



Diversity Matters

Race

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Finding Positive Employers

A key element to any job search is to find an employer that you feel comfortable working for. For many individuals, knowing that their employer shares their values can be crucial when deciding whether to accept a position.

Many graduate recruiters are now demonstrating that their organisation seeks out and encourages applicants from all ethnic backgrounds. So, how can you find these employers and research their level of commitment to diversity? Here are a few ideas:

- Speak to your careers service about schemes and organisations that work to encourage black and minority ethnic (BME) representation, such as The Windsor Fellowship, www.windsor-fellowship.org, or Sponsors for Educational Opportunity (SEO), www.seo-london.com.
- Look at other sources of specific vacancies, including Black and Asian Grad, www.blackandasiangrad.ac.uk, Ethnic Jobsite, www.ethnicjobsite.co.uk, and Path National, www.pathuk.co.uk, which offer training opportunities, vacancies, job hunting advice and more. Black and Asian Grad also have a list of employer profiles of companies that actively support them.
- Find out what your student union offers. Most unions have a Diversity or Equality Officer, who may have been approached by employers wishing to promote their diversity message.
- Be proactive and start your research early. Many employers have an equality statement and this can be a good measure of how inclusive they are as an organisation. Websites are often a useful way to get information on a company's ethos and equality policy.
- Attend employer-led events, fairs and workshops, hosted by your careers service. Use the opportunity to find out more about an employer's values and check whether they really are committed to encouraging equality of opportunity in their organisation.
- Look online for employer's staff profiles and consider whether the employer has a mixed ethnic workforce. Does the employer have a designated diversity representative who communicates issues to senior management?
- Consider what facilities are important to you. Work shadowing can be a useful way to research the work environment. By seeing the organisation for yourself, you can observe whether there really is a diverse workforce and look into facilities such as prayer rooms or multi-faith centres.
- If an employer provides diversity training, it may indicate that they encourage all staff to learn about and accept each other, leading to a more positive workplace. If no training exists, is this something that you could influence when starting your employment? Diversity, and tackling discrimination, is the responsibility of all.
- Does the employer offer any positive action initiatives aimed at students from BME backgrounds? Positive action aims to ensure that individuals from BME groups can compete on an equal basis with non-BME individuals, and is not intended to discriminate adversely. Similarly 'insight' days aim to encourage applications from under-represented groups.

- Does the employer advertise in specialist diversity magazines such as KAL (Kaleidoscope) Magazine, www.kalmagazine.com, as well as national newspapers and trade publications?
- Do they attend specialist minority ethnic careers fairs, such as the annual Manchester University Ethnic Diversity Fair, www.careers.manchester.ac.uk/recruit/profile/fairs/diversity?
- Is the organisation a member of Business in the Community (BITC), www.bitc.org.uk? Race for Opportunity, www.bitc.org.uk/workplace/diversity_and_inclusion/race, is a nationally recognised business network, run by BITC, which operates as a support system to employers' diversity agendas and encourages employment opportunities for individuals from BME groups.
- Don't overlook the smaller organisations that may not have the finance to advertise but have the right attitude to diversity. Widen your search to include regional organisations as well as the larger, national employers.
- In some sectors, there are organisations that work hard to overcome past barriers to their professions. Examples of organisations that may help are the Black Solicitors Network (BSN), www.blacksolicitorsnetwork.co.uk, the Association of Muslim Lawyers (AMC), www.aml.org.uk, and Asians In Media (Aim), www.asiansinmedia.org.
- Continuing support in the workplace is as important as the initial advertising and recruitment campaign that attracts you. If a company has an ongoing diversity programme or mentoring scheme, it may demonstrate a longer term commitment to embracing a diverse workforce.

Further examples of diversity initiatives and activities can be found by checking out industry insights (www.prospects.ac.uk/links/industries).

Marketing Yourself and Disclosure

The key to self-marketing is the same regardless of your ethnic background - you need to demonstrate your individual range of skills and qualifications to their maximum potential.

