The STUC is Scotland’s trade union centre. Its purpose is to co-ordinate, develop and articulate the views and policies of the trade union movement in Scotland; reflecting the aspirations of trade unionists as workers and citizens.

The STUC represents over 590,000 working people and their families throughout Scotland. It speaks for trade union members in and out of work, in the community and in the workplace. Our affiliated organisations have interests in all sectors of the economy and our representative structures are constructed to take account of the specific views of women members, young members, Black/Minority Ethnic (BME) members, LGBT members, and members with a disability, as well as retired and unemployed workers.

Introduction

The STUC Black Workers’ Committee and Conference is a self organising equality structure within the trade union movement in Scotland. The STUC Black Workers’ Conference is held annually and brings together workers from across Scotland, from all sectors of the economy. This policy making conference decides the priorities of the STUC Black Workers’ Committee, and nominates representatives to sit on the General Council of the STUC.

Through the Black Workers Conference and the insight of the Black Workers’ Committee the STUC has identified a number of ongoing concerns about how the labour market currently functions for BME workers. These include, but are not limited to, problems that BME people face in accessing employment and the concentration of Black Workers in the lower grades of organisations.

Accessing Employment

Educational outcomes for BME young people are very high in Scotland and statistics show that certain ethnic groups are more likely to perform better than White Scottish young people in education and Asian, African and Mixed Race and other BME groups are more likely to be in further and higher education. However, this academic excellence does not necessarily transform itself into labour market success, which suggests an inherent unfairness in the system for BME workers.

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1 Table9: Destinations by Ethnicity
http://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/954104/SDS%20National%20SLDR%202012-13%20Initial%20Report.pdf
While it is undoubtedly the case that the reason for these negative outcomes can vary, in many circumstances the BME worker can find themselves facing racism in recruitment practices or unconscious bias. Unconscious bias is where recruiters are more drawn to candidates that they see as similar to themselves. Unconscious bias therefore reflects the element of subjectivity in recruitment processes and means that BME candidates can only advance where they are an exceptional candidate and the clear favourite, and where this isn’t the case they often find themselves in second place with little explanation as to why. Unconscious bias has a similar outcome as racism as it can shut BME workers out of job roles but without the recruiter holding an active ill intent. Ultimately, however, both racism and unconscious bias have a serious effect on the life chances of BME workers and have a significant negative impact on the Scottish economy where the skills and talents of BME workers are underutilised.

The routes into employment for BME workers are more limited than for the wider White Scottish population. BME people continue to be underrepresented on the apprenticeship programme and it is still of concern that data on the ethnicity of apprentices in Scotland is not routinely reported by Skills Development Scotland. The equality concerns around apprenticeships tend to focus exclusively on age and gender, despite serious problems with regard to disability and race being easily identifiable. A recent study by the Equality and Human Rights Commission identified that only 2% of apprentices are from a BME background while 4% of the 16-24 population are BME2.

Intelligence from trade unions suggests that where BME apprentices do enter organisations their experience can be less positive, with some trade unions reporting that BME apprentices are less likely to complete their apprenticeship or are less likely to be kept on by the company on completion of their apprenticeship than their White Scottish counterparts. Given the lack of robust data generally about the destinations of apprentices in Scotland and an absence of ethnicity related data in this area it is difficult to quantify the scale of the problem. However, in the absence of data it is even more important to take these kinds of insights seriously as they provide one of the few sources of information on the fortunes of young BME workers.

Concentration in Lower Grades

A clear issue with regard to BME employment that has been identified by trade unions is the concentration of BME workers in lower grades. Again the reasons are complex but there seems to be a clear element of unconscious bias and racism associated with this. It is also worrying that this is a clearly identifiable trend within the public sector.

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Over the past year the STUC has been running a mentoring project within Further and Higher Education in Scotland for BME staff members, to support them to move into more senior positions. The purpose of this scheme is similar to that being run at NHS Lothian, and is designed to support through training and peer mentoring the advancement of BME staff. Core to the success of such schemes, however, is a parallel focus on institutional barriers to advancement and the recognition that within the organisation BME workers are over-represented in the lower grades. Part of the work of the STUC’s project is to raise awareness of the issue of unconscious bias and offer training in this too range of managers and HR officials.

