

**Exploring the low representation of Black and Minority Ethnic staff
in the library and information science profession: case study of
London**



A study by CIBER, UCL commissioned by CILIP in London

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Executive summary

Introduction

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) membership figures suggest both that there is under-representation of Black and Minority Ethnic staff in the library and information science (LIS) and that the problem is particularly acute in London. The London branch of CILIP ('CILIP in London') commissioned UCL to undertake a short study exploring reasons for this under-representation.

Method and sample

In-depth interviews were used to elicit the issues that may mitigate against Black and Minority Ethnic people as actual or potential LIS workers. Nine such staff from a variety of information environments, including public, academic and specialist libraries, were interviewed about their experiences of being information workers.

Findings

Findings suggested the following factors were all considered by the various respondents to play a part in creating barriers to actual and potential Black and Minority Ethnic LIS workers:

- *Qualifications:* Overseas qualifications may not be recognised in the UK. However, qualifications are not so important at the beginning of a LIS career. However those not originally from the UK, may not realise this.
- *Alienation from career:* This includes a lack of books in ethnic languages or information on community activities for specific communities, and of information for Black and Minority Ethnic library users. This results in little with which people can identify. A lack of representation was also noted - staff are predominantly white and middle class – a clear case of a 'vicious circle', with Black and Minority Ethnic s reluctant to join the profession because there were so few of them already in it.
- *Cultural differences:* Black and Minority Ethnic staff may come from cultures or societies where there are fewer libraries and where belonging to or frequenting a library is not the norm.
- *Lack of support:* employment agencies were perceived as not offering enough support, and there may also be a lack of support and encouragement generally from employment agents and potential employers.
- *Language barriers:* Some people are knowledgeable and skilled, but find it difficult to express themselves in English. Being bi-lingual can be advantageous, however, in providing alternative materials and assisting ethnic library users.
- *Perceived racism:* The problem of racism was mentioned by only a minority of interviewees. Others felt that prejudice or discrimination may simply be people's perceptions.
- *Immigrant rights problems:* Immigration and visa problems were mentioned by two of the four interviewees born outside the UK
- *Added 'life' pressures on immigrants:* Such pressures include having to study more than might otherwise be the case – the language, or for additional UK qualifications, for example. They are often denied benefits, too, and may therefore need to undertake overtime for the extra remuneration they accrue.

Conclusion

This study has been small-scale and qualitative, but has raised a number of important issues which provide ample reasons why LIS may not be the most attractive career for a Black and Minority Ethnic person. Several questions emerge from the findings, such as whether there are different problems or issues specific to LIS workers from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds. If so, the question is raised of how these individual differences might be addressed. A second question is the extent to which the same problems highlighted in this study apply to other areas of the United Kingdom. Much still needs to be done to address the issues raised in this report, both in terms of research and possible practical action.

Background and context

It is recognized in the library and information services (LIS) profession that there is under-representation of black and other ethnic minority staff in this sector. Statistics quoted by CILIP (The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) show that local authority libraries currently have only 3.9% staff from Black and Minority Ethnic groups (CILIP, 2008a). However nearly a third of all Londoners are from such groups (accounting for 45% of the total Black and Minority Ethnic population of the UK). In fact, 'statistics from the CILIP membership database suggest that only 721 are from such backgrounds (3.34% of the total membership)' (CILIP, *ibid*: p4). Whilst there are not regional statistics available to suggest that London is worse represented than the rest of UK, the large (in both percentage and absolute terms) ethnic community in London the under-representation is certainly larger than that of the UK as a whole. Although just 2% of CILIP members nationally describe themselves as Black or a member of another minority ethnic group, this compares with nearly 8% of the population as a whole (Buckley Owen, 2007; ONS, 2004).

The situation prompted the London branch of CILIP ('CILIP in London') to approach the CIBER team at UCL, who were commissioned to carry out a study with the remit of examining if there are barriers faced by LIS Black and Minority Ethnic staff and, indeed, by *potential* staff – those who considered joining the profession but who ended up not doing so - that might explain this under-representation.

