



**BRITISH ACADEMY  
OF MANAGEMENT**

---

**BAM**  
CONFERENCE

---

**3RD-5TH SEPTEMBER**

**ASTON UNIVERSITY BIRMINGHAM UNITED KINGDOM**

This paper is from the BAM2019 Conference Proceedings

**About BAM**

The British Academy of Management (BAM) is the leading authority on the academic field of management in the UK, supporting and representing the community of scholars and engaging with international peers.

<http://www.bam.ac.uk/>

**“What Happens Next Is Up To Me” –  
Analysis Of Ethnic Minorities’ Human Capital And Employability Development**

Rafal Sitko, Heather McGregor, Dimitris Christopoulos

Heriot-Watt University

Contact:

Rafal Sitko  
School of Social Sciences  
Heriot-Watt University  
Dubai Campus  
Dubai International Academic City  
PO Box 294345  
Dubai  
United Arab Emirates  
Rafal.sitko@hw.ac.uk

**“What Happens Next Is Up To Me” –  
Analysis Of Ethnic Minorities’ Human Capital And Employability Development**

**Abstract:**

Examining how ethnic minority group members can be aided in attaining economic equality is a pressing research problem. Human capital theorists have long established that an individual’s chances of success in a global economy can be increased by developing their personal variables such as work experience, training, skills, and knowledge. Drawing on the concept of employability, this paper qualitatively explores how work-based training and mentoring can develop ethnic minorities’ human capital and enhance their career development. Based on 30 semi-structured interviews, the study sheds light on how the benefits of professional training extend beyond provision of transferable skills and knowledge.

**Keywords:** Ethnic minority, human capital, employability

**Conference track:** Knowledge and Learning

**Word count:** 5942

## Introduction

The UK is a multicultural and multiethnic society. According to the Annual Population Survey (Department for Work and Pensions 2018) in 2017 the total working age population in England Wales and Scotland was just under 40 million. Of those, approximately 6 million were members of non-White ethnic minority. The most ethnically diverse region in Britain is London, where in 2011 40.2% of residents identified with either the Asian, Black, Mixed or Other ethnic group (Office for National Statistics 2018).

Previous studies reveal that, comparing to the White majority, ethnic minority groups face an ethnic penalty in employment (Khatab and Johnston, 2013, 2014), and that different ethnic minority groups experience different levels of labour market disadvantage (Khatab, 2009, 2012). Individual characteristics of ethnic minority members (Zuccotti 2015), geographical concentration of some ethnic groups (Simpson et al 2006), as well as racial discrimination inherent in job application processes and the workplace (Modood 1997) are some of the factors explaining ethnic minorities' lower rates of employment than the White majority population.

In multiethnic Britain, examining how minority group members can be aided in attaining economic equality is not only an important research problem, but also a crucial economic agenda (Cabinet Office 2017). Development of human capital and employability skills is a social process which can help to rectify some of the experienced by ethnic minorities 'legitimate' barriers to unevenly distributed economic opportunities. According to Boxman et al. (1991, p. 52) '*human capital, is the critical factor in determining life chances in western industrial societies*'. Human capital in a form of education and training increases individuals' productivity and job performance (Becker 1994). Thus, educated individuals equipped with marketable skills and abilities can have more access to employment opportunities (Yuzhuo 2013). One form of human capital are employability skills, which are a mix of knowledge and skills desired by employers (Wilton 2008). Graduates with the right balance of employability skills will be in advantageous position when seeking employment opportunities (Coleman 2000). Taking into account that differential human capital is often given as one of the explanations for economic inequality (Tomaskovic-Devey, Thomas, & Johnson 2005) it is of interest to explore how training programmes can develop ethnic minorities' individual human capital and equip them with skills improving chances of employment.

This article aims to explore how developmental programmes can help improve ethnic minorities' human capital by examining the experiences of graduates who undertook training provided by Taylor Bennett Foundation. Through qualitative analysis of ethnic minority graduates' self-reported data the paper identifies areas where charitable and non-government organisations can help disadvantaged groups in the labour market. In order to address the above research aim, the paper explores the theoretical overlap between the human capital argument, which has been well-established in the literature, and the recently popularised discourse of personal responsibility for individual employability.

## **Human capital**

The original theory of human capital derives from a macroeconomic development discipline and is based on an assumption that education raises workers' productivity (Schultz, 1963). Investment made in workers' useful knowledge, training and skills demonstrates high rate of return as it increases workers' future income and lifetime earnings (Becker, 1964). According to the human capital theory, employers rationally select job candidates on the basis of their knowledge and skills. In this view employees are hired without prejudice related to the candidate's personal attributes such as gender or ethnicity (Chiswick 1991). Where human capital does not explain ethnic inequalities in labour market outcomes, distribution of economic opportunities is likely to be affected by ethnic penalties (Heath and Cheung 2007).

