

Speech: Helping people from ethnic minority backgrounds into work

Thank you Kirsty and the Employment Related Services Association (ERSA) for inviting me to speak today. It is an absolute pleasure.

But more importantly – thank you for publishing this interesting [Race, Ethnicity and Employment report](#).

We have made huge progress in recent decades to improve the opportunities for ethnic minorities in the UK.

But its studies like this that help us identify where the challenges still lie.

And what we in government can do to tackle them.

I'm going to start by talking about Doctor Who.

For those of you who have heard me speak before you will know it is my go-to programme for anecdotes.

In a recent episode the new Doctor, and what a pleasure it is that we finally have a female Doctor, she and companions travelled back to 1950s Alabama.

On the eve of Rosa Parks' historic bus protest that sparked the Civil Rights movement.

What was remarkable was not only Rosa Parks' personal bravery.

But it was the incomprehension of the characters from 2018 when faced with the institutional racism of 1950s America.

This well-loved family programme brought the subject of racial injustice to Sunday night viewing, making it something to be talked about and not ignored.

And it showed how different the experience of ethnic minorities now is from decades past.

But let's be clear, discrimination does still exist.

And as a recent incident on Ryanair sadly showed, so does racism.

On a personal level, when my father settled in the UK in the 70s, he was not easily able to find a job in line with his experience and qualifications.

There may have been many reasons for this. But I expect his experience may not have been dissimilar from that of others, from an ethnic minority background.

So he set up his own business and, thankfully, made a success of it.

But that was then, of course.

Now we have cause for celebration, as those from an ethnic minority background share in the booming jobs market we have created. Ethnic minority employment is at a record high.

And the employment gap between ethnic minorities and white groups is below 10% for the first time ever on record.

In fact, we are almost three quarters of the way to achieving the government's target of increasing ethnic minority employment by 20% by 2020.

Since 2010 we have seen 3.3 million more people in work overall, of those 1.15 million were from ethnic minorities.

That means growth in ethnic minority employment of 36% – 3 times the growth in overall employment – closing the gap faster than ever before.

Cause for celebration, but not inaction.

The ethnic minority employment rate is 65.5%.

A record high, but that's still the same level as the overall UK employment rate was in 1984.

So I welcome progress, and I welcome the increasing rate of progress.

But when people from ethnic minorities face the same employment prospects that others enjoyed decades ago, that progress will never be enough.

Tackling injustices is at the heart of the Prime Minister's agenda.

When she launched the Race Disparity Audit (RDA) last year it was the first time a UK government looked overall at the impact of race across many aspects of life.

And we are leading the world in this approach.

The RDA has raised a lot of issues.

But above all, it has shown that we cannot treat ethnic minorities as one single group, with the same challenges.

Something I am glad to see ERSA's report also highlights.

To give some examples.

The British black employment rate is lower than that of the British Indian community, at 67.6 per cent.

In the British Chinese community it's 60.6 per cent, while the average rate in the British Pakistani and British Bangladeshi communities is just 54.8 per cent.

British Pakistani and British Bangladeshi workers are far more likely to be in the lowest skilled occupation groups and receive the lowest average hourly pay.

While the British Chinese community has a gender employment gap of just 6.6 percentage points, lower than the white British or UK average, among the British Indian community it's 12.3 percentage points.

And that's exactly why our approach is tailored to the specific challenges of different communities.

My department has identified 20 'challenge areas' across the country.

These are areas where the employment gap is highest and the ethnic minority population is the greatest.

We are targeting these places with specialist support, trialling new interventions.

Including mentoring programmes and targeted projects building on existing community networks.

Youth

Overall youth unemployment may be at a record low, but it is still hard for young people to see themselves in jobs which are effectively invisible to them.

Jobs where they do not see people like themselves succeeding.

That is why our network of mentoring circles helps open their horizons, bringing young people from ethnic minorities together – voluntarily – in their local jobcentre.

These young people are being mentored in our jobcentres by major employers like HSBC and Fujitsu, giving them the self-confidence and skills and aspiration they need.

I have visited one of these mentoring programmes in north London.

And saw for myself how transformative they can be for youngsters.

Particularly when the mentoring is provided by someone from a similar background to them.

So far, 63 mentoring circles have taken place in 21 jobcentres, and more are being prepared for next year.

A lack of expectations can do more than just drain ambition and hope – it can drive young people onto the wrong path.

That is why proactive intervention can be so important in fuelling their success.

Women

British Pakistani and British Bangladeshi women have some of the lowest employment rates in the UK.

Part of the reason for this may be cultural expectations of caring responsibilities in the home.

Determining what is a choice, and what may be the result of a cultural pressure is not straight forward.

But we must ensure that women know that when they choose to work, they can and will be valued.

That is why in Birmingham Yardley, an area with low employment rates for women from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds, we are reaching out to them to build a trusted relationship for the first time.

By building the women's confidence, and their knowledge about job opportunities.

And by working in existing community networks, we can bring them closer to the labour market so they can make a choice about their future in it.

Creating full employment among ethnic minorities communities is not just the right thing to do.

It makes good business sense.

As ERSA's members already know, an inclusive employer is also a successful employer.

And that includes the bottom line.

Full representation of ethnic minority individuals across the labour market, through participation and progression in their careers, would boost the economy by an estimated £24 billion a year.

And it's something the whole of government is acting on.

Take my colleagues in the Department for Education.

They are working with thousands of employers and the National Apprenticeship Service to get more young people from ethnic minorities into apprenticeships, a route into almost any career from nuclear engineering to law.

We have pledged to increase the number of apprentices from an ethnic minority background by 20 per cent by 2020.

And last year 55,000 apprentices came from such backgrounds.

Conclusion

The more we understand about where inequality exists, the more we can do to tackle it.

So again I thank ERSA for this thought -provoking report.

It joins a huge bank of evidence, including the Race Disparity Audit and the future findings from the consultation on the Ethnic Pay Gap.

Our work to tackle inequality is ongoing, and will be for some time yet.

But arming ourselves with this evidence means progress will be quicker.

So that when the Doctor Who of the future travels back to our own time, and she and her companions find it difficult to comprehend the injustices which still exist today – that will be because we have tackled them and created a future where everyone has the same opportunity to succeed in life.