Aims

The aim of the project was to elicit and explore the issues related to why there is an under-representation of Black and Minority Ethnic LIS workers in London. It is hoped that the results will produce a framework for a larger investigation which will include a more quantitative analysis.

Literature review

Literature specifically related to the low representation of Black and Minority Ethnic staff in LIS is limited. Indeed, there does not appear to be any academic studies of the issue undertaken in the last five years. However, barriers generally faced by this constituency clearly informs the project. The discussion below, therefore, examines barriers that this constituency face generally in the workplace. The review then turns to measures undertaken in the LIS to alleviate some of these.

Reasons for low representation

As Berthoud (2000) states, Britain's ethnic minorities suffer a variety of forms of disadvantage in employment generally, so it may not be a surprise that the LIS profession reflects this national trend. Berthoud (ibid: p390) goes on to discuss six theoretical issues 'which are commonly raised in discussions of the problems facing minorities in the labour market: migration, expectation, alienation, family formation, the structure of the economy and discrimination'. With regard to each, Berthoud says the following:

Migration: People who have recently arrived in the country may be at a disadvantage 'because their educational qualifications might be lower and/or unrecognised; they would lack the networks and references needed to obtain jobs in Britain; they might be unfamiliar with British ways in general, or the English language in particular'. Berthoud (ibid: p390)

Expectation: Berthoud describes low expectation as a 'self-fulfilling prophesy' and gives the example of Caribbean boys, whom, according to him (ibid: p391) 'achieve worse outcomes than their white counterparts'. The self-fulfillment is that 'both teachers and the children themselves know this, and their joint expectation about individuals' prospects reduces the Caribbean pupil's chances of success' (ibid: p391, citing Gillborn 1990). Lower educational achievement will directly reduce the individual's chances in the labour market ... (and) this relative failure in employment has a further effect on teachers and pupils' expectations at school. The National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education (Robertson and Hillman, 1997) found that students from lower socio-economic groups do indeed lack the qualifications necessary for entry to higher education, meaning that this group, including ethnic minorities, who tend to be relatively poor, are under-represented in higher education. However, there is a 'slight but favourable skew' (Robertson and Hillman 1997: unpaginated) in participation rates amongst many ethnic Asian groups [which] may in some measure be explained by 'parental push'. (Ibid).

There appears to be an element of 'self-fulfillment in housing, too, which may have a 'knock-on' effect in employment prospects. Social divisions are said by Wilson and Birdy (2008) to be reinforced by the identification of neighbourhoods and communities, and their inhabitants, as undesirable and underachieving,

Alienation: This is the possibility that 'young men from groups with adverse stereotypes may develop a sense of alienation that is both a consequence and a reinforcing cause of their exclusion from employment' (Berthoud, 2000: p392)

Family formation: This appears to be particularly concerned with Caribbean minorities, where – according to Berthoud (ibid) there is less likely to be co-habitation. Children living with single mothers may be affected by the lack of a (working) father figure and, therefore, be less inclined to seek employment later in life. The single mother will also be less likely to be employed, because of her child-rearing responsibilities. Berthoud admits that 'Neither of these hypotheses has been investigated in any depth in Britain' (Ibid: p392).

Discrimination: Employers and other institutions might discriminate against members of ethnic minority groups on the basis of their colour or other supposed characteristics.

Apart from creating a more equitable employment situation, by opening up librarianship more to ethnic minorities, there are other worthwhile reasons for correcting the under-representation of this constituency. Research by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU, 2005) shows that socially excluded groups such as ethnic minorities are far less likely than others to use services, because of poor communication experiences with staff, due in part to lack of staff awareness, and the negative attitudes of staff.(SEU, 2005).

There is an awareness of the problem in the United States also. There, recent statistics show the minority representation in the U.S. population at approximately 30%, as of 2000, with the number for minority representation in the profession 'lagging behind' (Hipp 2006, quoted in Neely and Peterson, 2007: p6)

Remedial measures

Reports emanating from various library associations and other bodies have addressed under-representation.