According to the original theoretical perspective, human capital is conceptualized on a macroeconomic level as an aggregate phenomenon with implications for economic growth. However, human capital can also be viewed as an important construct on an individual level (Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011). While investment in human capital can be seen as a foundation for success in a global economy (Thompson 2004), some scholars have also recognized human capital as a valuable unit-level resource (Barney & Wright, 1998; Kraaijenbrink, 2011). Nyberg et al. (2014) reviewed 156 articles published in fields of strategy and HRM which focus on human capital on the unit-level. On the basis of the review the authors mapped a typology of emergent trends in the literature recognizing specific dimensions in which human capital is studied in HRM, for example, in relation to organizational activities that shape and affect the nature of the unit-level of human capital.

Alternatively, Tomaskovic-Devey et al. (2005) argue that human capital development is a social process. From their perspective *“human capital investment is often not a voluntary and almost never an individual choice”* (2005, p. 61). To support their argument the authors differentiate between two main types of human capital. According to Tomaskovic-Devey et al. (2005) one form of human capital is related to educational and cognitive skills that developed primarily either before entering the labour market or outside of it. This form is acquired mostly on the basis of educational decisions made by parents and educational resources available to our guardians. On the other hand, experience, tenure, and on-the-job training are elements of human capital that are acquired internal to the labor market. As Tomaskovic-Devey et al. (2005) argue, development of these elements of human capital depend on joint investment between job seekers and employers or individual workers and their co-workers providing on-the-job training.

In this paper human capital is understood as a theoretical concept referring to:

*‘the personal variables that may affect one’s career advancement, including education, work experience, training, skills, and knowledge’* (McArdle et al. 2007, p. 249).

Here the emphasis is on the personal rather than sectoral development of human capital that can be a form of investment made by individuals and organisations rather than the government. We raise a question of how ethnic minority individuals can develop their human capital, thereby improving their own employability, by participating in a graduate training scheme.

## Employability

An increasing amount of evidence suggests that ‘traditional’ career structures, characterized by job security and linear progression through one organisation, are becoming less popular (Arnold et al. 2005; Brown et al. 2003). Work is no longer typically characterised by a finite and fixed set of tasks. In a fast changing business and work environment competencies developed for one job may not be sufficient for securing long term employment opportunities (McMahon et al. 2003). In the face of uncertain employment conditions the concept of ‘employability’ has emerged as a key contributor to one’s successful career (Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Fugate et al. 2004). In order to be an attractive job candidate to potential employers individuals must demonstrate a range of personal qualities such as adaptability, flexibility and reliability (Green and Turok, 2000). These characteristics need to be displayed in addition to transferable skills such as communication, problem solving and commercial awareness (Moss and Tilly, 1996). Thus, in simple terms, employability can be understood as:

*‘the possession by the individual of the qualities and competencies required to meet the changing needs of employers and customers’ (Confederation of British Industry 1999, p. 1).*

A broader definition, presented by research for the Northern Ireland Executive, recognizes employability dependable on various social factors:

*Employability is the capability to move into and within labour markets and to realise potential through sustainable and accessible employment. For the individual, employability depends on: the knowledge and skills they possess, and their attitudes; the way personal attributes are presented in the labour market; the environmental and social context within which work is sought; and the economic context within which work is sought (DHFETE, 2002, p. 7).*

This emphasis on contextual factors is also highlighted by Hillage and Pollard (1998) in their popular framework for employment. According to Hillage and Pollard employability consists of four main components. The first component is ‘*employability assets*’, which includes individual’s knowledge, skills and attitudes. However, those assets are of little value on the labour market if we cannot sell them to potential employers. Thus, the *second* component of employability is ‘*presentation*’. This consists of individual’s ability to demonstrate their assets and market them. As Hillage and Pollard (1998) argue, in practice this can be related to appropriate presentation of CV and good interview technique, ability to present useful references and testimonies, ability to present useful work experience or academic/vocational qualifications. The *third* component of employability called ‘*development*’ captures a range of abilities that an individual should possess such as: Career management skills (e.g. awareness of opportunities in the labour market, understanding one’s own abilities and limitations, decision-making skills), job search skills (e.g. having access to relevant formal and informal networks) and strategic approach (e.g. being occupationally and locationally mobile to adjust to labour market opportunities). The *fourth* and final component of employability are ‘*context factors*’ which affect the extent to which an individual will be able to realise the assets and skills mentioned above. Hillage and Pollard (1998) recognize that a combination of personal circumstances (e.g.

caring responsibilities) and external factors, such as macro-economic demand and employer attitudes, will have impact on individual’s ability to actualize their potential of being employable.

While some frameworks focus on employability as a whole (Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Fugate et al. 2004) others concentrate specifically on ‘employability skills’. For instance, Coleman (2000) breaks down employability skills into: 1) *job skills* which are technical knowledge and skills needed for a successful performance in a specific job, 2) *adaptive skills* which are needed to function in a new situation (e.g. flexibility, enthusiasm, getting along well with people) and *transferable skills* which are personal characteristics or skills that an individual can use from one situation or job to another (e.g. meeting deadlines, public speaking or efficient planning).

