

Employability and students from BME backgrounds (2013 / 2014)

Project Evaluation



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Employability and students from BME backgrounds

Project Evaluation

Executive Summary

This report describes the aims, method, outcomes, impact, lessons learned and recommendations of the Careers Centre and Staffordshire County Council pilot project to raise aspirations and employability of students from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds: *The Placement and Mentoring Programme* (PM Programme). The report will conclude that the Placement and Mentoring Programme should be offered to students in the 2014/15 academic year.

Key points

Successes and Impact

Ten Level 5 and 6 students were recruited in a competitive, but supported, application process, and placed into placements in SCC departments, with SCC mentors attached. As well as reporting increases in commercial awareness, business etiquette and confidence, students were also able to make the link between what they were learning on their courses, and how it is used in the professional world of work. In addition, they made useful contacts through their mentors and department managers.

Two students have opted to continue their placement experience with SCC beyond the life of this pilot project, and others have used their experience positively in applications for postgraduate study and graduate level work.

There were also a number of additional outcomes generated by the project including increased use of the Careers Centre, a student Society-led careers event, and a number of internal and external relationships developed and strengthened.

Feedback

Participating students were given the opportunity to provide feedback on their experience of the project, and its potential continuation. All feedback about the added value of the project received from students was very positive and constructive, indicating that it should continue in the next academic year.

“Being a part of the Placement and Mentoring Programme and Open Door scheme is something I would recommend to all students who have the opportunity to do so, and if given the chance to, I would definitely do it again.”

“I believe this definitely made my application more attractive to the Law Schools, subsequently being offered a place by all 3 of my choices. The scheme without a doubt opens doors for you.”

“The advice given about completing the application form was so useful. I could really see how my first attempt didn’t sell my abilities. I really needed the kick!”

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1. Introduction

Staffordshire University Careers Centre and Staffordshire County Council (SCC) have worked together across the 2013/14 academic year to improve outcomes for Staffordshire University students from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds. We have done this by developing a pilot 'Placement and Mentoring Programme' (PM Programme) using an existing SCC 12-week placement scheme, [Open Door](#), and facilitating an additional element of a mentor from within SCC. This has provided 10 students with a unique opportunity to develop employability skills and practical experience which will hopefully enhance their prospects for progression after graduation. This report will outline our reason for creating the pilot, will evaluate its achievements, summarise lessons learned, and make recommendations for the continuation of the project in the 2014/15 academic year.

1.1 Rationale

The 2011 Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey found that overall, students from BME backgrounds are not faring as well as their White counterparts in the graduate labour market. Unfortunately, the statistics for Staffordshire University graduate destinations mirror the national view. Statistics from the 2012 DLHE have shown a continuation in these trends in terms of unemployment with seven per cent more Asian graduates and 13 per cent more Black graduates out of work six months after graduation.

Black and minority ethnic (BME) students' participation in higher education: improving retention and success, a Higher Education Academy review of research (Singh, 2011) cited Cabinet Office research from 2003 which found that ethnic minorities in the UK faced a "chronic ethnic penalty" in the labour market. Staffordshire University Careers Centre wishes to ensure as much as possible that its BME students graduate equipped with confident employability skills that will reduce the effect of any perceived "ethnic penalty".

As such, the University Careers Centre Business Plan 2013, in support of the University Key Performance Indicator to improve graduate destinations statistics, and in line with the University's Equality and Diversity strategy: Equality Objective 9: *Improve equality of student outcomes*, includes a commitment to investigate and address equality issues like these. This is a view shared by Staffordshire County Council with its commitment to increasing the diversity profile of its own workforce and to developing the economic and wellbeing prospects of Staffordshire residents.

1.2 The Student Voice

The Careers Centre presented this rationale to a focus group of BME students who were unaware of, and very concerned by the statistics. They welcomed the idea of targeted support to improve their experience.

Careers Centre research into the issue of ethnicity and progression into employment pointed towards work experience and positive role models and mentors as being successful in raising aspirations in BME students: “One strategy for improving BME attainment and success that is most evident across the sector is the use of different forms of mentoring and the use of role models” (Singh, 2011). Feedback from a Staffordshire University graduate ([Appendix 1](#)) also indicated that some work on this issue would be beneficial.

2. Project Definition

2.1 Project Aim

To positively address disparities between the graduate destinations of students from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds and the graduate destinations of White students, through activities intended to raise aspirations and provide access to real work experience.

2.2 Project Objectives

The following activities were carried out and supported in order to address the aim:

- A mentor/placement programme in partnership with Staffordshire County Council (via the Open Door Scheme) for 10 Level 5 & 6 students.
- A student-led careers event with a programme of inspirational speakers, promoted through Students’ Union Forums and Societies, open to all students.

