Minority Ethnic Teachers' Professional Experiences
Evidence from the Teacher Status Project

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This study of minority ethnic teachers' professional experiences extends the findings of one strand of the Teacher Status Project (Hargreaves et al., 2007a). The Teacher Status Project was a four-year study of public and individual teachers' perceptions of the status of teachers and the teaching profession, conducted by the University of Cambridge, Faculty of Education and funded (following a process of competitive tendering) by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). This report summarises the views of African Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani teachers collected in 12 focus groups conducted in London, the West Midlands and the North West between 2005 and 2006. It highlights, in particular, the views of African Caribbean teachers, in response to two main research questions:

1. What part does the current status of the teaching profession play in attracting people from minority ethnic backgrounds to the profession?
2. Do minority ethnic teachers hold alternative perceptions of professionalism, which perhaps make teaching more or less attractive to them?

Key findings

- Minority ethnic teachers' concern to serve their communities provided the over-arching reason for their entry to the teaching profession in all three regions. They stressed the desire to act as role models for all pupils but particularly for minority ethnic pupils who may be at risk of under-achieving. The teachers, notably Indian teachers, also expressed intrinsic personal reasons, such as fulfilling childhood ambitions, for becoming teachers.
- Most teachers from each of the ethnic groups felt that wider representation of minority ethnic groups was needed among teachers, both to support pupil learning and to encourage greater participation in the education system from their communities. African Caribbean teachers were particularly concerned that schools need more proportionate representation of the African Caribbean community at all levels from classroom teacher to headteacher.
- Minority ethnic teachers who had trained and qualified in England reported being able to enter the profession and obtain teaching posts at schools in inner city and urban areas with relative ease. Minority ethnic teachers who had trained and qualified overseas, however, reported disillusionment with the profession in England, and perceived racist practices associated with the recruitment of teaching staff.
- The fear of potential racial abuse from teachers, parents and local communities prevented most participating minority ethnic teachers from applying for teaching opportunities in schools situated in areas with no or low proportions of minority ethnic people.

- Minority ethnic teachers felt that the requirements of the national curriculum hindered their ability to support the learning of minority ethnic pupils and compromised their professional expertise. African Caribbean teachers also felt that some teachers' unwillingness to appreciate the learning needs of an increasingly diverse pupil population undermined the cultural and social significance of their communities.

Research methods

Twelve focus groups were conducted between May 2005 to April 2006 in six local authorities in the North West, the West Midlands and London which had higher than average numbers of minority ethnic teachers. Forty-nine teachers took part of whom 33 were African Caribbean, three Bangladeshi, seven Indian and six were Pakistani. Five teachers opted for in-depth, face-to-face interviews. All participants were qualified teachers who were working in maintained schools or local authority school support services. Fourteen teachers were from London, 14 from the North West and 21 teachers were from the West Midlands. The focus group discussions were transcribed and analysed with the aid of Atlas ti (computer assisted qualitative data analysis software for social scientists). As with other qualitative research, our conclusions are limited to the contributions of the 49 participants and we have not sought to make generalisations about teachers' experiences.

Findings

The findings below are organised in response to the two main research questions. The first question concerns the status of the profession, and the second addresses status within the profession and conceptions of professionalism. Teachers themselves rarely used the word 'status' or referred directly to it. Instead they spoke of issues associated with the status of teaching, such as the attractiveness of a teaching career, motivation to join and remain in the profession, and their status within the profession, such as promotion opportunities and scope to use their professional knowledge and expertise. It falls to the research team to construct these teachers' perceptions of the status of the profession from their discourses.

Research Question 1: What part does the current status of the teaching profession play in attracting people from minority ethnic backgrounds to the profession?