Whether understood narrowly (i.e. primarily through the lens of skills) or more broadly the concept of employability offers more than simply means for workers to develop qualities needed to meet the changing needs of employers. Employability can also play a crucial role in tackling the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups. In this paper we argue that employability should also be viewed as an important element in improving access to paid work for groups, such as ethnic minorities that traditionally have been disadvantaged due to social exclusion.

### **Ethnic minorities’ employability in the UK**

‘Ethnicity’ refers to: ‘a set of individuals who share a common and distinctive heritage, and who have a sense of identity as a group’ (Cambridge & Carnaby 2005, p. 137). Unlike ‘race’ which has biological connotations ethnicity tends to be perceived as a socio-political construct. In Britain increased immigration in 1950s and 1990s has brought a significant ethnic change. The ethnic diversity of the population has increased over the last several decades and this trend is projected to continue. According to a study conducted by Policy Exchange (2014) by 2050 the proportion of UK citizens from ethnic minority groups will grow from the current 14% to an estimated 20% - 30%. Different research groups have indicated that ethnic minority communities constitute a fast-growing demographic group and that the UK can expect to have a more diverse population in the next few decades (GLA 2017; Rees et al 2013).

At present this newly found diversity in the UK does not translate into equal economic outputs for all ethnic groups. In 2017, the rate of employment for White residents, who are aged 16 to 64 years, was 77%, whereas for all non-White ethnic groups combined the employment rate was at 65%. The closest to employment of White ethnic groups was the Indian ethnic group (74%) and the lowest employment rate was recorded among the Pakistani/Bangladeshi group (55%). Evidence suggests significant difference between White ethnic groups and non-White ethnic minorities not only in level of employment but also in its quality. A report analyzing Labour Force Survey (LFS) data suggests that across the UK, the ethnically most diverse occupations are low skilled, such as taxi drivers (Norrie 2017). The Parker Review study shows that only 2 per cent of FTSE100 board directors are non-White and half of the companies (51) do not have any directors of colour (Parker 2017).

In recognition of these and similar economic inequalities, many employability initiatives have been introduced on the national, regional and local level. For instance, on a national level, since 2002 Jobcentre Plus has run pilot projects aimed specifically at increasing ethnic minority employment (House of Commons 2008). In 2011, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) introduced the Work Programme to replace a range of employment schemes and projects. The programme was designed to offer personalised support to individuals requiring more help in finding and maintaining employment (Department for Work and Pensions 2015). The DWP has also sponsored the Ethnic Minority Employment Stakeholder Group, which advised government on actions, policies and strategies related to employment of ethnic minorities and providing help to this underrepresented group in the labour market (EMESG 2014). Examples of regional intervention include Scotland developing its own employability strategy, ‘Working for Growth’, as well as a ‘Supported Employment Framework’ for Scotland. While these initiatives had a wide aim of helping members of disadvantaged groups enter and progress in the labour market they also specifically targeted people from ethnic minority communities (Employability in Scotland 2014). On a local level, charitable organisations can provide small scale employment development initiatives targeting specific communities and professions. For instance, in London the Taylor Bennet Foundation offers training and mentoring programmes aiming to improve Black, Asian and ethnic minority graduates’ chances of finding employment and developing a career in the PR industry (Taylor Bennett Foundation 2018). While studies and consultations have been conducted to examine impact of employability initiatives on the national and regional level, systematic examination of local initiatives is still underexplored.

## **Methodology**

The data for this study is collected from a programme of work-based training organised by the Taylor Bennett Foundation (hereafter TBF), which is voluntary sector training organisation located in the UK. The training lasts for ten weeks, provides professional knowledge in business communications and is open only to ethnic minority participants who have graduated from university in the previous 24 months. The programme teaches practical and theoretical skills necessary for the profession and provides an opportunity for visiting and working with various companies in the business communications sector. Trainees are also assigned two mentors (one who works in a communications agency, and one who works in a recruitment company) with whom they communicate at least once a week. Due to limited funds, TBF is able to offer training only for six applicants in each training cohort.

In order to examine an ethnic minority graduates’ perceived human capital development, the study collected qualitative data. At the time of writing, 30 in-depth semi-structured interviews were analysed with individuals who participated the training programmes in 2017 and 2018. Five different cohorts were interviewed. The data was collected at the end of each training programme. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted between 10 and 30 minutes. They were tape-recorded and transcribed in intelligent verbatim. The transcription focused on what was said rather than how it was said and for that reason stutters, repetitions and filler words were



removed. Prior to the summer of 2019 a further 12 interviews are planned to be conducted and analysed from new cohorts of applicants.

Thus far, gathered data was interpreted with the use of thematic analysis, which is “a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 79). Interview responses were thematically analysed using a data-led, recursive process of coding and identifying themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This form of qualitative analysis was previously adopted for interpreting data in careers research (Shortland, 2011; Osborn and LoFrisco, 2012) and human capital (Silva & Cooray, 2014).