CILIP (the professional body for library and information practitioners in the UK), for example, has a commitment 'to work towards establishing an LIS workforce that is representative of the diversity within UK society,' (CILIP, 2008b: p3). To this end CILIP has engaged PATH National Ltd., a national skills development agency, to undertake a London-based pilot programme (later entitled 'Encompass') addressing skills deficits and under-representation of Black and Minority Ethnic staff in the library and information sector. A traineeship scheme is being piloted across all public and private sector library and information services in greater London (within the M25). CILIP hopes this scheme will support 100 trainees working in a wide variety of library and information organisations across the UK over a five year period.

The Encompass project (CILIP, 2008a) includes:

- A positive action trainee scheme
The development of a toolkit to support employers wishing to introduce a positive action scheme.
- A work-place development scheme for existing library and information staff from black and minority ethnic groups wanting to gain CILIP's qualification for para-professional staff – ACLIP (Certified Affiliate of CILIP). (This scheme is still in development).

The British Library is also cognisant of the problem. Its Race Equality Action Plan (BL, undated: p2-3) promises to:

- 'Review / develop advertising methods to encourage applications from BAME [Black and Minority Ethnic] communities to all BL senior roles (especially where BAME are under-represented)...
- 'Develop an increase in BAME applications to senior roles especially where currently under-represented'.
- Monitor and analyse all recruitment and selection policies for racial equality
- 'Ensure Recruitment Panels have as diverse make-up as can reasonably be achieved for each process
- 'Look at initiatives to increase BAME employees where under-represented

- 'Increase in BAME employees at more senior levels across the BL, and facilitate career progression in the BL
- 'Establish BL pilot programme to mentor - targeting under-represented groups, pairing senior staff to lower grade staff to help cross-cultural awareness and understanding.
- 'To encourage and aid career progression for under-represented groups'.

The National Library of Scotland (NLS, undated) is also actively combating inequality. In an effort to attract Black and Minority Ethnic candidates it has recently placed job vacancy advertisements for some posts in minority ethnic journals. Actions the NLS plan for the future are to:

- Encourage completion of ethnic data by new staff,
- Build more equalities awareness training into staff induction,
- Publish headline figures for race equalities monitoring annually,
- Monitor equality in training and development opportunities.

There is concern in the USA also. A recent report from the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) in America, concerned with, as the title says 'Achieving Racial and Ethnic Diversity Among Academic and Research Librarians' (Neely and Peterson, 2007) makes several suggestions to achieve this goal. These include to:

- Develop a 'comprehensive, collaborative (among all stakeholders) recruitment and public awareness campaign' (ibid: p76);
- Create a flexible and positive environment that offers 'opportunities for professional development; a positive environment that honours employee values, opinion, and voice; compensation and rewards; good management; and recognition of work-life balance' (ibid: p7);
- Advance minority employees to management positions, by tracking assistant director/director/dean positions of academic libraries, tracking available leadership pools of minority candidates, developing statistical and data reports that can serve as the foundation for further research, and instituting a system of accountability regarding the retention and advancement of underrepresented groups in libraries (ibid: p7-8).

Alire (1997: p39) takes up the point regarding empathy with library users, stating that 'one way to serve minority communities better is to hire minority *staff* [original emphasis] who not only can relate to and understand diverse cultures, but who can also serve as role models to attract nonusers'.

Methodology

In addition to a critical perusal of the literature, the following approach and methods were used in this study.

Approach

Given that the aims of the project are to expose and explore issues, a qualitative methodology was considered appropriate. Within this broad area, one approach appeared to be particularly appropriate. This is 'Illuminative evaluation' - a qualitative and participatory approach to the evaluation of services (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972). It is characterised by putting the participants of the phenomenon studied first, and eliciting the issues that are important to them, rather than by using standard

measurable units of evaluation. As noted by Harvey (2000: p2-4) ‘an illuminative approach to evaluation allows us to report on factors important in a particular context and to identify unexpected factors or outcomes’.