Some students from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds are concerned about how to market their skills so that they are viewed without discrimination. For example, you may be reluctant to disclose information that may be an indicator of your ethnicity, such as presidency of a particular society or involvement in a religious activity. Disclosure is a personal choice, but do not underestimate the transferable skills gained from extracurricular activities, as these can help you to market yourself effectively.

Key Points to Bear in Mind

- Consider what your key selling points are and what makes you stand out from the crowd. What are you particularly proud of? Many students from BME backgrounds involve themselves in community, religious and voluntary activities which can demonstrate commitment and motivation.
- Highlight the transferable skills you have gained through extracurricular activities. For example, your role as President of the Afro-Caribbean Society may have built skills in autonomy, delegation, organisation, problem-solving and time management. Give some attention to explaining how you have built up these skills.
- Think about how you can make best use of the voluntary work you have done, e.g., teaching in a local mosque may have strengthened your skills in communication, listening, organisation, teamwork and working independently.
- In order to match yourself to the role requirements and succeed at all stages of the recruitment process, consider which examples demonstrate your abilities most effectively. For example, group-work at university may show team working skills, but within your family business, your ability to delegate, listen and encourage others, may illustrate your skills in a stronger light. Draw on examples from different areas of your life.
- Some employers may hold negative stereotypes, so the importance of marketing yourself cannot be overstated. Presenting yourself positively increases your chances of being selected for the job and can also challenge preconceived stereotypes.
- At interview, be confident when discussing your extra curricular activities. Do not assume that all employers will be aware of the significance of what you did and why. For example, if you have taken a stand on behalf of BME students and challenged the way that something was done, explain why this was important.
- Create a balanced picture of all of your activities to show that you have engaged with a variety of interests and work, not just those that lean towards a particular culture or way of life. Employers value the business case for recruiting a diverse workforce, so it is vital to reinforce that you are willing and able to mix with a broad mix of people.
- Pay a visit to your university careers service for help with creating an effective self-marketing strategy. Workshops on job searching, application procedures and interviews are often available.

Your Rights

Handling discrimination of any type is difficult and dealing with the practical and emotional aspects of discrimination can be daunting. It helps if you understand your rights and have put some thought into ways of dealing proactively with discrimination.

The main landmark legislation that protects individuals from racial discrimination is the Race Relations Act (1976), which made it illegal to treat an individual less favourably than others on racial grounds. This groundbreaking act set out to protect individuals from discrimination in the fields of employment, education, training, housing and the provision of goods, facilities and services and applies to England, Scotland and Wales.

The act was strengthened by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, which added an extension to prohibit public authorities from discriminating against individuals. This also placed a duty on public authorities to take steps to prevent discrimination in all aspects of recruitment. A more recent adjustment through the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2003 implemented additional regulations relating to discrimination on the grounds of religion.

The original Act identified different types of discrimination and this provides useful guidance if you are considering whether you have been discriminated against. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) definition of race discrimination, www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/yourrights/equalityanddiscrimination/race/Pages/Whatisraceanddiscrimination.aspx, identifies these types of race discrimination as direct; indirect; victimisation; and harassment, and explains how they occur.

Regardless of the work that has been done to eradicate racial discrimination, it is evident that it still exists. This is demonstrated by 2009 figures from the Employment Tribunals Service, www.employmenttribunals.gov.uk, which show that the number of race discrimination cases submitted to employment tribunals has not fallen in the past three years (4,103 in 2005/06, 3,780 in 2006/07, and 4,130 in 2007/08).

If you feel that you have been discriminated against when applying for work, or at work, you have the right to make a complaint under the Race Relations Act. Your first step should be to follow the organisation's internal grievance procedure, but if this proves unsatisfactory your next step will be to pursue your complaint through an Employment Tribunal.

