

## **An Investigation into the Barriers Facing Black and Minority Ethnicity Within the UK Construction Industry**

\*Vian Ahmed, Raju Pathmeswaran, David Baldry, Lisa Worrall and Sabri Abouen

---

**Abstract:** The UK construction industry is one of the largest employers, positioned as the country's top employer with over two million employees and projected to continue growth as far as 2011. However, it is facing ongoing skills shortages in a number of professional areas and tends to lack an ethnic diversity of workers compared to the White community of workers across the whole economy. The government's Ethnic Minority Employment Task Force shows that for any given level of qualification, a Black or ethnic minority person is less likely to be employed, than a similarly qualified White person. Current research into issues surrounding ethnicity, from academia to employment is scarce, particularly in entry and process development within the construction industry. The aim of this paper is to outline the findings from perceptual and experiential barriers of Black and Minority Ethnicity (BMEs) students and employees, in order to identify perceptual and actual barriers that lead to the under-representation of BMEs within the construction industry; and also to suggest how better knowledge flow mechanisms could lead to a more balanced development, particularly in terms of ethnic diversification in the UK construction industry. The aim was achieved by adopting qualitative and quantitative methods including questionnaire surveys of undergraduate students in a construction related programme, employees working within the construction industry and interviews with company directors and human resource managers. The image of the construction industry is found to be one of the major barriers for entry into the industry. Language and cultures form additional barriers for a range of ethnic groupings. Support, in the form of recruitment events, training, mentoring, professional networking, as well as work placement and experience schemes, can smooth entry, retention and progression within the construction industry.

**Keywords:** Barriers, Black and Minority Ethnicity, Discrimination, Employment, The UK

### **INTRODUCTION**

The UK construction industry is the biggest employer with over two million people (Dainty et al., 2007) and main contributor to the Gross Domestic Product (Steele and

Todd, 2005). The UK construction industry is also the second largest industry in the European Union (EU) and contributes a healthy 8.2% to UK's Gross Value Added (Department of Trade and industry, 2007). The industry itself incorporates a broad range of businesses and services, including the construction and supply of materials and products; building service manufacturers, providers and installers; contractors, sub-contractors, advisors and construction clients that design, build, operate and refurbish buildings

---

School of Built Environment, University of Salford Maxwell Building, Salford, M5 4WT, UNITED KINGDOM.

\*Corresponding author: v.ahmed@salford.ac.uk

and properties throughout the country as a whole (Business Sectors, 2006). Regionally, the construction industry is estimated to approximately worth £5.5 billion to the local economy (North West Regional Intelligence Unit, 2002). In terms of job opportunity, the North West region of the UK is predicted to reach a remarkable employment rate of 309,000 by 2011 which consists of 11% of the jobs within the UK industry (Construction Skills Network, 2007).

Concern about equal opportunities and the noticeable under-representation of women in both trades and professions within the UK construction industry brought about interest in the participation of Black and Minority Ethnic (BMEs) in the construction industry (Latham, 1994). The findings of study commissioned by the Centre for Ethnic Minority Studies (2004) relating to BME people in the construction industry found that BMEs were considerably under-represented within the industry as a whole, especially at middle and senior management level. This is despite the fact that BMEs are reasonably well represented on construction industry related to training and degree programmes. At present, data pertaining to BME workforce within the built environment sector in the UK is limited, particularly concerning the conversion from education through employment and for trainees, graduates and professionals (Twomey, 2001).

The government's Ethnic Minority Employment Task Force shows that for any given level of qualification, a Black or ethnic minority person is less likely to be employed, than a similarly qualified White person (EMETF, 2004). Within the labour market as a whole and among BMEs groups, people from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Black Caribbean backgrounds experience, on average, significantly higher unemployment and lower earnings than White. While White and Indian men have tended to maintain broadly similar rates of higher occupational attainment across the period, the remaining BME, with the exception of Chinese men, have lower proportions of professional/managerial employment than their White and Indian peers (Cabinet Office Strategy, 2002).