Illuminative evaluation is used primarily in education. As Spellman (2000: p75) explains, the need to evaluate the entire process of learning led to its development, which ‘involves intensive study of a teaching and learning programme as a whole: its rationale and evolution, its operations, achievements and difficulties’. Spellman (*ibid*) emphasises also that the context and process of the phenomena are as important as measures of ‘input’ and ‘output’. Indeed, Spellman himself undertakes an evaluation of a Computer Assisted Learning package by concentrating almost exclusively on contextual and process factors. His data gathering included only the views of the participants, not performance (as might be measured by pre-post test methods).

Lorraine Ellis (Ellis, 2005, 2004; Ellis and Nolan 2005) has also used illuminative evaluation extensively. She points out that the objective of this method is to ‘illuminate, or throw light on, issues such as what it is like to be participating [e.g. in a learning environment] ... significant features, recurring concomitants and critical processes’.

Considering Partlett and Hamiltons’s (1972, 1987) seminal work, and others who have undertaken illuminative evaluation (e.g. Russell et al, 2003, 2004; Ellis, 2005) three main methods appear most appropriate: observation, interview and document analysis, although other methods have been used (e.g. Spellman 2000). Russell et al (2004) show how it is possible to integrate all three main methods. Other research describing itself as illuminative evaluation includes Galvin et al (2000: p277), who examined the impact of Citizens Advice Bureaux situated in GP surgeries the impacts of the service ‘from the perspective of its users.’ The findings of the study suggest that locating CAB advisers in GP surgeries has been a success, providing access for people who would otherwise be excluded ‘by reason of age, poor health, poverty or lack of transport’.

Methods

The depth interview

In keeping with the general approach of qualitative methodology, the depth-interview was used. This enabled a very detailed exploration of all the key issues – including those the researchers had not considered previously. Another factor also influenced choice of methods – one of representation. It is nearly impossible to arrive at a reasonable sample of practice and thought on the problem at issue (or any other) given the enormous number and variety of Library and Information Services (LIS’s) in London - and the terms used to identify them. This makes obtaining and analysing quantitative data very difficult, whereas it was hoped a qualitative approach would clarify the problems and issues (for a possible later follow-up with a larger and therefore more quantitative) sample.

Areas of questioning

Following previous work by one of the present authors (Williams, 2005; Williams et al, 2008) a chronological approach was used, in which respondents are encouraged to talk about their experiences as their careers progressed. First, therefore, they were

asked why they decided to enter the field, training undertaken, experiences of gaining their first post, and subsequent career development. Through this chronological approach, it was hoped to tease out what problems and barriers respondents faced and how these were overcome. Current views on the issue were also sought, especially in terms of how these have been shaped by people's own careers in LIS

Analysing the data

The aims of the project and the consequent areas of questioning lent themselves very much to the 'framework analysis' approach of Jane Richie and Liz Spencer (Richie and Spencer, 1994: p176). This is a qualitative method of data analysis developed 'to facilitate systematic analysis within the demands and constraints of applied policy research'. We consider that framework analysis is a natural extension of illuminative evaluation in that it provides a means of analysing the kind of data typically accrued in illuminative evaluation, and we have previously used the method successfully in other studies (Nicholas et al 2003, 2005; Williams 2005). Framework analysis involves a process of familiarisation, identifying key themes, indexing, 'charting' ('lifting the [indexed] data from their original context and rearranging according to ... (theme)' (ibid: p182). 'Charted' data is further examined to complete the research, by eliciting concepts, finding associations (between circumstances and motivation; attitudes and behaviour etc.), assessing the strength and extent of elicited views and behaviour, and seeking explanations. Whilst not explicitly using the term 'framework analysis', this is very similar to the process undertaken by Ellis (e.g. 2004) in her illuminative evaluation study of Continuing Professional Education curriculae for nurses (she described it as 'content analysis'), and by Galvin et al (2000), mentioned above, who used the term thematic content analysis (after Strauss, 1967; and Atkinson and Abu El Haj 1996) in their illuminative evaluation, although the method was also very similar to framework analysis.