3. Methodology

3.1 Project Management

The pilot was co-ordinated by the Careers Centre, and involved three strands of activity:

Increasing Understanding

Research into the issue was carried out, and the student and graduate voice was captured through focus groups.

Raising Awareness

BME students needed to be made aware of the issue in a positive manner, and also be made aware of the opportunities open to them through the University and Students’ Union.

Inspiring Progression

Mentoring, work placements and inspirational speakers were utilised to support students to realise their potential.

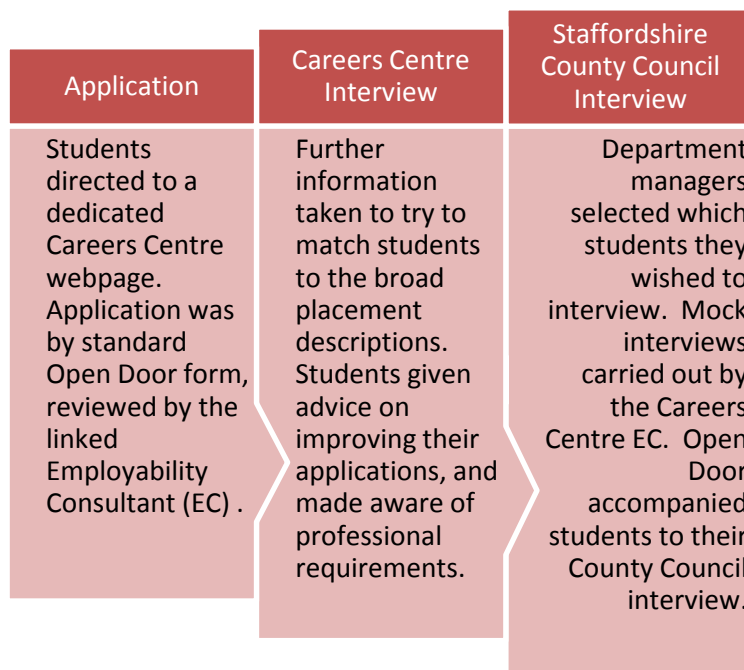
The project was managed by Clare Worrall-Hill, a Careers Centre Employability Consultant who is an accredited PRINCE 2 Project Manager. Using elements of PRINCE2¹ methodology ensured synergy and identified and minimised risk to the project. The project development was supported by a task group whose members were Alison Hunt, Equality and Diversity Officer; Dayo Odubonojo, Students' Union Officer; Lindsey Tate, Student Activities Coordinator, Students' Union; Robinay Johns, Multicultural Forum Chair and Stephanie Scott, African Caribbean Society Chair.

3.2 Marketing

The Placement and Mentoring Programme was advertised to students via the Careers Centre's social media channels, and with emails to academic award leaders who promoted it to students. A Students' Union Officer also generated a lot of interest through regular Tweets. [Flyers and posters](#) were created and displayed in prominent sites across campuses.

3.3 Recruitment and Selection

Figure 1: The recruitment and selection process used for the PM Programme



3.4 Mentors

SCC carried out a call for mentors across all of their departments. Although the emphasis for the project was on BME, all members of staff were invited to get involved.

The linked EC led a briefing session to five interested members of staff in preparation for their involvement as mentors.

¹ Projects in Controlled Environments

3.5 Support

The students were informed about the departmental projects they would be working with and attendance patterns and start dates were agreed.

Students received continued support from Open Door with reviews at 10 weeks, and from the Careers Centre as a point of contact and for assistance with related issues such as form filling and disability support. For example, a disabled student could not reach his placement location on public transport. The Careers Centre worked with the Student Enabling Centre and Involved at the Students' Union to match fund and arrange taxi travel for the duration of the placement.

[Involved](#) at the Students' Union, also confirmed that the placements on the whole could be counted as volunteering activity, and participating students could claim for their travel expenses under the scheme, depending on their individual circumstances.

This increased contact encouraged students to access the Careers Centre for assistance with other career-related issues. Also, students who applied but were not selected due to no placement match being made, or students who registered interest but did not submit an application were sent information about appropriate initiatives and opportunities throughout the life of the project, for example, the initiatives run by organisations like Windsor Fellowship contained in the CV Boosters hand-out. This resulted in increased activity for the Careers Centre in terms of e-guidance, with some students asking questions due to their initial contact with the EC.

