of fundamental importance, and that they are from BME groups may add to the barriers, or modify the nature of some of the barriers. *Therefore, interventions targeting ex-offenders from a BME background should primarily be grounded in overcoming barriers to the employment of ex-offenders.* This is all the more so because many of the barriers BME ex-offenders face are similar to those that many ex-offenders face in general, for example lower educational attainment, higher rates of unemployment, limited work experience and skills, health problems and so on. *Therefore, the preparation of individually tailored intervention plans based on comprehensive assessments for ex-offenders from a BME background is ever more important.*
- Having said this, *it is also important that assessments and subsequent interventions aimed at BME ex-offenders are mindful of the fact that people from different BME backgrounds do not fall into one homogenous group.* For example, higher proportions of people from a Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean background may be more likely to have multiple barriers to employment (e.g. lower educational attainment, higher rate of unemployment, health issues etc.) than members of some other ethnic groups.

5.1.2 Barriers specific to BME groups

- *As potential barriers also exist that are specific to BME groups, it may be useful for structured assessments aimed at identifying the barriers to the*

employment of ex-offenders to contain an additional part with a range of questions which assess the existence of these specific barriers. This might help ensure that better quality information is available and potentially significant issues are not overlooked.

- Geographical, religious and cultural differences may put additional barriers in the way for some. For example, *the ability to travel to work needs to be carefully considered in individual intervention plans*. Levels of family and community support available to some ex-offenders from different ethnic backgrounds may be significantly different, depending on prevailing attitudes towards ex-offenders in particular communities. *An assessment of the likely impact of the existence or lack of support for the individual should also be considered.*
- Female ex-offenders from a BME background may face particular barriers, for example accessing already available services. *It is recommended that the needs of female BME ex-offenders and the barriers faced by them are also specifically addressed both at the assessment and at the intervention stage.*
- Any interventions that are developed *should also take into account the fact that first generation people from BME backgrounds may have different needs to their second generation counterparts*, also depending on how long they have been in the UK. For example, fluency in English, UK qualifications and work experience is more likely to be a problem for an ex-offender who is a first-generation immigrant.

5.2 Future action directed at employers

- The research identified concerns among employers about the risk of reoffending if they employed an ex-offender: *it appears that more information about risk (e.g. different levels of risk, trigger situations), and the assessment of risk would be useful for employers. Information breaking down stereotypes, such as a perception of lack of motivation and trustworthiness when thinking about ex-offenders in general may also help in overcoming employer reluctance to view ex-offenders as individuals.*
- *Employers also need to be liaised with to ensure that improvements to the skill and education levels of ex-offenders (both BME and non-BME) meet the needs of employers*.
- There is support within the literature for *arranging useful work experience for ex-offenders during their time in prison as a way to help them engage and find positive employment when they are released*. Making sure that work allocation in prison is, and is seen to be, on an equal basis is also important.
- *In conjunction with information about handling risk issues and the drawbacks of generalised perceptions, raising awareness of the advantages that result from having a diverse workforce and examples of the useful insights and experiences an individual from a BME background may bring could also be useful. Concrete examples and case studies may be helpful in illustrating these points***.**

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