Sample

Initial interviewees were recruited through CILIP in London, and then a 'snowballing' technique was used (Atkinson and Flint, 2003), in which initial respondents were asked to suggest others fitting the respondent criteria. A good example was that of one interviewee who was able to suggest a respondent at the beginning of her career – the profile required to complete a wide a spectrum of LIS workers. Nine people were interviewed, as follows: two academic librarians who worked in higher education, a specialist library information officer, a further education librarian, four public librarians, and another interviewee who was not based at any particular branch, but worked in the public library service at senior managerial level. Interviewee ages ranged from early twenties to late fifties, and participants were at various points in their careers. The sample consisted of two men and seven women, of whom four were born and raised outside the UK. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, and the possibility of identifying interviewees, locations are not being disclosed in this report.

Results

As requested at each interview session, respondents spoke of both their personal experience and offered their opinions, based on these, of why others chose not to embark on a Library and Information Services (LIS) career. It is important to note that two of the interviewees did not encounter any problems or barriers, either in their own careers or in their knowledge of the experiences of other Black and Minority Ethnic staff. One of these was, frankly, bemused by the whole project – even questioning

whether there was an under-representation of these groups in the profession. That said, others did mention both points in their own careers which they felt had been – and still were in some cases – barriers to their career progress, and their knowledge of other people’s experiences.

Qualifications

Anyone wishing to make a professional career in LIS obviously needs certain qualifications. However, the experience of the interviewees suggests that qualifications obtained overseas seem not to be recognised as much as they should in UK, except those in shortage areas such as nursing. As an example, the management qualifications and, indeed, the subsequent budget management skills one interviewee (now working in a specialist library) gained in Africa were not valid in the UK. He had to re-take these courses once he had arrived. Whilst, clearly, this is a major setback for him, and others in the same position, the CILIP in London project co-ordinator pointed out that some courses offered overseas may not meet CILIP’s requirements. It is inevitable, therefore, that these problems arise.

It was also pointed out, however, by senior librarians interviewed, that qualifications are not so important at the beginning of a LIS career. Some people, particularly those not originally from the UK, may think one needs certain educational qualifications, or a particular level of education to work in the area, and thus decide not to pursue a career in this field.

Alienation from career

Several interviewees spoke of potential alienation from LIS as a career for Black and Minority Ethnic people because of:

- *Lack of materials for Black and Minority Ethnic staff*: One public librarian respondent has found few materials, such as books in ethnic languages or information on community activities for specific communities, or information for minority library users, and therefore little with which people can identify. Thus, even library users might not feel the profession is relevant to them
- *Lack of representation*: Staff, according to four interviewees, are predominantly white and middle class – a clear case of a ‘vicious circle’, with ethnic minorities reluctant to join the profession because there were so few of them already in it (two of the interviewees, however, disputed this, claiming that in certain boroughs – Westminster was mentioned – there was a wide ethnic mix. One respondent said that there was also a better representation in further education). Black and Minority Ethnic staff might perform badly in interviews, it was suggested, because the interviewing panels tend to be all-white and thus appear intimidating to the candidate, however welcoming and positive the interviewers may try to be.

Cultural differences

Two main issues arose. First, some Black and Minority Ethnic staff may come from cultures or societies where there are fewer libraries and where belonging to or frequenting a library is not the norm. Thus, LIS does not readily suggest itself as a career option. Second, as three respondents opined – interestingly, all three coming from outside the UK - some people might not be used to having to ‘sell’ themselves at interview. The one European (Higher Education) librarian interviewed said that in her country one took an examination which, once passed, leads automatically to a position – interviews did not form part of the process.