The Careers Centre created a number of documents to support the students and mentors through the life of the project:

- [Programme Information sheet](#)
- [Getting the Most from your Placement](#)
- [CV Boosters](#) (provided to all students who expressed an interest – with the intention that those who were not selected were provided with ideas for alternative activities which would boost their employability)
- [Mentee Guide](#)
- [Mentor Guide](#)

4. Outputs and Outcomes

The pilot project activities generated the following outcomes and outputs

4.1 Direct Outcomes

Placements

There were **22** expressions of interest in the PM Programme. Of these, **19** students met the eligibility criteria and **18** application forms were submitted. Five students withdrew their applications after deciding

the placements were not suitable for them, or because they wanted placements in subjects SCC was unable to access e.g. engineering.

Table 1 shows the degree subject and level of the 10 successful students and which departments they worked in:

| Degree subject | Level | SCC department |
|--|-------|---|
| Law | 6 | Legal |
| Law | 6 | Information Governance |
| Law | 5 | Information Governance |
| Law | 6 | Executive Business Support |
| Accountancy and Finance | 6 | Information Governance |
| Networking | 5 | IT |
| International Business Management | 5 | Economic Planning and Development |
| Social Welfare Law Policy and Practice | 5 | Customer Services |
| Psychology | 6 | Community Wellbeing |
| Psychology and Counselling | 6 | A suitable placement could not be found before the end of the pilot |

Of the above students:

- Five students have successfully completed their full 12 week placements.
- Two of these five requested for their placements to be extended and will also be returning to the departments in the new academic year. One of these students is returning to Level 6, and the other is starting the Legal Practice Course (LPC) at Staffordshire University Law School.
- One student completed a requested six week shadowing opportunity and now wishes to have a more 'hands on' placement for six weeks.
- One student was not selected for the placement originally applied for and Open Door was seeking an alternative placement. They were not able to establish an alternative placement before the end of the pilot.
- Two students requested changes of placement after finding the original placement unsuitable. One started a placement, but was offered a more degree specific placement a couple of weeks in.
- Of these three, one student was invited to an interview with a different department but declined it as it coincided with the start of the assessment period; Open Door are seeking an alternative placement for another, and the third student has had a placement offer withdrawn (see *Issues* below).

“I am working in the Information Governance Unit. The role that I am undertaking is research for the County Council. I have been tasked to do two projects. One project consist of research and at the end of the research produce a report to be placed on the Staffordshire County Council website about what information the Council can give people and what information they don’t hold, also the difference between Councils such as Borough and County. The second project also consists of research about certain litigation, about why certain information is withheld and produce a report of what information we can give to the public by the Council.”

Level 5 Law student, Staffordshire University

“My role in Economic Planning is to undertake tasks to the best of my ability and to be committed to the objectives of the team. The work I have been involved in includes looking at government policies, research begs practice, attending meetings, and use of Outlook and basic Microsoft Office programmes.”

Level 6 International Business Management student, Staffordshire University

“My duties at Staffordshire County Council Legal Department Property Team include research tasks, administration tasks and attending meetings to aid my understanding of the various types of work they are involved in.”

Level 6 Law student, Staffordshire University

Mentoring

Eight of the placed students were linked with mentors (one student did not wish to be mentored). Mentors were all SCC employees from varied ethnic backgrounds working at management level across different departments.

Where mentors were not working in roles directly related to the students’ career aims, they were able to facilitate meetings with managers working in more appropriate roles.

The mentoring relationship was set up to be flexible with focus and frequency of contact to be agreed between the mentor and mentee.

Successes and Impact

A Level 5 Law student placed with Information Governance was invited to extend her 12 week placement a further six weeks. She will also be returning to the department to continue her experience in the 2014/15 academic year.

A Level 6 Law student placed within the legal department has been invited to continue for two days a week throughout the summer and throughout her LPC with Staffordshire University.

"I'm still at the Council doing 2 days a week and it's going really well; I feel like I'm getting real hands on experience."

Level 6 Law student, Staffordshire University

A disabled student previously lacking some confidence has requested a further placement where he can be more involved in the work that is being carried out.

A Law student aiming for a career as a Barrister was able, through Careers Centre support, to draw on her experience at SCC in her successful applications to law schools for the Bar Practice Training Course (BPTC). She attributes this success to the experience she gained on the Placement and Mentoring Programme:

"Being a part of the Placement and Mentoring Programme and Open Door scheme is something I would recommend to all students who have the opportunity to do so, and if given the chance to, I would definitely do it again. The placement gave me the opportunity to put my academic skills to practice in the 'real world'. It gives you an insight into what life will be like after University and helps you to determine whether this is an environment you'd be suited to. Furthermore, this experience helped give me an advantage on my BPTC applications as I was able to illustrate how I had used the legal skills learned at University in a practical way. I believe this definitely made my application more attractive to the Law Schools, subsequently being offered a place by all 3 of my choices. The scheme without a doubt opens doors for you."