QSR NVivo software was used to aid systematic coding and data management. Although nodes were driven by the data, they were also informed by authors’ knowledge of academic literature (Braun and Clarke, 2006) on the subject of employability. A priori nodes were focused around Hillage and Pollard’s (1998) framework for employment and included codes such as: knowledge, skills, CV or interview technique. As the analysis progressed, new nodes that emerged from the data were added. These nodes included: “confidence”, “mentoring” or “alumni”. During the analysis key themes started to emerge. They were later refined according to Braun and Clarke (2006) guidelines on thematic analysis. The following three sections report research findings, which are later discussed in relation to the extant academic literature.

## **Findings**

### ***Substantiated self-confidence***

One of the strongest themes that emerged from the dataset was related to interviewees’ comments on their confidence. Asked about potential benefits of the programme for them and their career, two thirds of the research participants reflected on how their self-assurance has grown due to the received occupational training. This growth in confidence was related to trainees’ personal belief in themselves as well as professional confidence that they *can* develop their careers and achieve success. Interviewees recognised this change in their own attitude as they compared their experiences before and after the programme:

*Interviewer: You mentioned the programme has already helped your career in PR. Can I ask in what way?*

*Interviewee: I think in belief in myself. I was at a career point where I was examining a lot of options, but didn’t know what to do next. I was confused. It helped me to think that ‘it’s possible’, and it’s given me a platform to build on. What happens next is up to me.*

- Trainee 1048

*Interviewee: It’s improved my confidence a lot in my own abilities. I got a lot of good feedback. If I’d gone to these job interviews before the programme, there would have been a very different person being interviewed, in terms of how capable I felt*

*for that role. But I actually went in quite confidently and secure. The interviews just felt more like a conversation, rather than me trying to prove myself.*

- Trainee 1045

Research participants did not only converse about confidence. During the study almost all of them demonstrated belief in themselves in the way how they spoke. This is illustrated for example by Trainee 48's comment: *"What happens next is up to me"*. Research participants' responses also suggest that their newly gained confidence can translate into results for their career development. For instance, newly gained self-assurance has positively changed Trainee 1045's experience of undergoing a job interview.

The confidence gained through the programme was also expressed in the advice that trainees would give to other ethnic minorities. Prompted to discuss what advice they would give to someone who is a member of an ethnic minority group and wants to start a career in public relations interviewees responded:

*Be conscious of your ethnicity but don't let it impact you. As an ethnic minority you have a lot to bring to PR because the world is changing and the clients are changing. The workforce that the PR firms have definitely needs to change to service its clients so be confident in your abilities and move forward.*

- Trainee 1023

*Prove them wrong. Let's take FTI as an example. Many of their clients are really big clients from some of the FTSE 100 companies. The people high up in these companies often have stereotypes of minority ethnic background people. So I would say be ready to challenge this, and prove them wrong.*

- Trainee 1064

The confidence to use their ethnicity to their advantage was something that was highlighted to research participants during their programme. Interviewees had a chance to learn about this change of attitude from other ethnic minorities who they met during the programme while visiting various agencies and PR companies:

*I'd like to say that perhaps you can use your ethnicity to an advantage. I mean because you are going to stand out. Not out of choice but you will just stand out because of the way you look so maybe use that to your advantage. I personally haven't done that because I haven't really experienced a career in the PR world yet because I've been in the trainee scheme. So, that isn't a point that I can back up but it's what I've been told by other ethnic diversities who are in the PR world at a range of firms.*

- Trainee 1104

Learning directly from people with a similar background who were already able to find employment in pursued career can be convincing, and build confidence. However, a significant

amount of interviewees' self-esteem was built through a range of benefits provided by the programme. This is illustrated for instance by Trainee 1102's comment reflecting on their change of attitude based on newly gained skills:

*When I was applying before, I'd applied for so many jobs, and when you don't hear anything from applying for that many jobs. It's just, like, okay I'm not employable. But, I think, it has just really amped up my CV and made me look a lot more employable. 'Cause I don't think, without this programme I would have felt confident going into a job, being, like: 'yes I can do this, this, this and this'.*

- Trainee 1102

The following section elaborates in depth what newly gained knowledge and skills supported interviewees' development of confidence, leading to a creation of substantiated professional self-assurance rather than a forced facade.

### ***Professional knowledge and skills***

More than two thirds of the research participants commented on industry knowledge and various occupational skills that they developed during the programme. According to the interviewees, the programme has provided them with media knowledge necessary for working in communications industry. Thanks to visits in communications companies, they have learned how teams in different types of PR agencies operate. Trainees have also learned about the language used by communications professionals in various sub-disciplines of the profession. Prompted to explain what they have gained through the programme, interviewees explained:

*It's given me a lot... a much greater understanding of public relations and communications as a whole. There is only so much I could find out on the internet. Looking back to what I thought of public relations three months ago to what I know now, having been on the programme and received tutoring and advice from many different people, who are in the industry, as well as going to different agencies and in-house teams, has given me a much whole-rounded view of public relations, the different sectors that exist and work within that market, as well as, the different trends or how the industry is having to adopt and change with modern times.*