With regards to some of the limited existent research, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE, 2005) found that, although BME students are relatively well presented within most of the built environment disciplines in higher education (except for the subject area of landscape design), fewer ethnic minority graduates are actually entering the industry (35%) compared to 51% of their white counterparts. This is reflected more in the industry, where only 13% of employees in the industry are women and even smaller percentage of employees (between 2% to 3%) are BMEs (Gale and Davidson, 2006). On the other hand, the Lloyds TSB Business in Britain survey (2007) indicated that even

though the construction industry is envisaged to remain very buoyant this year, it is facing ongoing skills shortages.

This research is funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) under Objective 3 to "promote the integration of and combat the discrimination against people at a disadvantage in the labour market." This research also fits in with Priority 2 of the Regional Development Plan (RDP, 2004) to lessen the effects of disadvantage faced by excluded groups, by supporting their integration into the labour market. This BME project in construction project is aimed at identifying and analysing the issues in both Higher Education (HE) and industry, for their under-representation of BMEs in the construction industry sector in the North West of the UK. It is also worth noting here that this research employs the "Ethnic Group Statistics Report" definition put forward by the UK governmental Office for National Statistics (ONS) that defines BMEs with respect to their heritage and identity, such as kinship, religion, language, territory, nationality or physical appearance which makes them distinct from other communities. This governmental definition includes a statement that this classification is changeable and subject to individual and subjective interpretation (Office for National Statistics, 2003).

The rest of this paper will be examining the issues concerning entry, progression and retention of BMEs in the UK construction industry that contribute to their current

under-representation. In order to achieve this, the next section will provide a background of the make-up of the construction industry and the projected skills needs, both nationally and regionally, as well as entry, retention and progression in the industry with a specific focus upon issues of ethnicity. This paper will then progress onto analysing and discussing the perceptual and experiential barriers and enablers to BME entry, retention and progression into the industry by analysis of data gathered from quantitative and qualitative survey of BME in the construction industry. These findings have led to the formation of a series of recommendations to overcome barriers that serve as a focus for the research activities of the BME in construction project. It is hoped that, by identifying such barriers, this research will assist policy makers and government bodies in promoting new workers and migrants from developing countries to enter the construction industry, and to be better equipped to survive in this industry.

### **MAKE-UP OF THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY AND PROJECTED SKILL NEEDS**

The construction industry has greatly expanded over recent years and anticipated employment is projected to grow as well. The industry in the UK currently employs over two million people and construction-related employment is projected to grow at between 1% and 2% annually, which

equate to 80,000 new recruits to the industry each year (CITB, 2003). This anticipated growth has led to an estimated annual increase with the need for 8,830 workers, 1,870 professionals and technical staff, and an additional 1,110 new recruits each year for the wood trade and interior fit-outs.

At this level of demand, the construction industry as a whole is expected to experience problems in meeting its skill requirements, particularly in London and southeast.

Regionally, in the North West recruitment is predicted to grow by 6.6% between the years 2007 to 2011 (Construction Skills Network, 2007). Such lack of skills, as has been identified by the CITB for both professionals and technical staff, as being mainly attributed to the declining number of the first-year UK domiciled students on construction industry-related degree courses, with the exception of architecture. Table 1 shows the labour demand between the period of 2003–2007.

Table 1. Labour Demand, Supply and Training Requirements (2003–2007).

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Labour Supply	1,928,615	1,887,015	1,843,343	1,801,013	1,758,653
Labour Demand	2,045,897	2,101,328	2,137,879	2,174,938	2,209,998
Cumulative Requirement	117,281	214,314	294,537	373,901	450,346
Annual Requirement	85,301	97,033	80,223	79,365	76,444
Requirement due to Expansion	43,458	55,432	36,551	37,058	35,061
Requirement due to Supply Side Factors	41,842	41,601	43,672	42,306	41,384

Source: Construction Industry Training Board, 2003

The levels of requirements for the skilled and qualified workforce in the construction industry have created an extensive load on the labour market to match the demand in the number of skills. The industry will therefore have to be inclusive and diverse in terms of recruitment and retention, from non-traditional groups, such as BME to make-up for the projected shortfalls of all categories of workers, and to respond to the legal and social pressures to ensure equality. Thus, the participation of BMEs in the construction industry is vital in terms of meeting the industry's demand for labour and the shortfall of skills. This shortage of skills creates strong opportunity for BME to take advantage of the current skills shortage. However, this does not appear to be the case as BME consultants and contractors still seem to face barriers that limit their chances to gain from the ongoing growth in the construction based industry (Steele and Todd, 2005).