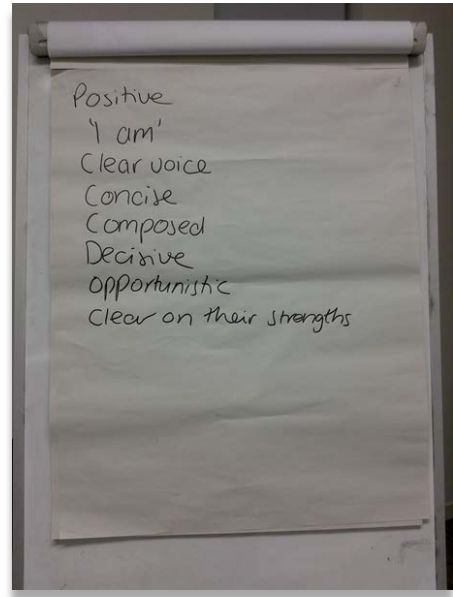
Level 6 Law student, Staffordshire University

Personal Development session

Kate Young, a Personal Development Coach recommended by SCC, was commissioned by the Careers Centre to create a bespoke session for the PM Programme students. This consisted of a 2 hour session to address barriers to confidence and introduce the students to positive thinking techniques. The attending students were also offered a complimentary hour-long individual coaching session with Kate. Eight students attended the session and five of these booked an individual appointment with Kate.



Students attending the Personal Development session



Student views on confident attributes

Some feedback from the attending students:

“I found this really interesting and engaging, the information was easy to understand and very applicable to my life.”

“Was very insightful.”

“Overall a very useful and organised session.”

Confidence

PM Programme students were asked to complete an adaptation of *Catching Confidence* (NIACE, 2004)² at the start and end of their placement. Three students completed the first measure, and two students returned the second measure after their placement. Although the returned data are minimal, they show that by self-assessment,

² This is a simple tool that allows a measure of confidence to be taken in increments.
<http://shop.niace.org.uk/catching-confidence.html> (free download)

the students felt that their confidence increased by 27 and 28 points in total across all of the presented scenarios, taking them from 'confident' to 'very confident'. The charts in [Appendix 2](#) illustrate these increases in detail.

The most marked increases in confidence with a rise of 4 points between measures one and two were for the following statements:

- I am confident I can learn from this programme
- I am confident that I have valuable skills to offer
- I am confident when meeting new people
- I am confident when speaking with an unfamiliar person
- I am confident when speaking in a group
- I am confident when promoting my ability to others in writing
- I am confident when verbally promoting my ability
- I am confident in challenging situations
- I am confident in organising myself and my affairs

Issues

One student reported that she was unhappy in her placement. SCC is following up on the nature of her discontent with the student and with the department she was placed with, and Open Door is seeking an alternative placement for her.

One student who had started a placement was given the opportunity of a newly established placement which was directly related to her chosen career aim. However, despite considerable support offered and provided by the Careers Centre, SCC and the placement provider the placement had to be withdrawn due to a consistent lack of communication from the student through the security checking procedure. The Careers Centre is working with the student to identify her barriers in this area.

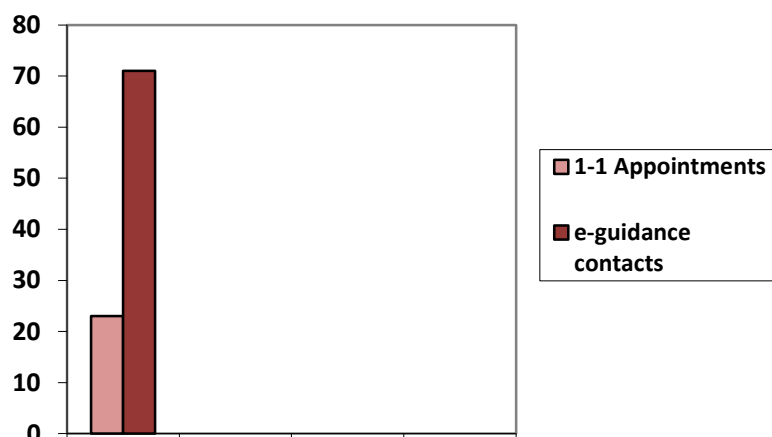
The numbers of SCC staff wishing to mentor a student was disappointing. Four managers committed to be mentors, with three of these taking two or three mentees each. Encouragingly, this did not detract from the experience for either the mentor or the mentee (see *Feedback*).

4.2 Additional Outcomes

Use of the Careers Centre

Through the life of the pilot project, increased interactions were generated between interested and participating students and the Careers Centre. Table 2 illustrates this.