Employment tribunals are independent judicial bodies that settle disputes relating to employment. The procedure for resolving employment disputes changed on 6 April 2009, when the Employment Act 2008, www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2008/ukpga_20080024_en_1, came into force. The latest Rules of Procedure are available from the Employment Tribunals Service website.

If you intend to pursue a formal complaint, here are some things to consider.

- It is constructive to know from the outset what you hope to achieve, so be clear about your objectives. For example are you aiming for financial compensation, an employer's apology or both?
- Consider how you might resolve the issue informally by speaking to the individual or your manager first. Under UK law, employers are required to follow formal procedures for resolving grievances and these channels must be followed before you pursue your case at an employment tribunal.
- Grievances should be dealt with promptly by both the employee and the employer. Check the Department for Business Innovation and Skills employment dispute resolution, www.berr.gov.uk/whatwedo/employment/Resolving_disputes, for the latest information on time limits for resolving disputes in relation to the Employment Act 2008.
- Speak to your careers service and/or the Equality Challenge Unit, www.ecu.ac.uk, to get as much advice and support as possible. It is often useful to talk to someone about your feelings and to discuss the implications of taking a case forward.
- Seek advice from an independent agency such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, www.citizensadvice.org.uk, your trade union, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), www.equalityhumanrights.com, your local racial equality council, or the Law Centres Federation, www.lawcentres.org.uk.
- Racial discrimination can be difficult to prove, so it is vital that you can demonstrate that you were treated less favourably because of your race.
- Make a detailed record of the incident and why you feel it amounted to racial discrimination, as this will help you to evidence your complaint. Keep written records of any subsequent actions taken by you, other employees or the employer.
- Consider whether there are any witnesses you can call upon and check whether they would be prepared to verify what happened. Be conscious that witnesses may be reluctant to get involved for a variety of reasons.
- Taking forward a complaint can be a stressful and time-consuming experience, so enlist the emotional support of friends or family before you start the procedure.
- Consider how you might fund the support needed. Public funding (also known as legal aid) is only available for county court and sheriff court cases, not for employment tribunals. Contact the EHRC for advice on funding.

Top Tips

- When job searching, look for organisations that match what you want in terms of job roles, development opportunities and diversity. Research is key, so examine the company and their competitors and speak to staff. This background information will also be useful if the employer asks you to explain why you selected the company and the role.
- Consider what you can do whilst at university. What extracurricular activities could you participate in and what will this say to a prospective employer? Involve yourself in a wide range of activities to show your uniqueness and key selling points in a variety of ways. This will also evidence that you can get on with a wide range of people.
- Start your research early and find out what's out there. Black and Asian Grad (www.blackandasiangrad.ac.uk) has an up-to-date list of positive action initiatives that may assist you to identify appropriate employers.
- Widen your search and don't restrict your options by focusing purely on large graduate employers. Be open-minded to other employers, such as small to medium-sized organisations.
- Employers are keen to recruit a diverse workforce, as drawing from the widest pool of talent makes good business sense. Be proud and positive about your ethnicity at all stages of the recruitment process.
- Establish the core competencies that the organisation is looking for and relate your education, work experience and interests to these. Don't be afraid to use voluntary or community work as evidence – they often demonstrate additional attributes such as commitment and enthusiasm.
- If you have language skills, state your proficiency level and say how you have used these skills. Languages are often highly valued by employers, as businesses need to communicate with a wide range of customers to compete in a global market.
- If you are still concerned that your ethnicity could affect your chances of success, speak to a careers adviser. If you need advice on discrimination, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHCR), www.equalityhumanrights.com, will be able to offer advice and support.
- Think about how you can promote diversity within the organisation that you work for. Could you develop a working group to help embed the spirit of diversity and promote this as a high profile area? Could you volunteer to develop training for staff or source outside training?
- If you feel you have been discriminated against speak to the person involved and tell them how it makes you feel. Dealing directly with the individual in an informal way is the first step to addressing the issue.