Professional ambitions on entry to the teaching profession
The teaching profession was viewed by most minority ethnic teachers as a respectable and desirable occupation which afforded minority ethnic teachers the scope to serve their communities whilst servicing the learning needs of all pupils. Prominently, but not exclusively, among their reasons was the drive to present themselves as role models for pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. The African Caribbean teachers educated in England recalled their own experiences of seemingly irrelevant and inaccessible teaching

practices and learning aids which they felt continued to impede the academic progress of African Caribbean pupils today. Several African Caribbean and Bangladeshi teachers had become teachers specifically seeking to reform an education system and teaching profession which they felt were dominated by racial injustices which deterred minority ethnic communities from considering a teaching career.

Recruitment concerns of minority ethnic teachers trained in England and those trained overseas
Minority ethnic teachers trained in England experienced a relatively comfortable entry to the teaching profession provided they were content to remain in inner city and urban areas with ethnically diverse teacher and pupil populations. On the other hand, the efforts of experienced minority ethnic teachers trained overseas to secure permanent teaching posts led them to feel that they had been unfairly discriminated against due to their ethnicity. Furthermore, these teachers perceived an inclination, by school leaders, to retain their expertise but as supply teachers and with minimal financial cost to their schools. These teachers can expect to serve in these roles for long periods without the contractual benefits or career development opportunities enjoyed by permanent teaching staff.

Geographical exclusion zones
Minority ethnic teachers' own fear of potential direct or indirect racism that they might encounter in applying for posts in various parts of the England was as destructive as the racially discriminatory practices they perceived to be exercised by certain schools. Notwithstanding the legitimacy of their fears, by taking decisions not to work in schools based in less ethnically diverse areas, these teachers have voluntarily excluded themselves from alternative teaching opportunities. The fact that these teachers felt they needed to avoid certain areas raises questions about attitudes in the teaching profession as a whole.

Research Question 2: Do minority ethnic teachers hold alternative perceptions of professionalism, which perhaps make teaching more or less attractive to them?

A curriculum in support of teacher professionalism
Most of the teachers considered that their readiness to research and understand the social and cultural differences of minority ethnic pupils, and to adapt their teaching accordingly, was central to their professionalism. This enabled them to develop curriculum content which was more responsive to the needs and motivation of these pupils, provided that the curriculum was flexible enough to permit such adaptation. Some felt, however, that school leaders had stifled their professionalism through rigid and prescriptive interpretations of the national curriculum, such that some teachers had resorted to covert methods to impart culturally relevant knowledge to their pupils. These teachers resented the responsibility to teach what they considered to be a mono-cultural national curriculum which held other cultures in low esteem, to diverse pupil populations.

African Caribbean teachers, in particular, emphasized also a need for more like-minded teachers who are keenly disposed to investigate and embrace pupil differences, and to employ teaching strategies and interaction styles more appropriate to pupils' needs. The constraints on their freedom to adapt their teaching strategies, and unwillingness of some of their colleagues to do so was seen as having negative consequences for both pupil attainment and teacher professionalism.

Despite the recent reforms to the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) aimed at providing additional resources for under-achieving pupils and pupils with English as an additional language (EAL), there was concern from African Caribbean teachers about what they perceived to be the redirection of (EMAG) resources from under-achieving African Caribbean pupils and towards EAL pupils, typically excluding the former group. African Caribbean teachers felt, therefore, that the development of EMAG over the years removed support for them to pursue their professional ambitions and commitment to act as role models to support the academic performance of African Caribbean pupils. These teachers felt that more positive approaches towards the learning needs of minority ethnic pupils would encourage their communities to participate in, and begin to feel some ownership of, the education system.

In sum, the constraints, actual or perceived, that minority ethnic teachers feel limit their opportunities to exercise their professional judgment in the interests of their pupils, undermine their professionalism and diminish their status within the teaching profession. Ultimately this lack of recognition and respect for teachers' expertise was considered to distance minority ethnic communities from the education system.