- Trainee 1012

*I've also gained media knowledge as well. And just skills. For example, I usually read the newspapers...or read the news on my phone but actually having the hard copies and reading that, having to do that, weekly tasks, writing skills, verbal skills and just the knowledge about the financial 'comms'. Being able to analyse markets and companies. I know things that I never thought I would know which is crazy but it's gone really well.*

- Trainee 1103

Trainee 1103's response sheds light not only on the newly gained knowledge but also developed skills which are necessary for communications professionals. During the study one third of interviewees reflected on obtained through the programme skills such as analysing national press and writing for different audiences. Moreover half of the interviewees also commented on gained skills which are not directly linked to the PR profession and can be used in manifold occupations. Again, asked about the potential benefits of the programme the interviewees responded:

*Probably the most obvious one would be the presentation. We present every week to FTI, and we get some really comprehensive feedback. Just having to present every week, you do improve without really realising sometimes. You get more confident, you pick up skills from other people by watching them present as well, you take on the feedback and try and adapt it. (...)*

*Writing skills – the English tuition. I've seen my writing style change from a more academic writing style, to more of a PR style, and to be able to adapt it to what you need to. In the ten weeks I've seen my writing skills improve as well.*

- Trainee 1062

*The programme has really helped me in the fact that it really developed my writing skills. (...)* Also, just work on the team and having delivered presentations.

- Trainee 1025

Repeated opportunities to give presentations and receive feedback on performance can help improve how individuals deliver information in a professional setting. As comments Trainee 1062, such development opportunity can also increase person's confidence. Skills honed during the programme, such as team-working and competent speaking and writing, are not exclusively used in PR and could be important for career development in various office-based occupations.

While discussing newly gained knowledge the vast majority of employees majority of interviews also mentioned how the programme helped them make decisions about their potential career in PR:

*Before the programme I didn't really have an idea about which sector or which discipline I want to go into. After, three or four weeks, this is it, I knew exactly where I want to go. Once that is narrowed down then you know exactly what you are applying for. It just makes it a lot simpler.*

- Trainee 1003

*The Foundation just shows you so much. It even showed me whether I wanted to work in an agency or in-house or not. Coming on here and I'm learning so much about industry, different sectors I can go into.*

- Trainee 1107

Interviewees responses suggest that knowledge gained at the programme can aid trainees in navigating the labour market and even help them identify their own professional interests. Understanding different trends in the relevant market and how the industry is changing allows one to more strategically decide about their career commitments.

### ***Selling it***

The interview responses suggest that the training programme has also improved participants' ability to demonstrate their assets to potential employers. One third of the interviewees specifically mentioned the help that they received with improving their CVs and job applications. This was related to both advice how to improve CVs and job applications as well as 'hands on' editing of trainees' documents. This professional guidance was mentioned for instance by Trainee 1049 and 1063:

*My Finsbury mentor, he's edited my CV – improved it, changed the language, shorter and more concise. He's given me tips on how to email people when I'm looking for jobs.*

- Trainee 1049

*I never had the particular advice in terms of how to develop your CV properly, how to develop your cover letter. Before the programme I tended to have a cover letter that was quite generic, and I'd just change the names of the actual job that I'm applying for ... it's funny and seems like common sense ... but it wasn't apparent to me. It's these little things that count.*

- Trainee 1063

In some instances, such as Trainee 1063, the help which trainees received with marketing their assets was not available to them before they joined the programme. In the case of Trainee 1049 the received advice was not only related to how to improve CV but also how to establish contact with relevant PR professionals while applying for jobs.

One third of the research participants have also mentioned the help that they received with job interview preparations. This assistance was provided by mentors which each trainee on the programme was assigned. For instance, as explain Trainees 1048 and 1045:

*I've got two mentors – TB and Finsbury. They've both helped me. TB mentally, with advice and everything, but she's really busy. The Finsbury one, she's been there throughout. She helps me with interview techniques, goes over my presentations.*

- Trainee 1048

*My Finsbury mentor has been very encouraging, helped with some interview preparation – gone over questions with me, I've interviewed her ... In general, she's been a nice, affirming voice to have and someone that I can bounce ideas off of.*

- Trainee 1045

Numerous trainees commented on the help that they received from their mentors with regards job interview preparation. A popular form of received help was a practice job interview, which trainees would conduct with their mentors. Some trainees mentioned calling their mentors before jobs interviews and discussing with them what questions might occur. Help also involved discussing already undertaken interviews and learning from own experience what elements of interview technique trainees are good at and what can be improved.

Another factor improving trainees' ability to 'sell' their assets was the opportunity to personally visit established PR companies. One of the pivotal points of the programme was allowing trainees to visit, over the course of 10 weeks, numerous PR companies and personally meet and engage with communications professionals. One third of research participants recognised this as a positive experience and a significant benefit of the training.