Case Studies

Salma has a Postgraduate Diploma in Personnel Management from Leeds Metropolitan University. She works as a HR officer for a charitable organisation.

I was working as a Human Resources (HR) Officer, with predominantly white colleagues, when I realised that the general view was that I'd been chosen for my job because of my ethnicity. Many social activities centred on drinking or the pub and I felt unable to join in and, because of this, colleagues assumed that I wasn't a team player.

After four years, I applied for promotion and was rejected on the basis that I didn't have enough 'experience or qualifications', but the person appointed had less than me. I carried on with my job, which I enjoyed, but found parts of the work environment unsettling. For example, I heard people using derogatory, racist language, which I ignored, but now feel I was too quick to dismiss it. Also, a racist e-mail about a London colleague circulated amongst the directors and I was so shocked that I kept a copy.

I noticed that other people were being promoted while I struggled even to get an appraisal. When the HR Manager in Manchester went on maternity leave, my equivalent was promoted, without the post being advertised. I felt disappointed at not being given the chance to apply, so I questioned it and discovered that management had presumed that I wouldn't travel. I was also told, 'Tough, that's how the cookie crumbles!'

Several years later the HR Manager was promoted and I decided to apply for the role again. I was once more rejected on the basis of my 'lack of experience'. I felt that I'd been racially discriminated against as I hadn't been given the same opportunities as others to progress. I lodged a grievance which was rejected, but I was reluctant to appeal as experience had taught me that this rarely worked. I spoke to a solicitor, who made it clear how difficult it would be to prove racial discrimination as it was my word against theirs. My evidence was limited and the email that I'd kept wasn't directly about me, so it was insufficient evidence to back my case. I wanted to take this to a tribunal but I also understood it would be difficult.

Immediately, colleagues began to keep information from me and I felt like an outcast as people stopped talking to me. One colleague from another office was supportive, though he couldn't do much, for fear of losing his own job. My health suffered and I developed high blood pressure, so my doctor signed me off work. My employers hinted that this was because I wasn't capable of doing the work! I needed the emotional support of my family but they didn't live in this country. It was really difficult to deal with the big drop in self-esteem, which was a result of being made to feel stupid and inadequate. I lost a lot of confidence and felt angry and ashamed at what was happening.

Senior colleagues attempted to persuade me to drop the complaint, but before the tribunal I spoke to a director. He listened as I told him everything, including the racist e-mail. It had been six months since things had started and I just wanted to get things over with. He offered a payment, so I negotiated a settlement and left. I later discovered that my boss was accused of mismanagement and given a disciplinary, which was at least something, though not enough, considering what I went through.

I thought I was strong enough to deal with discrimination, but it was hard and I had to fight from day one. Even now, my confidence is still affected and I always presume that I'm the one who's in the wrong. My advice to others would be: always get the facts and write things down to prove what you're saying. Don't jump in, but think carefully about how you're going to deal with things before taking action.

Nadia completed a degree in psychology and crime from the University of Bradford in 2009. She worked part time in a store while studying.

I applied and was interviewed for a part-time job in a home store. When I found out that I'd got the job, I was really pleased as I needed the extra money to support my studies. Once I started the job, I immediately noticed that all three new workers were Asian. I didn't really think about it further until I was chatting with a friend who pointed out that we were the first Asians to work there in three years, and that the employers 'only did it for diversity'. She explained this as if it was a perfectly normal thing to do, but afterwards I found out that managers had been ignoring white applicants, I realised that it was 'positive discrimination'.

This made me feel awkward and confused as I believed that the managers had not behaved badly towards me, but they had obviously stopped others getting jobs because they were white, and I knew this was wrong. I wasn't sure what to do, so I ignored my friend's comments, and just got on with my job, as I didn't want to cause problems for my managers. I didn't address it or mention it to anyone at work, as I felt uncomfortable doing that and knew it could cause an atmosphere. However, I did wonder how my managers would answer me if I brought it up with them and also whether it would affect my prospects within the company. As I continued in my job, my race never came up again and the only time that I noticed a lack of understanding was outside work, when social events were held at places that I couldn't go to, such as the local bars.