Conclusions

The findings presented here, based on focus groups of minority ethnic teachers in three English regions, reveal the opinions and perceptions of committed professionals with particular contributions to make to improve the educational achievement of all pupils, but especially of minority ethnic pupils. Motivation to act as role models and serve their communities in this way, has led these teachers to join the profession. Whilst those trained in England can find posts in areas with ethnically diverse populations, they are deterred from seeking teaching posts in other parts of the country and in higher achieving schools, by real or perceived racist attitudes towards them. Such restrictions on their freedom to teach in any school also have implications both for their status within the profession, and also for the attractiveness of the profession to people from minority ethnic groups. Experienced minority ethnic teachers who have trained, qualified and taught overseas reported being placed in inferior positions to newly qualified teachers during their probationary periods. Such treatment seriously under-estimates the respect and professional status that these teachers deserve, and must also jeopardize the attractiveness of the teaching profession for minority ethnic teachers in England, at a time when there are policies in place intended to increase their numbers.

There is also, at this time, considerable concern about the underachievement of minority ethnic pupils, and in particular pupils of African Caribbean origin. Teachers in our focus

groups felt that their ability to recognize and respond to these pupils' needs and interests through adaptation of the curriculum and teaching strategies could improve the standards achieved by these pupils. They feel however that the national curriculum, national strategies and school-leaders' sometimes rigid interpretations of these frameworks, deny them opportunities to exercise their professionalism. In other words, in a situation where their expertise merits high status within the profession, it appears that they feel subject to control and regulation which detracts from professional status.

Whilst we make no attempt to suggest that these teachers' views are typical of all minority ethnic teachers, the fact that they were expressed by minority ethnic teachers in three different regions suggests that their perceptions and potential contributions to current educational needs justify the immediate attention of government, agencies and education leaders, who are concerned about the role of minority ethnic people within the education system.

Minority ethnic teachers, particularly African Caribbean teachers, have argued that their communities have, for the past few decades, been consigned to the outskirts of the education system by a profession which has consistently formed preconceived and stereotypical notions of their communities based on unfair assessments and the mis-education of their children. For these teachers, the denial of their professional expertise and status within the profession, and associated neglect of minority ethnic communities' needs is at the root of these groups' disillusionment with the education system and distance from the pursuit of a teaching career.

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

The Teacher Status Project was the result of a Department for Education and Skills (DfES) commission to examine the status of teachers and the teaching profession in England, over the four years from 2002 to 2006. The impetus for the research came from a government ambition to raise the status of teachers in a time when recruitment and retention issues formed a major challenge for education policy-makers. The design of the project facilitated exploration of the internal (teachers) and external (public, media and parents etc) views of the status of teachers generally. Two of the project's main aims, to '*understand the factors that might influence perceptions of status and teachers' attitudes*' and to '*identify how perceptions of teacher status can be improved*', acknowledged the possibility that the experiences of minority ethnic teachers may cause them to hold alternative perceptions of the profession. A strand of the Teacher Status Project, therefore, dealt specifically with the experiences of minority ethnic teachers and engaged these teachers in focus group discussions. Our reporting of the findings has been organised into two separate papers, the first of which forms a contribution to the Project's Evidence Base (Hargreaves et al., 2007a) and is concerned with minority ethnic teachers' experiences within the profession and addresses issues surrounding opportunities for promotion and their relationships with colleagues, school leaders and other external factors that they believe to influence their status. This second paper explores the motivations for minority ethnic teachers' entry to the profession and examines the extent to which teachers feel that the teaching profession and the education system is capable of supporting minority ethnic teachers to realise their professional ambitions.

Of crucial importance to teachers generally, and arguably any other profession, is the autonomy and support to achieve their professional aspirations and gain appropriate recognition/rewards within and outside of the profession. However, we investigate in this second paper the extent to which the ambition and drive for many people from minority ethnic backgrounds to enter the teaching profession is derived from a commitment to generate or improve pupils' learning opportunities in an increasingly diverse pupil population. We also report the challenges faced by minority ethnic teachers in attaining the above goals and their perceptions of the British education system's ability to support their mission. This paper, therefore, considers teachers' views in terms of two questions, namely:

1. What part does the current status of the teaching profession play in attracting people from minority ethnic backgrounds to the profession?
2. Do minority ethnic teachers hold alternative perceptions of professionalism, which perhaps makes teaching more or less of an attraction to them?