### **BARRIERS TO ENTRY AND BALANCED DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES**

Barriers to entry and balanced development processes within the construction industry have been neglected by researchers. With respect to the limited data, the only comparable substantive existent research is the study commissioned by the CITB (2002) that examined the retention and progression of BMEs in the construction

industry, across all levels of employment. The findings of the CITB illustrated that comparatively high levels of BMEs people studied construction related subjects, and identified a number of factors that had a determined impact on BME students, job applicants and professionals in construction. Some of these factors start early in the BMEs career, specifically at the university level. These include perceived unfair treatment of some BMEs students, which had a later effect on their ability to network. Racial bantering as an accepted feature of life on site, was also mentioned by the CITB report, which BMEs people either reconciled themselves to or avoided by leaving the industry altogether. This will widen the gap of much needed diversity recruitment to fill up the already existing shortage of skills within the construction industry. The findings of the CITB report also identified unequal access for BMEs people to training and development opportunities and negative experiences of BMEs professionals in interviews and with recruitment agencies.

Similar to the previous study, the Centre for Ethnic Minority studies (2004) study highlighted that lack of a tradition of employment in the built environment professions and of the networks of contacts that facilitate employment continue to be major barriers which BMEs aspiring professionals must cross. The study has further highlighted that BME (HE) staff have increased and is becoming more ethnically diverse where evidence of

perceived unfair treatment of current BME university students was less pronounced than has been in previous study (CITB, 2002). The report however established that BME students still on the whole experience a curriculum and support system that is largely Euro/Anglo-centric. Thus, successful BME students had to acquire certain degree of mental toughness and develop a variety of coping strategy as a part of coping and maturing process, which in turn added additional burden that is not shared by the general student population.

In spite of the efforts in recent years to implement equal opportunities and recruit a more socially inclusive workforce, the report confirmed the previous study findings conducted by the CITB (2002) that both employers and professionals recognise there are a series of thresholds for BMEs professionals to cross and ceiling to break through which start at the initial recruitment process. This situation is mainly attributed to traditional, exclusionary attitudes and prejudicial assumptions which discriminate against BMEs employees. The report also identified that despite some employment practices have since improved; many firms are dominated by White men, which they continue to recruit in their image. Further, the report demonstrates that BMEs professionals who have been frustrated in their initial desire for a career in the built environment might opt for work in other industry which widen the skills gap and

creates less inclusive and diverse environment within the industry.

The construction industry is culturally both hierarchical and fragmented (Barthorpe et al., 2000). There is a greater emphasis upon the importance of profit over people (Dainty et al., 2007). In some case, "support" is more a case of a productivity review rather than real support for the person. BMEs tend to lack adequate and supportive networking and mentoring systems that can help in encouraging them to stay in an already aggressive and White British male dominated industry. It is imperative to note here that the Centre of Black and Ethnic Minority (2004) survey reported positive response from ethnic minorities' concerning the attitude of employers towards them personally and professionally. Some of the report findings indicate that successful BME professionals suggest that once you are trusted and accepted by the firm, that progression within the construction and built environment is determined by what one knows and do and not by considerations of ethnicity. Others have indicate that success is a question of working harder, taking part in the inhospitable social life of the organisation, denying their cultural heritage and conforming to a corporate norm, ignoring daily annoyances that are expected as a banter. This has become part of what BMEs must do to expect to progress. However, if this is accepted as "going with the territory" and it is part of the organisation culture, then

progression within the industry may continue to be unfairly governed by individual ability to get on with (White) senior management and getting one's face fit in social situations and events.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to achieve its objectives, this research was delivered mainly by four work packages:

Work Package 1 - Developing an understanding of the current status of BMEs within the construction domain in general and in the North West of the UK in particular.