Table 2: Careers Centre contact generated through the PM Programme



The African-Caribbean Society Careers Network

Through her involvement with the working group for the PM Programme project, the Chair of the ACS agreed to lead her society in planning and delivering a student-led careers networking event. ACS did this with support from the Careers Centre, Students' Union, the Equality and Diversity team and funding from Be Inspired at Staffordshire University.

The event on 27th February 2014 started with an afternoon CV and networking session for ACS members led by the Careers Centre and ended with an evening of inspirational speeches and networking, open to all students, with

- David Hyner (motivational speaker)
- Snowdon Reid (Network for Black Professionals)
- Winnie Oudemans (Barclays)
- Kieran Carty (4 Children, and Staffordshire University Alumnus).

The Careers Centre made a presentation on the Placement and Mentoring Programme.

Forty-five students attended and networked with the attending speakers in the 'marketplace' following the speeches.



Students attending the ACS Careers Network event marketplace

Networking

- The Careers Centre EC has refreshed links between Staffordshire County Council and the Staffordshire University's Law School with senior and departmental managers offering to deliver talks to law students.
- Following the ACS event, the linked Careers Centre EC connected Snowdon Reid of the NBP with Rashida Gilkes, Equality and Communities Lead at SCC.
- An Open Door placement has commenced with the Careers Centre.

Improved paperwork

- The Open Door service has adapted the [Getting the Most from your Placement](#) for use with its general clients.
- SCC Health and Safety officer has provided updates for Staffordshire University's Placement Team H&S form

5. Feedback

Feedback Focus Group

The Careers Centre EC carried out a group feedback focus group with participating students to gather opinions about the continuation of the project for a new cohort in the next academic year. All students agreed that participation on the PM Programme had been of benefit to them, and that it should continue. Further discussion took place around the various elements of the project from marketing to support, and which elements should be kept, changed or discarded. One student said:

"The advice given about completing the application form was so useful. I could really see how my first attempt didn't sell my abilities. I really needed the kick!"

Level 6 Law student, Staffordshire University

Further feedback gathered during the activities has been used to formulate some of the recommendations for how this project might be delivered going forward. These will be presented at the end of this report.



Students participating in a focus group activity



Focus group feedback

Qualtrix feedback

Participating students were asked to complete a Qualtrix form with further questions on their placement and mentoring experience. Four students responded:

Question: What has been the most beneficial or interesting aspect of your placement so far?

"Getting to meet different types of people and engaging with them in a working environment."

"Meeting different people, networking and having a mentor."

"I am looking forward to all of the new things I'll learn, the skills and information I will gain."

"Starting the placement I had limited knowledge of the type of work the council did, but working there I am able to witness first-hand the magnitude of the projects they are involved in and the direct impact it can have on individuals. I attended a meeting which was about a £50 million project within the Staffordshire area concerning a well-known company. It was beneficial because it furthered my understanding of the powers which the council has, and it highlighted how the resources I use at university for my assignments are the same resources which are being used by the professionals."

Question: How do you think the placement will help you in your future career?

“Social skills in the workplace. Knowing what an office workplace atmosphere is like. Communication skills.”

“I think it will guide me into what I want to do as my future career. It will also give me an insight of what my future job in an office might involve.”

“It will help me directly as there are people of my hopeful future career that I will have the opportunity to shadow therefore I will see at first hand exactly what the job entails and the skills that I will need.”

“I think it will increase my business acumen in particular my commercial awareness, and it will also help me to apply my knowledge of the law to practical situations in order to provide answers to questions and solutions to problems. It will also provide me with more practical experience in an area which I want to work in, as often one of the biggest hurdles is not finding or securing a placement, but being able to arrive on time and being able to make the adjustment between being at university and being a professional in an office environment. Furthermore I think it will give me the confidence to know I am capable as securing a placement is no easy challenge and by being able to secure one placement, provides me with the confidence that I can secure another in a different area if I wanted to.”

Question: How has the mentor relationship contributed to your placement experience?

“The mentor relationship made the placement experience less intimidating. By getting to know the mentor who is also the line manager, it makes it easier for the mentee to ask questions without being afraid or intimidated by how the mentor might respond.”

“It has been great. It has been the most beneficial. My mentor has been a great help and aid to help me in progressing further.”

“It helps you enjoy the placement more knowing you have someone who is specifically there to help. The first few weeks of a placement can make you extremely nervous particularly if you have never had an office based job, so knowing there is someone who is there to support you is extremely reassuring.

Question: If you were going to recommend the Placement and Mentoring Programme to someone, what would you say to encourage them to apply?

“I would state that it is an opportunity to learn and gain experience of Staffordshire County Council. They will learn valuable information about different types of Councils and how they work.”

“It will benefit your future career and may set you up with contacts to use in the future and a great work experience out of university that will look great on your CV.”