This study follows and supports a well-established but growing concern for government and other agencies (e.g. General Teaching Council for England (GTC) and Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA)) to increase the number of minority ethnic teachers in order to, among other reasons, create a more diverse team of professionals who are responsive to the needs of all children but particularly minority ethnic children. This report is timely in that it deals with many of the issues of concern to the various

agencies, revealing teachers' perceptions of the ways in which teachers feel that these factors might affect their status within the teaching profession.

The next part of this section outlines the strategy and methods employed in carrying out this study of the status of minority ethnic teachers. This is followed by a brief summary of the literature and studies which have considered, previously, some of the issues raised by teachers. The experiences and perceptions of teachers are then contained in the findings section before the paper concludes with some of the key observations.

Methodology

This paper represents the second report of the results from data collected in connection with the Teacher Status Project's study of the status of minority ethnic teachers. This account of the methodology is identical, therefore, to that contained in the Evidence Base report (Hargreaves et al., 2007a).

The investigation of minority ethnic teachers' status was conducted in focus groups, which invited the value judgements of teachers holding a range of professional roles in schools and local authorities. The objective was not to make generalisations about the population of minority ethnic teachers nor was our remit to draw comparisons between groups of minority ethnic and white teachers. Rather, we sought to gain an understanding of the social, political and cultural developments that influenced their perceptions of their status and their relationships with the teaching profession. We are confident, however that the research strategy adopted was sufficiently robust to ensure validity of the findings.

The level of interest in this study displayed by minority ethnic teachers was encouraging, however, translation of that interest into committed participation was somewhat challenging. Teachers were asked to participate and share experiences of a sensitive nature pertaining to past and current school experiences and fear of reprisals punctuated reasons for non-participation. Undoubtedly, one of the chief fears was the prospect that information about teachers' presence and contributions, at meetings might reach their headteachers. Teachers suspected a sinister agenda might exist in the association of the Teacher Status Project to the DfES and an Indian teacher shared the views of her colleagues who decided against attending a focus group:

> She said "Whatever we say, these people are always connected and we could fall in trouble". So I thought that there is an issue where ethnic minorities don't feel confident. She said "even if they say it's completely confidential, it's not". She told me "Be careful what you say". You need to work on building confidence in these minority ethnic teachers.

Also, a common accusation, even from those who attended focus groups, was the charge that valuable research which challenge the activities, motives or policies of government and school management would fail to achieve sufficient exposure.

Data collection
Data collection for this study took place during the 12 months from May 2005 to April 2006 and the main method used was focus groups. African-Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani teachers were invited to participate in one of up to four focus groups held in each of three local authority areas. In addition, interviews were conducted with five teachers who chose not to participate in group sessions. Focus groups were held in three regions, the North West, the West Midlands and London and were conducted in local authorities where there were schools with substantial numbers of pupils and teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds. Participants were assured anonymity and so neither their names, the names of their local authorities, nor their schools, are divulged in this report. The main method of gaining access to these teachers was through negotiations with local authority representatives, teachers' union representatives and various minority ethnic teachers' network groups. The GTCE's Achieve Network was also generous in publicising the study to its network members.

Twelve focus groups were conducted with qualified minority ethnic teachers who were working in maintained schools or attached to various local authority school support services. Participation took place in 6 local authorities and included 14 teachers from London, 14 teachers from the North West and 21 teachers from the West Midlands. From the four ethnic groups 33 African Caribbean, 3 Bangladeshi, 7 Indian and 6 Pakistani teachers participated. Analysis of the focus group discussions was carried out with the use of Atlas ti, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software package for social scientists.