Work Package 2 - Comparing the presentation of BMEs within other disciplines and various sectors of the society and identifying cultural effects on the employment of BMEs in construction.

Work Package 3 - Identifying the barriers and enablers for increasing the presentation of BMEs in the labour market in general and construction in particular.

Work Package 4 - Developing a recommendation framework to inform the stakeholders of the way forward to aid the recruitment and retention of BMEs in construction.

This paper mainly focused on the finding for work package 3, by identifying the barrier and enablers for increasing the presentation of BMEs in the construction labour market. This was achieved by adopting qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection. These included:

- Questionnaire surveys for 229 undergraduate students in a construction related programme.
- Questionnaire surveys for 105 employees working within the construction industry.
- Interviews with 11 company directors and human resource managers. The ethnic breakdown consisted of; 3 White British male company directors, 3 BME British Male company directors, 1 (non British origin) BME male company director, 3 White British female HR managers and 1 White British male HR manager.
- Workshops and seminars with a selective postgraduate focus group.
- Interviews with seven key academics in construction in HE.
- Interviews with career advisors from two universities in the North West of UK.

The rest of this paper will disclose the main findings related to barriers to entry, progression and retention within the construction industry.

## **MAIN FINDINGS**

### **Postgraduate Focus Group**

In order to fulfil the aim of this paper, empirical data were gathered from BME students, professionals and employers. A group of BME students were formed to address perceptual barriers and potential enablers that BMEs may face upon entering construction industry. This was a competent group of researchers composed of 25 postgraduates of mixed gender and ethnicity who met high criteria for entry to the postgraduates programmes within 6-star rated Research Institute of Built and Human Environment at the University of Salford. The group has also discussed and proposed good practice mechanisms to facilitate entry and progression within the built environment.

The results show that BMEs have dual disadvantages because they face some government regulations and restrictions, which include for example, visa problems as well as language and national barriers. It was also perceived that within the UK industry, there are

"educational" barriers with regards to the international recognition of qualifications and membership of professional institutions. Often, BMEs from overseas find that they need to retrain and/or join UK recognised bodies or institutions in order to be able to enter the profession. There is also an ongoing "governmental" problem of visas and the need to keep constantly updated with UK laws, regulations and standards. As within HE, those attempting to enter the construction industry face visa problems as well as 'language' and nationality barriers.

Issues involving networking and nepotism also exist to varying degrees and at varying levels within differing countries. Many of the postgraduates stated that within the UK, there are "cultural" cross-generational UK families in the construction industry, and that these family associations can form very powerful barriers to those that do not "fit the mould". Therefore, there is a need to address the barrier of the current "lack of support networks." These findings conform to the previous two studies by the CITB (2002) and the Centre of Black and Ethnic Minority (2004).

With regards to good practice mechanisms that the focus group argued to be needed, Table 2 highlights the views that facilitate BME entry into the construction industry. The focus group argued for a need to introduce positive role models alongside monitoring processes (to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of good practices).

Table 2. Comparison of HE and Industry.