“It will help you gain further prospects, an edge above others in the eyes of future employers. It’s reliable and relevant as it’s through the uni and as it’s through the uni the people are very helpful and caring. Overall it will be worth it and beneficial.”

“It’s an opportunity that is both insightful and flexible. It can work around your university commitments and provide you with the chance to secure a job all whilst having the support of the Careers Centre.

Applying for a placement is not just about obtaining some work experience; it is about developing your knowledge on how to write a first class application. It is about applying your knowledge to practical situations, and providing you with the confidence to be the best in your chosen area!”

Question: Any other comments?

“I found this process extremely useful and have felt thoroughly supported throughout the process.”

6. Lessons learned and Recommendations

Various lessons learned, and resulting recommendations can be identified from the pilot project. Implementing these improvements in any future delivery should result in a more efficient structure which will benefit the operational partnership team, students and mentors.

Lesson learned

Although the project was planned to set up placements and mentors for a relatively small number of students (10), the pilot was quite labour intensive for both the Careers Centre EC and the County Council Open Door team.

Where students requested a change of placement, it was not possible to find alternative placements within the life of the pilot project.

Recommendation:

Going forward, the project should be made available for a maximum of 10 students. This is not necessarily a target – just an aim. It will not be considered a project failure if only 5 placements could be established and filled. Open Door will also use their external partners to try to agree suitable placement opportunities.

Lesson learned

A lot of recruitment seemed to happen as a result of ‘word of mouth’ and social media marketing – the Students’ Union doing a lot of this.

Recommendation

Maximise on the good relationship developed with the SU in the planning of this project and invite them to be involved again in the next recruitment.

Lesson learned

The placement finding and matching process was not very streamlined as Open Door needed an idea of what kind of placements the students would like, and the students found it difficult to express interest in placements without having a clear idea of the work area or what would be involved.

Recommendation

Open Door will source specific placements that can be advertised to students with clearer details about what will be expected of them, so that students know exactly what they are applying for.

Open Door will adapt their application form to ask for more specific information about student expectations and skills.

Change the recruitment model to mirror another SCC programme: 'V-Talent'. The Open Door lead will meet with the students prior to selection by a placement supervisor

This will reduce the amount of EC time needed for reviewing applications and trying to make matches to placements.

Lesson learned

The staggered start dates of placements created an additional workload for the Careers Centre EC and for the Open Door team.

Recommendation:

Placement and mentor sourcing, marketing and recruitment to take place Sept-Dec 2014. Students to start placements in January 2015 as near the same time as possible. This will also allow for easier monitoring of placement milestones for example the four-week and 10 week reviews.

Lesson learned

- The students thought that not all of the information handouts, were necessary and would have preferred to see the information on a webpage.

Recommendation:

Streamline the information that students receive in the marketing, application, and placement stage. Create a more informative Careers Centre webpage for the recruitment and project information.

Lesson learned

Despite individual briefings by the Careers Centre EC, and a detailed mentee guide, some mentors felt that the students were relying on them to lead the relationship too much and did not fully appreciate professional etiquette for example, texting with short notice to arrange an absence.

Recommendation

A mentor / mentee briefing to take place prior to placement start (perhaps simultaneously, followed by quick introduction and swapping of contact details to arrange first meeting). The mentee briefing will ensure that students fully understand their equal responsibility in the relationship.

Lesson learned

It proved difficult to encourage enough SCC staff to get involved with the project as mentors.

Recommendation

Previous placement students will be asked if they will act as mentors to new students coming onto the programme.

Mentors can also be sourced from outside of SCC where necessary, for example from Open Door's external partners and through the Careers Centre Careers Alumni Network.

7. Conclusion

This report has presented a successful and valuable pilot project from the points of view of the Careers Centre EC, Staffordshire County Council, and most importantly the participating students. The pilot project achieved its aims through the activity strands of *Increasing Understanding*, *Raising Awareness* and *Inspiring Progression*. It is the main recommendation of this report that the project continues in the 2014/2015 academic year with the streamlining and improvements generated by lessons learned from the pilot project.

The combined elements of the placement and mentoring made for a more valuable experience for the students. The pre-entry support in terms of application form reviews and mock interviews were identified by the students as being particularly helpful. Overall participation in the project raised the confidence of the students, has taught them professional and social skills for the world of work, and has helped them make the link between what they learn at university and what will be required of them in employment.

8. Dissemination and Next Steps

The following dissemination activities have already taken place:

- Publicity of project success across Staffordshire University RSS feed: the ACS Careers Network Event
- AGCAS webinar event for careers advisers: presentation of successes of project and sharing of good practice and ideas around improving outcomes for BME students from different universities. Careers advisers from Liverpool John Moores, MMU, Birmingham, Birmingham City, Derby and Canterbury Universities participated and provided good feedback:

“I found [the webinar] really informative and encouraging – in terms of the work you have done with BME students. I think that there are lessons for all of us here.”

