

- targeting young black and minority ethnic individuals who are experienced in digital technologies such as mobile phones, MP3 players etc. Many black and minority ethnic school leavers have limited knowledge about the immense scope in IT, though they are aware of what is involved in things they enjoy- messaging programmes, computer games, internet searches. Computing and information technology are areas of study which, if marketed as an enjoyable learning experience, may appeal to many who would otherwise never consider they have an appetite and aptitude for or may have been directed away from it by parents.
- recognising that many black and minority ethnic males aged 16-20 after having left school early do not value education. Without qualifications or jobs they see no future. Creating a welcoming, supportive and enjoyable learning environment where regular attendance would develop structured routines is key to the development of these potential learners.

Many of the issues that have been outlined above are not unique or specific to the black and minority ethnic community. However it is worthwhile to consider them specifically in this context in order to appreciate the differences and commonalities, and to shape learning opportunities appropriately.

Irfan Rabbani

YCSA
(Youth Counselling
Services Agency)
Progression Project



Alhambra House
45 Waterloo Street
Glasgow G2 6HS
Tel: 0141 285 6000
Fax: 0141 285 6001

www.lds4partners.com

Supporting Black and Minority Ethnic Learners

Attempting to look at the learning needs of the black and minority ethnic communities with a "one size fits all" approach is fraught with dangers. Within each of these communities there are complex and diverse requirements in the many components that comprise each section of each individual community. Although there is scope to make certain common generalisations based on experience it is imperative that the most important factor remains treating each learner individually. This article identifies some barriers to learning for black and minority ethnic communities in Scotland today.



Key areas to look at are motivation and the make up of the targeted community. Until now Scotland had neither ageing black and minority ethnic citizens nor a rapidly increasing young black and minority ethnic population.

Some older black and minority ethnic individuals adhere to a concept which transfers to children, that learning is merely a means to an end: employment. Rigid views are sometimes held on acceptable employment routes regardless of capability, aptitude, or desire. This has an immense bearing on outlook, and motivation for learning, resulting in minimal numbers of older adult learners and capable young people dropping from learning completely.

Areas for consideration in targeting the black and minority ethnic community in general include:

- improving access to learning centres by analysing current marketing techniques. Advertisement through flyers, even in community languages, is not adequate. Community centres and places of worship, for example, should be visited by staff with presentations extolling the benefits of available services.
- collaboration with existing black and minority ethnic training service providers, utilising the client knowledge base these organisations enjoy and exploring the possibility of joint partnership initiatives. Open day presentations at such venues should be considered.
- approaching colleges which have begun to address low service uptake in order to share valuable knowledge on successful ventures.
- visiting schools with high black and minority ethnic rolls, for example at parent/teacher events, so that pupils and parents can be made aware of what is on offer to assist and complement the overall learning experience.

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General issues and accessibility

It is important to ensure that cultural and religious sensitivities are addressed appropriately through, for example:

- provision of female only classes
- avoiding prayer times and religious ceremonies
- ensuring facilities are made available for spiritual time
- providing crèche facilities, as many black and minority ethnic females begin raising families at earlier ages

Many black and minority ethnic individuals lack confidence in attending events where they would be in a minority, as perhaps applies to the indigenous population but are their "differences" as readily visible?

One approach which has been piloted successfully is where black and minority ethnic individuals form the majority clientele but provision is not exclusively black and minority ethnic.

It is important to realise that there is often a general attitude that learning which does not lead to qualifications and/or employment is an alien concept in this group.

Also, motivation and confidence may be lacking initially for school leavers, or older females. Specialised guidance at the initial enrolment and difficult early stages will help to reduce drop out rates.

Specific approaches for consideration in targeting black and minority ethnic clients include:

- organising awareness raising sessions for adults on how the multiple benefits and many forms of available learning opportunities would lead to an ability to make more informed decisions on their children's education.
- recognising that, for the first time in Scotland, we now have many black and minority ethnic females, having fulfilled traditional obligations as home-makers, actively seeking opportunities. They can be specifically targeted and encouraged into the learning community.

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- recognising that for many older black and minority ethnic individuals this may be the first time they are accessing formal learning processes in this country or indeed at all. Tutors can help to increase confidence by concentrating on positives from their life experiences rather than dwelling on formal qualifications, for example when filling out enrolment forms.
- recognising that older black and minority ethnic individuals may view computers suspiciously due to adverse publicity concerning the internet. Raising awareness of e-learning opportunities should help alleviate suspicion as would information on how to utilise the internet as a learning tool for themselves and their children.
- appreciating that black and minority ethnic individuals, perhaps more than most learners, will value personalised learning plans structured to provide for an achievement/certificate/qualification. This is critical for young black and minority ethnic individuals with bad learning experiences often compounded by parents also viewing them as "failures".
- targeting young black and minority ethnic individuals who have dropped out of learning immediately after school. Often these young people are regarded traditionally by parents and general academics as having no learning aptitude. Yet many possess unrecognised knowledge in areas such as sports, music, arts, and automobiles, to name a few. Tutors can help to increase their confidence by explicitly recognising these non-traditional skills and talents and linking them to learning opportunities.
- motivating those who have opted out of the learning cycle immediately after leaving school by, for example, arranging access to college visits during any learning process, thus enhancing confidence and sense of achievement through involvement in a learning environment they have not previously felt part of.