Higher Education (HE)	UK Industry
The perceived advantages and disadvantages of working within HE vs UK industry	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salary/less income</li> <li>• Job stability/security/CPD</li> <li>• Academic freedom/comfortable/flexible</li> <li>• Lack of real world construction experience</li> <li>• International recognition/status/image/prestige</li> <li>• Sharing of knowledge with others</li> <li>• Impact on others (unique influence)</li> <li>• Inclusiveness/diversity/cultural perceptions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salary incentives</li> <li>• Less stable and secure job, less CPD</li> <li>• Restrictions and driven by set targets</li> <li>• Transferable skills and real world on the job learning</li> <li>• Status/image/prestige in higher status positions only</li> <li>• Less sharing and fully responsible</li> <li>• Less impact upon others</li> <li>• Less cultural recognition and diversity</li> </ul>
The potential BME entry barriers of attempting to enter HE vs UK industry	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocational qualifications not effective</li> <li>• Lack of training to teach in HE</li> <li>• Language</li> <li>• Nationality/visas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Membership of professional institutions/qualifications</li> <li>• Lack of understanding the UK law, regulations, etc.</li> <li>• Language</li> <li>• Nationality/visas</li> <li>• Appearance/status/image</li> <li>• Lack of networking and support</li> <li>• Lack of work experience</li> </ul>
Potential good practice mechanisms for BME entry, retention and progression	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive role models</li> <li>• Monitoring systems and processes</li> <li>• Work placement opportunities</li> <li>• Building support networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anonymity in job applications</li> <li>• Agreements in implementing guidelines</li> </ul>

The facilitation of stretched "opportunities" for entry are also required, comprehensive of more "experiential learning" work placements (for longer periods of time) in order to facilitate the learning of "real world" knowledge and skills that can be directly beneficial to a smoother and less stressful entry into the profession. Together with these good practice mechanisms, were the ongoing concerns surrounding family based organisations and institutional nepotism. To assist in counter balancing this, it was recommended to introduce and expand BME "support networks."

In addition to introducing good practice mechanisms, there were also recommendations put forward regarding the modification of current construction industry policies and practices. The focus group outlined the benefit to BMEs of introducing total anonymity in job applications. This would remove any potential bias based upon deriving the ethnicity, religion or gender from application names as well as additional irrelevant details such as age and marital status. The focus group argued for the need to bring closer agreements on the implementation of guidelines surrounding issues of diversity and equality within the construction based industry.

These results were merely indicative, to identify any personal barriers, procedural or skill barriers, faced by the BMEs group. It is apparent that there is a mixture of all these

factors, and that there are more barriers to entering the industry than HE. These factors were then tested out by employees within the industry, to get a better insight of the reality and the barriers faced by workers.

### **Employees Surveys**

A total of 105 questionnaires were returned by employees who are already working in the industry. The aim of this survey was to identify the barriers faced in their entry and progression within the industry, and the factors that hinder their retention. Table 3 show the analysis of the sample profile, indicating that the largest ethnic groupings were White British (54.3%). The next largest ethnic groupings were Asian-Asian British Pakistani (17.1%). The joint third largest ethnic grouping consisted of British Indian and those from an "Other White Background" (mainly White Eastern European) both figures stand at 6.7%.

The results showed that, with regards to the factors that have influenced the decision to join the construction industry, family encouragement played significant role as, of the 39 respondents, 21 White British (54%) and 8 Asian-Asian British Pakistani (21%) indicated that they had received encouragement from family members. With regards to the remaining number of ethnic based respondents and/or percentages were too low to provide clear indicators of potential familial influence. When asked

about whether they did seek advice from career advisors in the school, college or university prior to their entry into the construction industry, only 10% of Asian-Asian British Pakistani did seek advice from career advisors compared to 25% White British. It is interesting to note that more than 40% of the respondents indicated that practice of open-up recruitment processes to a wider range of universities needs to be adopted to widen the recruitment pool of BME graduates within the construction industry. These findings seem to mirror those of the HR manager who argued that new recruitment process should be adopted to widen the recruitment of BME employees. When asked about potential barriers they encountered in the construction industry, of the 20 respondents indicated lack of proper qualifications and skills were the barriers to retention and progression, 10 were White British (50%) and 4 Asian-Asian British Pakistani (20%). The main findings from this survey are summarised by BME entry, retention and progression.

Table 3. Ethnic Breakdown of Employee Questionnaire Respondents.

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
No Response	3	2.9
Asian-Asian British Indian	7	6.7
Asian-Asian British Pakistani	18	17.1
Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi	1	1.0
Chinese/Other Ethnic Background	4	3.8
Other Asian Background	2	1.9
Black or Black British – African	3	2.9
White British	57	54.1
White Irish	2	1.9
Other White Background	7	6.7
Other Ethnic Background	1	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### **BME entry**

The overwhelming majority of BMEs joined the construction industry before finishing their degree. About 40% joined after they had finished their GCSEs while about one third joined after they finished their degree and all were under 30 years of age. BMEs are more likely to enter the industry after finishing their GCSEs whereas non-BMEs are more likely to join the industry after they have finished their degree.