The following dissemination activities are planned to take place across July 2014.

- Circulation of report to Senior Management Team at Staffordshire University and SCC
- Circulation to Staffordshire University Equality and Diversity Team, and to Dr. Mike Hamlyn, Director of Academic Enhancement.
- Publicity of whole project success across Staffordshire University via RSS feed, news page, E&D page, Students' Union and social media.
- Publicity via Staffordshire County Council's channels
- Explore the possibility of a local press release.

For further information please contact:

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Former student opinion on the statistics related to BME student destinations.

Thank you for inviting me to voice my opinion on this topic. I will include some brief points to consider, but will be more than happy to elaborate on any points should you need it. I feel it would be worth giving my experience in both Universities that I went to as some of the experiences were different. I will also give some insight to the experiences I have encountered during work as well.

The stats and research:

Although I am not surprised by these statistics, it is obviously quite sad. I would be interested to know whether the employment statistics were before or after an interview any reasons they were turned down from jobs they applied for. It must be said that the figures might be misleading nationally because there are some areas where there are not many BME graduates living, so it might be that the gap is smaller than we think. For example you will get more BME's living in the bigger cities (e.g. Birmingham, London, Manchester), but perhaps not as many living in places like Sheffield, Chester, Swindon.

Some reasons why –

First generation university students:

For many BME graduates, they will have been the first person in their family to have gone to university which may mean they have no one passing on their experience and guidance to them. A knock on effect is that their family do not value education as high as our counterparts, therefore they are not sure what they can achieve with their new qualification.

Lack of Funds:

Most BME graduates will not have the financial support of their family, and often have to take up secondary positions during their study. Although this is work experience, most of the jobs they will get will not be related to their industry, while others who are financially backed will be able to afford relevant internships and gain vital experience.

Negative perceptions:

Some graduates might see negative stats and assume they are fighting a lost cause in regards to a successful career. Obviously this is counterproductive, however research studies and the media have a powerful influence on perceptions and I am sure this will be a factor. The negative perception might also come from their parents and peers who still believe that there are little or no opportunities for BME people. As many studies will demonstrate parents and peers can be the single biggest influence on perceptions, in several different capacities.

Westernised testing methods:

Most assessment methods are coursework or exam based which are traditionally westernised methods of testing. Practical/applied exams take place in some institutions but perhaps not enough. I feel that more applied assessments would help BME's this approach especially as we tend to be more involved with practical activities in our everyday life.

Type of degree taken:

It would be interesting to see what degrees most BME graduates have taken and what jobs they might be applying for. Most of my friends from that are BME tend to graduate with creative/arts degrees, however there is a vast shortage of jobs, and competition is fierce when one comes up. Could we be doing more to educate BME's and organisations about alternative careers in health, PR etc?

My experiences:

Unfortunately discrimination is still very much an issue in the workplace, and not just racial but in regards to gender, orientation and religion. In my experience I have heard reasons such as 'women can't deal with the pressure like men', 'I don't want to give her Sundays off so I won't be taking her on', and 'they won't be a good team fit, we like to go out drinking, they don't look like they would enjoy that', as reasons for not hiring someone. I have also witnessed common attitude in one past position, whereby people from an African background were ridiculed because they were working in a Supported Housing industry, were doing front line work, or even had unusual names. This not only causes a barrier in getting the job in the first place, but definitely makes you feel unwelcome if you do get the chance. Further during my MSc, there was a clear bias towards a particular type of person on the course. Despite having some of the best grades in the class, being the only person not to fail any of the modules, and asking about a further career in Sport Psychology several times, I was often fobbed off with 'have you looked at the website' or 'I'm not sure if you can do it'. In comparison, someone who was of the same background as the course leader was pursued several times about a supervised experience, given additional help on her work that others weren't offered, and also presented with job opportunities, that again others were not offered. All of this despite her grades, and attendance being worse than mine. This is only my experience, but seeing it from both sides helps me to understand some of the reasons why the stats might be as they are.

What can be done?

Following my earlier points, mentors could be used to better effect. Sometimes those who are from a BME who are successful are not prepared to go back and help those who are struggling to make their way. I believe their experience should be shared more. This would also reduce the impact negative perceptions of parents and peers have, especially as a significant other's opinion could negate this negative perception. BME graduates could also be made more aware of funding that is available. There are Bursaries and grants that they might sometime not be aware of. However many student's parents earn too much to be eligible for this but not enough to help their child with finances. This can also be an issue. Lastly, a look into the assessments used in universities would be beneficial, especially making sure that there is a consideration for assessments outside of the traditional coursework and exams (i.e. practical tasks).