*I feel that joining the programme actually allowed me to progress in terms of being able to step in some buildings that I probably would have never had the opportunity to ten weeks ago.*

- Trainee 1063

*The programme puts you right in front of people that perhaps might have roles or would be considering people in the very near future. (...) It's very useful because you can call up somewhere they won't take your call. You can email a specific application, they might not take your call, or take your email, reply. It's useful really in terms of putting you in front of people.*

- Trainee 1043

*Even some of my colleagues who have been successful in their job applications. They've been successful in those job applications on the back of visits. Literally just two days ago I went to a PR firm called Hope and Glory, a PR firm, and towards the end of the visit they're like: 'we're recruiting, feel free to apply, drop us your CV' and things like that. You would never have thought of that. I mean don't get me wrong. We would have approached them if we really wanted to, but they opened the door for us which goes a long way. It really means a lot and quite a few of the PR firms that we go to actually do that and in a way that isn't perhaps seen on their website. Because you don't see it on the website...yes apply to us whenever you want or whatever. But we actually go to these PR firms... 'yes, we'd love to have you on board, get in touch with us' ... and it's so encouraging.*

- Trainee 1104

Visits organized by the programme provided trainees with direct exposure to a range of PR professionals, including employment decision-making employees. As argues Trainee 1043, this personal form of presentation can be more effective than indirectly establishing contact with potential employers’ telephone or email. Trainee 1104’s experiences suggest that direct, personal exposure can lead to tangible career opportunities such as invitations to apply for a position. According to her, these positive encounters enabled by the programme feel encouraging when in the process of applying for jobs.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

The findings revealed that training provided by initiatives such as the Taylor Bennett Foundation can offer a range of benefits that develop ethnic minorities’ employability, and consequently their human capital. The paper shows that the TBF programme can increase ethnic minority graduates’ belief in their ability to succeed. This is one of the key aspects of employability (Pool and Sewell, 2007; Yorke and Knight, 2007), as a lack of confidence limits job applicants’ ambitions and restrain actions they might take to improve employment prospects (Benabou and Tirole, 2002). As Gloria Steinem (1992, p. 26) argues “...self-esteem isn’t everything; it’s just that there’s nothing without it”. The TBF programme develops self-esteem and self-confidence, thereby allowing graduates to undertake projects and persevere in pursuing career development in spite of any encountered and perceived obstacles. Research suggests that in the case of ethnic minority graduates and lower socio-economic groups, raising confidence and self-esteem may be even more important than developing skills and competences (Brennan and Shah 2003).

According to trainees the TBF has also provided work-related knowledge and skills which can be useful for career development. The data suggests the programme improved interviewees both *job skills* and *transferable skills*, which Coleman (2000) recognises as key aspects affecting anyone’s employability. Trainees learned for instance how to read, analyse and prepare relevant communications documents. They practiced generic skills such as how to deliver professional presentations, work in teams, and meet deadlines. Possessing a combination of such ‘key skills’ may be especially important in gaining the initial employment (Hillage and Pollard 1998), although it is not enough for graduates to navigate in the labour market and ‘realise their potential’ (Hillage and Pollard 1998). Fortunately, the programme has also provided opportunities to develop career management skills. Due to the programme, interviewees were able to recognise their own occupational interests and opportunities available in the market. The TBF programme has also addressed issues recognised by Hillage and Pollard (1998) as the third crucial element of employability, i.e. the ability to present own assets to potential employers. The majority of interviewees positively reflected on opportunities to learn how to write CVs and job applications for PR positions, or how to undertake a job interview.

Moreau and Leathwood (2006) argue that the employability discourse can have damaging consequences for graduates as it overemphasises the importance of personal qualities and neglects the impact of social inequalities. Initiatives such as the TBF demonstrate that the employability discourse and recognizing the impact of contextual factors, such as graduates’

ethnicity, are not mutually exclusive. While developing key elements of one's employability, the TBF programme highlights to graduates the important role that ethnic minorities have to play in the PR industry. The 10 weeks long employability programme does not present ethnicity as irrelevant (cf. Moreau and Leathwood 2006). Among other benefits, it allows ethnic minorities to connect with successful ethnic minority communications professionals and learn from them how to manage unequal labour market opportunities.

The paper demonstrates how work-related training can provide a range of professional development benefits and develop ethnic minorities' human capital. In light of literature on ethnic penalty in employment and a discussion on the recently popularised concept of employability, this paper investigates how organisations, such as charitable institutions, can support professional development of ethnic minorities. With the use of Hillage and Pollard's (1998) framework for employability the study demonstrates how work-related training programmes can develop ethnic minorities' professional confidence, knowledge, skills and presentation abilities while at the same time acknowledging and recognising their distinct position in the labour market. While the study presents qualitative in-depth insights on ethnic minorities' human capital development, further research is needed to quantitatively measure to what extent ethnic minorities' professional assets change throughout the process of work-based training. Moreover, a longitudinal investigation of developing social capital through professional training would present a more holistic picture on the potential benefits of such practices.