Lack of awareness of staff diversity

From the evidence provided by the respondents, there still seems to be a surprising lack of awareness regarding the presence of Black and Minority Ethnic staff in professional positions within LIS. Two vignettes told by one senior public librarian, who described herself as 'black British', illustrate the point. First, she was attending a buffet lunch at an important gathering of senior figures from the library service, when one of the other delegates mistook her for a waitress. Second, at an information-related conference, she was asked if she was a Personal Assistant to one of the attendees. She said there were around 300 delegates, but no more than seven Black and Minority Ethnic staff. In a way, therefore, as she admitted, it was no surprise that others did not realise that she was one of their peers. She also recounted that on many occasions she is asked where she comes from, with the enquirer surprised to find the answer is Brixton.

Lack of support

One interviewee felt that employment agencies do not offer enough support, although his later experiences have been better. Similarly, he said, some immigrants end up doing nothing with regard to their careers, because they never receive the right support and encouragement generally, from employment agents, and potential employers as well as relatives who have gone through hardships and drive the new arrival into care or industrial jobs.

Language barriers

Some people are knowledgeable and skilled, but find it difficult to express themselves in English, as it may be a second language. This can clearly be a barrier at the start of a career, and may be a contributing factor in under-performing at interviews or, indeed, for not being selected for interview. Once in the profession, there is also a large specialised lexicon which may prove troublesome for those with English as a second or additional language, impeding career progression. On the other hand, as was pointed out by one of the academic librarians, being bi-lingual can be advantageous. Indeed, a Chinese librarian interviewee has taken on the duties of Chinese cataloguing; providing suggestions regarding purchasing books abroad, and arranging book selection and withdrawal. She also translates signs and notices and is involved in outreach projects using Mandarin and Cantonese to communicate with people.

Perceived racism

Fortunately, the problem of racism was mentioned by only a minority of interviewees, although several forms of it were described. First, one interviewee felt that she should, at least, have been selected for an interview, for both of two positions she had applied for (at different times), as she met all the criteria for being selected. When she asked for feedback, the person to whom she spoke also could not understand why she had not been short listed.

Racism within one's physical environment was also reported. In one instance a volunteer cataloguer working with the special library interviewee ostensibly complained about a new computerised system being introduced. However, the interviewee feels there was an element of racism in the cataloguer's opposition. The same interviewee claims this situation is made worse when one enters a position of

responsibility. Good collaboration is needed between managers and staff, and this is not always possible if any of the staff are racist in any way. The same interviewee has also experienced what he feels is racism at job interviews, in that apparently non-relevant questions have been asked of him – such as regarding home location. He feels interviewers are often ‘only looking for an excuse to not employ you’. He feels this is (quoting from additional notes the interviewee wrote on being sent the researcher’s) ‘to do with prejudice, as where there is a preferred candidate, the level of questioning is aimed at finding excuses for not offering you the job e.g. the interviewer will ask you if there are any development needs you envisage on the job, you never can tell if saying the truth will lend you with or without the job!’

Finally, there were mentions of occasional incidents with library users in which it appeared that they were perhaps less polite because of the ethnic origin of the staff.

More positively, other interviewees did not speak of any of these problems. Indeed, two felt that prejudice or discrimination may not be prevalent at all, but instead simply be people’s perceptions. One felt that being pleasant and friendly to others is a good way to avoid having any such problems. The other suggested that staff sometimes feel that things going against them have racial origins when, in fact, they are being treated as anyone else. In fact, there is a large body of literature on perceived racism. Of interest to this project, Rollins and Valdez (2006), in a study of African American adolescents, found that those who perceived there to be racism against themselves or members of their racial group performed professional tasks less well than others.

It is worth mentioning that, according to this respondent (a librarian in Higher Education) users of services sometimes feel they are being discriminated against, when, for example, rules are rigidly adhered to (e.g. fines not being waived), where some consider the rule enforcement is applied specifically as a racist act. Similarly, customers of the same ethnic origin as the librarian or information officer dealing with them may feel they have the right to certain privileges or exceptions from rules etc. on the basis of this shared attribute.