All of the above are possible factors of the lack of employed BME graduates; however the question must be asked whether sometimes these factors are used as excuses not to try in the first place. There can be a tendency to give up before even trying, which is something that needs to be challenged. This is of course quite a multifaceted and complex debate that will need much investigation.

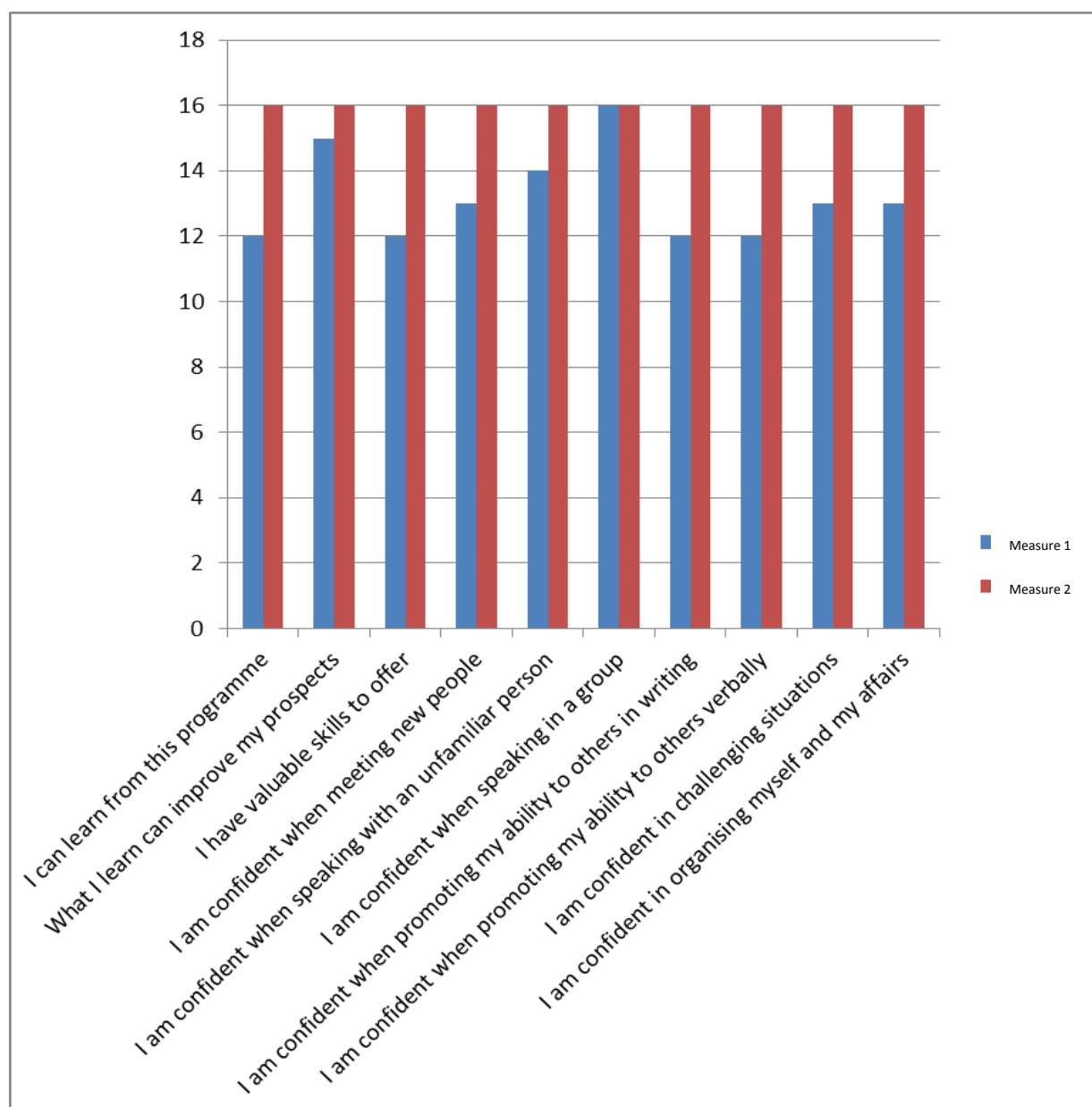
Appendix 2

Catching Confidence

The students were asked to self –assess their confidence levels before starting their placement, and again towards the end of their placement. They were asked to rate their confidence levels in different situations and venues (at university, at events, at work / out and about, at home) by giving scores to a number of confidence related statements, using the following scoring key:

Highly confident [4], Confident [3], Not confident [2], Very low confidence [1]

Respondent 1



Respondant 2