## References

- Arnold, J., Silvester, J., Patterson, F., Cooper, C.L., Robertson, I. and Burnes, B. (2005) *Work psychology: Understanding human behaviour in the workplace*, (4th ed.), Harlow, New York: Prentice Hall.
- Barney, J. B., & Wright, P. M. (1998) On becoming a strategic partner: The role of human resources in gaining competitive advantage, *Human Resource Management*, 37: 31-46.
- Becker, G. S. (1964) *Human capital*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Becker, G. S. (1994) Human capital revisited. In *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education*, (3rd ed.), The university of Chicago press, pp. 15-28.
- Benabou, R. and Tirole, J. (2002) Self-confidence and personal motivation, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 117(3): 871-915.
- Boxman, E. A., De Graaf, P. M., & Flap, H. D. (1991) The impact of social and human capital on the income attainment of Dutch managers, *Social networks*, 13(1): 51-73.
- Brennan, J. and Shah, T. (2003) *Access to what? Converting education opportunity into employment opportunity*, London: Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, Open University.
- Brown, P., Hesketh, A., & Williams, S. (2003) Employability in a knowledge-driven economy, *Journal of education and work*, 16(2): 107-126.
- Cabinet Office (2017) *Race Disparity Audit - Summary Findings from the Ethnicity Facts and Figures Website*, available: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/static/race-disparity-audit-summary-findings.pdf> [retrieved 05.02.2019].
- Cambridge, P., & Carnaby, S. (2005) *Person centred planning and care management with people with learning disabilities*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Chiswick, B. R. (1991) Speaking, Reading, and Earnings among Low-skilled Immigrants, *Journal of Labour Economics*, 9 (2): 149–170.
- Coleman, L. (2000) *Developing Workplace Skills – How to get your first job and keep it*. Juta & Co.Ltd: Cape Town.
- Dacre Pool, L. and Sewell, P. (2007) The key to employability: developing a practical model of graduate employability, *Education + Training*, 49 (4): 277-289.

- Department for Work and Pensions (2015) *2010 to 2015 government policy: employment*, available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-employment/2010-to-2015-government-policy-employment#appendix-1-managing-the-work-programme> [retrieved 05.02.2019].
- Department for Work and Pensions (2018) *Ethnicity facts and figures – Employment*, available: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/employment/employment/latest> [retrieved 05.02.2019].
- DHFETE (Department Of Higher And Further Education, Training And Employment) (2002) *Report of the Taskforce on Employability and Long-term Unemployment*, Belfast: DHFETE, available: [https://web.archive.org/web/20140401072510/http://www.delni.gov.uk/taskforce\\_report\\_v.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20140401072510/http://www.delni.gov.uk/taskforce_report_v.pdf) [retrieved 05.02.2019].
- EMESG (2014) *Ethnic Minority Employment Stakeholder Group*, available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/ethnic-minority-employment-stakeholder-group> [retrieved 05.02.2019].
- Employability in Scotland (2014) *Working with Minority Ethnic Clients to Promote and Progress Racial Equalities: A Toolkit for Employability Partnerships and Projects*, available: [http://www.employabilityinscotland.com/media/315700/working\\_with\\_minority\\_ethnic\\_clients\\_to\\_promote\\_and\\_progress\\_racial\\_equalities\\_-\\_a\\_toolkit\\_for\\_employability\\_partnerships\\_and\\_projects\\_-\\_march\\_2014.pdf](http://www.employabilityinscotland.com/media/315700/working_with_minority_ethnic_clients_to_promote_and_progress_racial_equalities_-_a_toolkit_for_employability_partnerships_and_projects_-_march_2014.pdf) [retrieved 05.02.2019].
- Fugate, M., Kinicki, A. J., & Ashforth, B. E. (2004) Employability: A psycho-social construct, its dimensions, and applications, *Journal of Vocational behavior*, 65(1): 14-38.
- GLA (2017) *2016-based Ethnic Group Population Projections*, available: <https://files.datapress.com/london/dataset/2016-based-projections-documentation/2017-11-24T12:10:05.22/2016-based%20Ethnic%20Group%20Population%20Projections.pdf> [retrieved 05.02.2019].
- Green, A. E. and Turok, I. (2000) Employability, adaptability and flexibility: changing labour market prospects, *Regional Studies*, 34: 599-600.
- Heath, A., and Cheung, S. (2007) *Unequal Chances. Ethnic Minorities in Western Labour Markets*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hillage, J. and Pollard, E. (1998) *Employability: developing a framework for policy analysis*, Research Report No. 85. Department for Education and Employment, London, available: [https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/43539201/Employability\\_Develop](https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/43539201/Employability_Develop)

[ing a framework for20160309-24658-1ix1nw2.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1550324912&Signature=E3FrtRYVXKRROwt2gJMe1NMu%2BJg%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DEmployability\\_developing\\_a\\_framework\\_for.pdf](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmpublic/472/472.pdf) [retrieved 05.02.2019].

House of Commons (2008) *Increasing employment rates for ethnic minorities*, available: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmpublic/472/472.pdf> [retrieved 05.02.2019].

Khattab, N. (2009) Ethno-religious background as a determinant of educational and occupational attainment in Britain, *Sociology*, 43(2): 304–22.