By the time I'd been at the store for three years, I'd begun to notice that others CVs had been disregarded, and no further people were recruited from Black or Asian backgrounds. This meant that I was the only Asian left working at the store and I sometimes felt uncomfortable about this. I chose to keep my thoughts to myself as I was sure that my managers had their reasons for recruiting in the way that they did. That said, I often wondered what their reasons were for recruiting me, and my colleagues, and whether it was because of our race.

It's a tough area to deal with if you feel you've faced 'positive discrimination' and I'm not sure what my advice would be. For instance, I know that any kind of discrimination is wrong, but in my case I was so happy to get the job and was anxious about upsetting things in my workplace if I spoke out. I did speak to my sister about it, which helped, but I'm left wondering whether I was good enough for the job or if I was just recruited because of my race. I progressed well in the company and don't feel that it affected my confidence, but I can see how this could cause issues for some people when applying for other jobs, as it could lead you to over analyse your employers' reasons for recruiting you.

Contacts and Resources

Jobs and Work

- African Caribbean Diversity (ACD), www.acdiversity.org
- Asian Jobsite, www.asianjobsite.co.uk
- Asians In Media (AiM), www.asiansinmedia.org
- Association of Muslim Lawyers (AMC), www.aml.org.uk
- Black and Asian Grad, www.blackandasiangrad.ac.uk
- Black Solicitors Network (BSN), www.blacksolicitorsnetwork.co.uk
- Business in the Community (BITC), www.bitc.org.uk
- Equality Britain, www.equalitybritain.co.uk
- Ethnic Jobsite, www.ethnicjobsite.co.uk
- KAL (Kaleidoscope) Magazine, www.kalmagazine.com,
- Manchester University Ethnic Diversity Fair, www.careers.manchester.ac.uk/recruit/profile/fairs/diversity
- Networking Association - Professional Ethnic Minorities (NAPEM), www.napem.co.uk
- National Mentoring Consortium, www.uel.ac.uk/nmc
- Path National, www.pathuk.co.uk
- Race for Opportunity, www.bitc.org.uk/workplace/diversity_and_inclusion/race
- Sponsors for Educational Opportunity (SEO), www.seo-london.com
- The Windsor Fellowship, www.windsor-fellowship.org

Advice, policy and research

- All Wales Ethnic Minority Association (AWEMA), www.awema.org.uk
- Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland (BEMIS), www.bemis.org.uk
- Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations (CRER), www.warwick.ac.uk/go/crer
- Citizens Advice Bureau, www.citizensadvice.org.uk
- Department for Business Innovation and Skills employment dispute resolution, www.berr.gov.uk/whatwedo/employment/Resolving_disputes
- Employment Tribunals Service, www.employmenttribunals.gov.uk
- Equality Challenge Unit, www.ecu.ac.uk
- Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), www.equalityhumanrights.com
- Ethnic Multicultural Media Academy, www.emmainteractive.com
- Institute of Race Relations, www.irr.org.uk
- Law Centres Federation, www.lawcentres.org.uk
- Liberty, www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk
- Muslim Council of Britain, www.mcb.org.uk
- Runnymede Trust, www.runnymedetrust.org

News

- Race & Class Journal, SAGE Publications, quarterly
- Smaart Talent, www.smaarttalent.com

Reference

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- Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) definition of race discrimination, www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/yourrights/equalityanddiscrimination/race/Pages/Whatisracediscrimination.aspx
- Home Office, www.homeoffice.gov.uk
- Office for National Statistics (ONS), www.statistics.gov.uk
- Race Relations Act (1976), www.opsi.gov.uk/RevisedStatutes/Acts/ukpga/1976/cukpga_19760074_en_1
- Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/ukpga_20000034_en_1
- Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2003, www.opsi.gov.uk/SI/si2003/20031626.htm