The STUC Black Workers’ Committee has also, with the support of GMB Scotland and Scottish Union Learning, been running ‘Moving into Management’ courses for BME workers in Scotland. The committee has organised a series of 4 courses that have provide 62 learning places to Black Workers across Scotland. These courses have not only focused on providing skills for advancement within the workplace but have also encouraged peer to peer mentoring that allows the outcomes of the course to be pursued even when the course is finished. A key element to the training was the specific focus on racism, and the direct support that was offered around building networks and resilience.

To date the course has proved very popular, with places on the most recent course being filled in a matter of days. They have also evaluated very well, with many participants finding the learning extremely valuable. From the feedback received we have also heard specific examples of workers gaining promotion as a result of the course and the skills gained from the learning.

The experience of these two schemes underlines the value of a well-designed mentoring and training scheme, which can be delivered on a relatively modest budget. It also suggests how much can be achieved if focus is placed on this issue by institutions and senior management.

Other Issues

Certain constructs within the labour market, which are negative practices for all workers, also have a disproportionate effect on Black Workers. For example the use of unpaid internships, can add an additional barrier to employment which can work against ethnic minority young people, as the offer of an unpaid internship can be reliant on ‘who you know’. It can also be more difficult for poorer young people to access these opportunities which may also disproportionately affect BME workers.

Equally insecure work, zero hours contracts, agency work and fixed term contracts also reduce the quality of work, and are often used in the sectors and the grades where BME workers are more prevalent. This kind of insecure employment also usually suggests low pay and currently disproportionately more BME workers live in poverty in Scotland.
Despite the presence of strong equality laws, challenging discriminatory practices in the workplace has become more difficult with the introduction of tribunal fees. There is a clear correlation between the introduction of tribunal fees and the reduction of race discrimination cases. Research by the TUC suggests that race discrimination claims have reduced by 60% when compared to similar periods before the introduction of tribunal fees.³

The STUC has also been concerned that austerity politics has driven a reduction in support for ethnic minority communities in Scotland. In 2011/12 in conjunction with the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CRER) the STUC Black Workers’ Committee commissioned a survey of the funding levels for ethnic minority community groups. The survey was conducted with a range of organisations who work with the CRER. In total 18 organisations responded to the survey. The survey found that all but one of the organisations had experienced budget cuts and some had seen cuts as high as 60% in a single year. All organisations who reported cuts felt that they were having an effect on their services, with some reporting losses in staff members, and many reporting a narrowing or a reduction in the quality of their service as a result.

This short survey suggests that specialist support designed to help asylum seekers and refugees integrate into our communities, learn English and support their skills into work are being significantly cut back. Equally projects focused on BME communities, particularly those supporting women and children are increasingly under threat.

The STUC continues to be concerned about the reduction in funding for equality groups. With many of these organisations funded through local councils, and the budget pressures on local government being severe it is likely that this situation will continue to deteriorate at the expense of BME communities and vulnerable groups within our society.

**Supporting Better Outcomes**

The STUC is concerned that the focus on race equality work is low within Scotland. This is apparent through the lack of data collection and publication with regard to race in some key government agencies, for example with regard to apprenticeships. It is also apparent in the approach to diversity within the Fair Work agenda. While there is a clear emphasis on gender, the focus on race is much less apparent. The STUC believes that it would be appropriate to focus on eradicating the over-representation of BME workers in lower grades within organisations and believes that this would fit well with the wider objectives of Fair Work.

While there has been some focus with regard to internships for ethnic minority young people, more needs to be done to ensure that this work is mainstreamed throughout the skills agenda. Good representation in terms of equality groups, including BME young people, should be seen on foundational apprenticeships and within the wider apprenticeship scheme, equally improving the security of work in the labour market more generally is likely to benefit BME workers who often find themselves in precarious positions.

There should be an absolute commitment to improving outcomes in the public sector. The Government should also use its influence, through procurement, through the funding associated with training schemes and through the business pledge, to incentivise better outcomes with regard to race equality in the private sector.

**Conclusion**

Ultimately, however, it is important for the Scottish Government and Government agencies to have a clear focus on race equality in their work. The data in this area is limited and will most likely continue to be so, but it is possible to paint a picture of what is happening within education and within the labour market without perfect data sets. It is important therefore to listen to BME workers and BME young people about their experiences and to take these testimonials seriously. The STUC Black Workers’ Committee would be happy to facilitate the Government’s work in this area.

Before anything can really be achieved there needs to be a recognition that Scotland is not immune to racism and that negative discourses around immigration do have an effect on people’s experiences of life in Scottish communities and in the workplace. It is only through a concerted effort to change and to challenge stereotypes and ingrained ways of working that we will challenge these issues.

STUC
24 June 2015