BMEs have a tendency to join large companies while non-BMEs join small companies. The majority of BMEs are working in building services while non-BMEs work in building surveying. None of BMEs are working in construction surveying because none of them has completed a degree in this area. The average number of years of working in construction for BMEs equals 4 whereas for non-BMEs it is 11 years. This is because more than two thirds of BMEs have entered the profession at an earlier age.

It can therefore be concluded from these results that, BMEs who made through to the industry enter the industry market with lower qualification, and there seems to be a barrier to their retention to remain in the industry for a longer term. The results also verify the earlier findings highlighting the difficulties faced by the BME postgraduate researchers in entering the industry, even when they hold a higher degree.

A lack of role models and career advisors adversely affects both BME and non-BME entry levels. One third of BMEs and non-BMEs stated that language was a main barrier. Non-BMEs identified a lack of proper qualifications and skills. Racism and discrimination was reported by one third of the sample as being a major obstacle.

Family was found to be the strongest influence on their decision to join the profession. Web searches, teachers in schools and HE lecturers were shown to have an important role. Career advisors were important (when used). BMEs are more likely to be interested in receiving support from employment agencies compared to non-BMEs. GCSE and A level holders are more likely to approach employment agencies. BMEs are motivated by the chance to gain "real world experience." The diversity of the profession is rated as the most important motivator. Transferable skills were the second strongest motivator to join construction industry for BMEs, while it was rated as the seventh most important motivator for non-BMEs.

### **BME retention**

More than two third of employees regardless of their ethnicity are willing to stay in the industry although few (once in the industry) are willing to enter HE. Approximately 10% of BMEs stated that their welfare package is different from non-BMEs. The good news is that both BMEs and non-

BMEs revealed that they have been assigned the same amount of responsibilities within their companies.

### **BME progression**

A lack of opportunity to work within mainstream industry is the main barrier to career progression. About one fifth of BMEs stated that their career path is different from the majority of employees in the market place. A lack of support from senior management staff is the main barrier for career progression. There is no stability within construction firms, stated by more than three quarters of BME employees who have been working with their current employer. More than one third of BME employees have been assigned technical tasks rather than managerial tasks. Larger companies are more likely to develop training courses on equality and diversity compared to the majority of smaller companies. Larger companies tend to have written equality and diversity policies and better mechanisms for integration in the construction industry compared to the majority of smaller companies. Practical experience and work placements are the major factor that can affect integration and progression in the construction industry. A lack of role models was ranked as the second strongest area that needs addressing to aid graduate integration in the construction industry.

### **Directors' Interviews**

In order to triangulate these results, it was also deemed necessary to take on board what company directors' views are of entry and progression within the industry. Some selected directors of construction SMEs (small and medium enterprises) based in North West of UK were interviewed as part of this study. These directors are recognised for their vast experience and knowledge in the construction industry. Some of these views are captured in this section.

With regards to experience and qualifications within the construction industry, a BME male director expressed his view:

*I value experience much more than education and most of my friends who are in the construction industry are the same. In fact there are some who just disregard qualifications...The only time I would consider a degree in the construction industry is if I'm employing someone as an engineer or as a structural engineer.*

With regards to factors that might hinder career progression, another BME male director claimed that there is no clear-cut route for BMEs:

*It's very difficult to retain them because for someone who's of an ethnic minority, the way to progress isn't as clear. It's not a clear-cut route. For example, someone*

Vian Ahmed et al.