Immigrant rights problems

The story of one of the interviewees not born in the European Union (EU) was illustrative of the problems individuals coming to the UK from outside the EU may face. He first came over on a student visa, which permitted 20 hours work per week. However, this expired shortly after his studies finished and so he applied for a work permit. The process took two years – during which time he continued to work part-time. Co-incidentally, the day after the result of the application, he was due for promotion at the NHS Trust where he was working. He was informed that his application (supported by the Trust), had been refused. Hence he had no status or leave to remain. He lost his job because of this. He then applied for asylum, as the situation in his home country had deteriorated. He realised later, he had been ill-advised to do this, as people in this category are not permitted to work at all while their case is under consideration. He obtained legal support, which suggested he withdrew his application for asylum, and now has discretionary leave to remain in the UK. His application for indefinite leave to remain is classed as being a ‘legacy file’ as it forms part of a Home Office backlog of cases, and may not be heard until 2011. Clearly, if this story is multiplied across different ethnic communities and individuals,

many constraints will be placed on the employment of Black and Minority Ethnic people.

Also on the point of rights, another interviewee felt that job opportunities are available first for UK candidates, than for those in the European Union, and only later for other people – there are not equal rights of candidature. In law, of course, workers from any country within the European Union have the right to work in the UK, and cannot be discriminated against on the grounds of nationality (or race) when applying for jobs. The recent dispute at the Lindsey oil refinery (see e.g. BBC, 2008) highlighted this issue. This equal right extends to non-EU workers by virtue of the Race Discrimination Act 1976 and amended in the Race Relations Act (Amendment) Regulations 2003 (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2008) assuming they have the right to work in the UK. Thus, this view may be the perception of the interviewee rather than the reality. Clearly, it is possible for an employer to act in a subtly racial manner in employing staff, although one hopes that this is not the case in LIS (or, indeed, anywhere).

Added ‘life’ pressures on immigrants

Overcoming bureaucratic obstacles to gaining the right to work is not the only pressure on immigrants. It was pointed out that a typical ‘9-5 job’ common in many LIS posts, may not necessarily be suitable for those coming to settle in Britain. For one thing, they may have to study more than might otherwise be the case – the language, or for qualifications they were not able to undertake at home, for example. They are often denied benefits, too, and may therefore need to undertake shift work or additional hours for the extra remuneration they accrue.

Conclusion and areas for further study

This study has been small-scale and qualitative. It has, however, succeeded in its aim of raising a number of important issues. These have included an exploration of the barriers that Black and Minority Ethnic people face in entering the LIS profession, such as misconceptions about the nature of the work and the relevance to their own lives and cultures; worries – real and imagined – about qualifications; and barriers faced in the application process. It has also revealed barriers faced within the profession, such as feelings of isolation and, sadly, prejudice and mild racism (be it perceived or real).

The study clearly leads to several questions. The blanket term ‘Black and Minority Ethnic’, for example, covers many different circumstances, e.g., those newly arrived in UK, first, second, third (West Indians from c1950), Caribbeans, East, West and South African, Asians from many countries. An important point is the extent of cultural differences, particularly with regard to education, that may impact on LIS career prospects and practices. In other words, are there different problems or issues specific to LIS workers (current or prospective) from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds? If so, how can these individual differences be addressed. This is, of course, a sensitive matter, but one that needs serious attention if the problem of under-recruitment is to be tackled.

A second question is the extent to which the same problems highlighted in this study apply to other areas of the United Kingdom. Almost half of the ethnic minority population resides in the London area (ONS, 2001) but nevertheless there are large

concentrations in other big cities. Are there different problems in, say, the West Midlands, or the North West, to those in London, or are there the same problems, but exacerbated or lessened by local factors?

Regarding the barriers facing people with regard entering LIS, it might be fruitful to examine careers advice to prospective information professionals. There are certainly no shortage of information sources: CILIP itself; specialist employment agencies, of which there are several, and, of course, careers advisors. Questions arise as to whether – and how – any of this literature could be improved to obviate some of the reasons why LIS as a career does not appeal to Black and minority Ethnic people. Could highlighting the range of ethnic material in public libraries, or the need for more ethnic candidates help?

In short, much still needs to be done to address the issues raised in this report, both in terms of research and possible practical action.

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