Khattab, N. (2012) 'Winners' and 'losers': The impact of education, ethnicity and gender on Muslims in the British labour market, *Work, Employment & Society*, 26(4): 556–73

Khattab, N. and Johnston, R. (2013) Ethnic and religious penalties in a changing British labour market from 2002 to 2010: The case of unemployment, *Environment and Planning*, 45(6): 1358–71.

Khattab, N. and Johnston, R. (2014) Ethno-religious identities and persisting penalties in the UK labor market, *The Social Science Journal*, 52(4): 490-502.

Kraaijenbrink, J. (2011) 'Human capital in the resource-based view', In J. C. Spender & A. Burton-Jones (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of human capital*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, pp. 218-237.

McArdle, S., Waters, L., Briscoe, J. P., & Hall, D. T. T. (2007) Employability during unemployment: Adaptability, career identity and human and social capital, *Journal of vocational behavior*, 71(2): 247-264.

McMahon, M., Patton, W. and Tatham, P. (2003) *Managing life, learning and work in the twenty-first century: Issues informing the design of an Australian Blueprint for Career Development*, available: <http://www.lifework.ca/AUSBP04-03.pdf> [retrieved 05.02.2019].

McQuaid, R. W., & Lindsay, C. (2005) The concept of employability, *Urban studies*, 42(2): 197-219.

Modood, T. (1997) Employment. In T. Modood, R. Berthoud, J. Lakey, J. Nazroo, P. Smith, S. Virdee and S. Beishon (Eds.) *Ethnic minorities in Britain*, London: Policy Studies Institute, pp. 83 - 149.

Moss, P. and Tilly, C. (1996) "Soft" skills and race: an investigation of Black men's employment problems, *Work and Occupations*, 23(3): 252-276.

- Nyberg, A. J., Moliterno, T. P., Hale Jr, D., & Lepak, D. P. (2014) Resource-based perspectives on unit-level human capital: A review and integration, *Journal of Management*, 40(1): 316-346.
- Office for National Statistics (2018) *Ethnicity facts and figures – Regional ethnic diversity*, available: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/british-population/national-and-regional-populations/regional-ethnic-diversity/latest> [retrieved 05.02.2019].
- Parker, J. (2017) *A Report into the Ethnic Diversity of UK Boards*, available: [https://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/The\\_Parker\\_Review/%24FILE/EY-Parker-Review-2017-FINAL%20REPORT.pdf](https://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/The_Parker_Review/%24FILE/EY-Parker-Review-2017-FINAL%20REPORT.pdf) [retrieved 05.02.2019].
- Ployhart, R. E., & Moliterno, T. P. (2011) Emergence of the human capital resource: A multilevel model, *Academy of Management Review*, 36: 127-150.
- Ployhart, R. E., Van Iddekinge, C. H., & MacKenzie, W. (2011) *Acquiring and developing human capital in service contexts: The interconnectedness of human capital resources*, *Academy of Management Journal*, 54: 353-368.
- Policy Exchange (2014) *A Portrait of Modern Britain*, available: <https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/a-portrait-of-modern-britain/> [retrieved 05.02.2019].
- Rees, P., Wohland, P., & Norman, P. (2013) The demographic drivers of future ethnic group populations for UK local areas 2001–2051, *The Geographical Journal*, 179(1): 44-60.
- Schultz, T. W. (1961) Investments in human capital, *American Economic Review*, 52: 1–17.
- Schultz, T.W. (1963) *The economic value of education*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Silva, P., & Cooray, R. (2014) Start building human capital in organizations through corporate social responsibility—a holistic coaching approach, *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 159: 753-758.
- Simpson, L., Purdam, K., Tajar, A., Fieldhouse, E., Gavalas, V., Tranmer, M., Pritchard, J. and Dorling, D. (2006) *Ethnic minority populations and the labour market: and analysis of the 1991 and 2001 census*, DWP report No. 333, London: The Department of Work and Pensions.
- Steinem, G. (1992) *Revolution from Within. A Book of Self-Esteem*, Little Brown & Company: Boston.
- Taylor Bennett Foundation (2018) *About Our Programmes*, available: <http://www.taylorbennettfoundation.org/theprogramme/> [retrieved 05.02.2019].

- Thompson, P. (2004) *Skating on Thin Ice – The Knowledge Economy Myth*, Glasgow: University of Strathclyde / Big Thinking.
- Tomaskovic-Devey, D., Thomas, M., & Johnson, K. (2005) Race and the accumulation of human capital across the career: A theoretical model and fixed-effects application, *American Journal of Sociology*, 111(1): 58-89.
- Wilton, N. (2008) Business Graduates and Management Jobs: An Employability Match made in Heaven?, *Journal of Education and Work*, 21 (2):143-158.
- Yorke, M and Knight, P. (2007) Evidence-informed pedagogy and the enhancement of student employability, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 12 (2): 157-170.
- Yuzhuo, C. (2013) Graduate Employability: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Employers' Perceptions, *The International Journal of Higher Education and Educational Planning*, 65(4): 457-469.
- Zuccotti, C. V. (2015). Do parents matter? Revisiting ethnic penalties in occupation among second generation ethnic minorities in England and Wales, *Sociology*, 49(2): 229-251.