*who was say a white male, he can probably see his way clearly if he wanted to progress up a ladder. For someone who is an ethnic minority, it's not really quite as clear-cut as that.*

Another White male director argued that salary structure is not transparent within their company. However, salary is the important factor that can impact the retention of both ethnic as well as non-ethnic employees within the company:

*I would say the only thing that isn't transparent within our company is the, the salary structure...does cause a little bit of friction sometimes particularly when people think they're better paid than somebody else then perhaps they discover that they're not.*

As for BME views on not being able to network, which forms an obstacle for career progression, these views were mirrored by the White British director who argued that it is important to have support and mentoring networks in place in order to attract BMEs. He also admitted that construction is not doing enough as an industry, which needs to do more in terms of attracting Black and ethnic groups.

The above discussion and analysis have highlighted a number of issues and factors that still persist in the built environment and the construction industry, which continue

to hamper BMEs from entering and progressing. Particular barriers have been identified in this research, which are experienced by BME people or which they experience to a greater degree than the majority of population. The paper highlighted that lack of a tradition of employment within the built environment professions and of networks of contacts that facilitate employment continue to be major barriers that BME aspiring professional must overcome. The next section summarises the conclusions of this study and provides recommendations.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Establishing levels of BME representation within the built environment sector and professions continue to be difficult due to a lack of consistent data on the UK built environment workforce. The construction industry has increased rapidly over recent years, and the industry is projected to continue to grow, and the current under-representation of BME employees means that qualified BME people seeking employment in the built environment professions are being under-utilised. Taking into account that BME students are well represented in most of the built environment profession subjects at HE level, the main fault appears to be in the systems recruitment, entry, support, knowledge flows and balanced development processes thorough the built environment industries.

The image of the construction industry within UK society tends to be White male dominated environment. Stereotypes exist, to which there is a perception that construction based work consists of low-skilled and "dirty" work and that jobs within this sector are a poor career option. Within this climate, additional ethnic based cultural barriers exist that further lead to the under-representation of BMEs within the construction industry. Although there are some initial indications that BME familial influences are changing (at least with regards to the Asian-Asian British Pakistani ethnic cohort), there are indicators that this change is slow and not occurring within all BME groups (Worrall et al., 2007).

Language forms an additional barrier for a range of ethnic groupings, inclusive of White minority ethnics. Examples of direct racial discrimination were small while at the same time worrying findings of religious prejudice and intolerance exist that may possess accompanying racial associations and connotations. Also, there is a perception among some BME to take part of the uncongenial social life of the organisation and "adapt" to the cultural norms and values of the White British male majority in order to be accepted. Such a perception is unhealthy and undesirable process because may be progression within the industry is seen as unfairly governed by individual ability to get on with White male senior manager and fit in social condition and events.

Changes in the way staff are recruited into the construction industry, which have traditionally inhibited the ethnic diversification of a workforce as well as presenting the construction industry as an inclusive environment can make a difference. Support, in the form of mentoring, professional networking, smoothing and increasing knowledge flows, as well as work placement and experience schemes can also smooth progression within the construction industry. The image of the construction industry remains predominantly White and stereotype male, which to some degree reinforced discriminatory practice either deliberately or undeliberately, that might have put off those who consider a career in the built environment. Thus, there is an urgent need to improve the way the industry is perceived. The construction industry needs to improve their recruitment practices and policies and build on best practices aiming at making the industry recruitment processes more objectives. Further, the industry needs to develop mechanisms to support the development of the professionals, particularly the effectiveness of those mechanisms for increasing knowledge flows and supporting career development of those from non-traditional backgrounds.

The UK society is a mix of White and BME people and international students, that have come to continue their education in the built environment, who are comfortable with their ethnicity, identity and difference. With positive

and basic changes within the systems of retention and progression can accelerate removing barriers to access and progress for BME professional that are keen to make a contribution to construction and the built environment. At present, very little data exists regarding BMEs within the construction industry. There is a need for comprehensive data relating to BMEs within the construction industry in order to identify places of action at addressing under-representation, particularly in the areas where there are greatest needs for BME. Further research is required to monitor and assess whether this is a workable strategy for better, as well as more balanced development over the longer term. The findings of this research will also assist those who are seeking employments from developing countries to understand and consider such barriers, for integration and integrating others within the construction industry in the UK and beyond.

## REFERENCES

- Barthorpe, S., Duncan, R. and Miller, C. (2000). The pluralistic facets of culture and its impact on construction. *Property Management*, 18(5): 335–351.
- Business Sectors. (2006). <http://www.dti.gov.uk> (Accessed on 2 May 2007).
- Cabinet Office Strategy, Cabinet office/Strategy Unit and National statistics. (2002). Labour market. <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=271> (Accessed 2 May 2007).
- Centre for Ethnic Minority Studies. (2004). *The Under-representation of Black and Asian People in Construction*. London, UK: Royal Holloway, University of London.
- Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE). (2005). Minority ethnic representation in the built environment professions. <http://www.cabe.org.uk> (Accessed 2 May 2007).
- Construction Skills Network. (2007). 2007–2011 Construction Skills Network Labour Market Intelligence. [http://www.ConstructionSkills.net/pdf/research/outputs/NW\\_LMI.pdf](http://www.ConstructionSkills.net/pdf/research/outputs/NW_LMI.pdf) (Accessed 15 May 2007).
- Construction Industry Training Board (CITB). (2002). Employer needs skills survey. <http://www.citb.co.uk> (Accessed 12 October 2006).
- Construction Industry Training Board (CITB). (2003). Construction skills and foresight report. <http://www.citb.co.uk> (Accessed 4 May 2007).
- Dainty, A., Grugulis, I. and Langford, D. (2007). Understanding construction employment: The need for a fresh research agenda. *Personnel Review*, 36(4): 501–508.
- Department of Trade and Industry. (2003). <http://www.dti.gov.uk> (Accessed 10 May 2007).
- Ethnic Minority Employment Task Force (EMETF). (2004). Equality. Opportunity. Success. <http://www.emetaskforce.gov.uk/pdf/EMETF.pdf> (Accessed 2 May 2007).

- Gale, A.W. and Davidson, M.J. (Eds.). (2006). *Managing Diversity and Equality in construction: Initiatives and Practice*. London: Spon Press (Taylor & Francis).
- Latham, Sir M. (1994). *Constructing the team. Final Report of the Government/ Industry Review of Procurement and Contractual Arrangements in the UK Construction Industry*. London: HMSO.
- Lloyds TSB Business in Britain Survey. (2007). *Business in Britiansurvey*. [http://www.lloydstsbcorporatemarkets.com/media/pdfs/Economicresearch/BIReports/LTSBCM\\_BusinessInBritain\\_Jan07.pdf](http://www.lloydstsbcorporatemarkets.com/media/pdfs/Economicresearch/BIReports/LTSBCM_BusinessInBritain_Jan07.pdf) (Accessed 6 May 2007).
- North West Regional Intelligence Unit. (2002). *Employment Statistics*. <http://www.nwriu.co.uk/> (Accessed 4 April 2007).
- Office for National Statistics. (2003). *Ethnic group statistics: A guide for the collection and classification of ethnicity data*. [http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/ethnic\\_group\\_statistics/downloads/ethnic\\_group\\_statistics.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/ethnic_group_statistics/downloads/ethnic_group_statistics.pdf) (Accessed 14 April 2007).
- Regional Development Plan. (2004). *North West of England Objective 2 Programme*. [http://www.gos.gov.uk/497468/docs/470946/NWO2\\_programme\\_complement](http://www.gos.gov.uk/497468/docs/470946/NWO2_programme_complement) (Accessed 14 June 2006).
- Steele A. and Todd S. (2005). *The Future of the Black and Minority Ethnic Construction Sector in England*. *Construction Management and Economics*, 23: 1017–1023.
- Twomey, B. (2001). *Labour market Participation of ethnic groups*. *Labour Market Trends*, 109, 29–42.
- Worrall L., Ahmed V., Pathmeswaran R., Baldry D. and Abouen S. (2007). *Cultural issues affecting Black and Minority Ethnic entry, retention and progression in the UK construction industry*. *The International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations*, 7(5): 275–284.