The next section of this paper provides a brief background to some of the issues affecting the relationship between minority ethnic communities and the education system.

The context

Factors influencing the career aspirations of minority ethnic teachers
Much of the existing, but limited, studies relating to the situation of minority ethnic teachers in British schools can be found in publications about the academic attainment of minority ethnic pupils. For instance, there has, since Coard (1971) and Swann (1985), been a steady stream of studies concerned with establishing a more ethnically diverse teacher population equipped to combat academic under-achievement among minority ethnic pupils. Both Coard (1971) and Swann (1985) were concerned about school-based assessments, teacher attitudes and teacher expectations of minority ethnic pupils which were developed from stereotypical notions and lack of understanding of these pupils. In their judgements, the consequences for these pupils in British schools revealed systemic failures, the rectification of which might be addressed through the recruitment of more teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds.

A decade later, the plight of minority ethnic pupils remained a matter of concern for Bourne (1994) and McCadden (1998) who stressed the urgency with which they felt schools and education policy-makers needed to avert a travesty in British education which consigned some minority ethnic pupils to academic failure. Whilst few studies are devoted directly to the position of minority ethnic teachers, there exists, among those concerned with raising minority ethnic pupil attainment, acknowledgement that a solution would involve effective strategies to attract more people from minority ethnic backgrounds into the profession. Carrington et al's (2001) survey of Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) entrants in 1998 identified both positive and negative factors influencing the decisions of people from minority ethnic groups to enter the teaching profession. Gaining a '*sense of achievement/job satisfaction*' and being '*teacher role models*' were the two most prominent positive factors with 43 per cent and 22 per cent (respectively) of PGCE entrants feeling this way. Other factors deemed as negative aspects of a teaching career concerned '*pay, conditions and status*' (34%), '*discipline*' (19%) and '*political profile*' (17%). In their study which considered factors influencing people from minority ethnic backgrounds to become teachers, Maylor et al. (2003) emphasised the altruistic motives of minority ethnic teachers, claiming '*minority ethnic teachers are very much more motivated by a desire to give something back to their community or society than are white teachers*'. For teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds, therefore, the will to enter the teaching profession is determined by the contributions that they are able to make not only to the academic success of their pupils, but also, in many cases, to their communities.

It is from the contributions that minority ethnic teachers are able to make to pupil attainment and the internal and external recognition of their successes that these teachers derive their sense of esteem within the teaching profession and their communities. Hoyle (2001), in his explanation of various forms of teacher status, labels this concept of status as '*occupational esteem*' and makes the point that this is the only dimension[1] of status over which teachers themselves can have any influence. Esteem can be influenced by teachers' interpersonal relationships but also by the ways in which teachers are presented and discussed by politicians and the news media. Hoyle explains occupational esteem as, '*the regard in which an occupation is held by the general public by virtue of the personal qualities which members are perceived as bringing to their core task*'. This notion of *occupational esteem* is particularly pertinent to the cause of minority ethnic teachers who yearn for the opportunity to secure positions in schools which afford them the scope to influence, positively, the academic diet of minority ethnic pupils as role models esteemed by their communities.

Challenges to professional commitment
For commentators such as Wright (1987), Callendar (1997) and Brooker (2002), an essential component of teachers' professionalism is the willingness to appreciate and respond, positively, to the social, economic and cultural differences of pupils in diverse school populations. As recorded in the findings to this report, teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds also afforded great importance to the relevance of the cultural toolkits

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[1] Hoyle identifies three dimensions of status, see the Synthesis Report (Hargreaves et al., 2007b) to the Teacher Status Project for a more detailed explanation of the concepts.

and social knowledge which they bring to the profession and which enhance their sense of professional competence. The following studies demonstrate the extent to which, for minority ethnic teachers, the ability of the education system and education practitioners to develop professionalism capable of responding to the learning needs of minority ethnic pupils is crucial to teacher professionalism and sense of belonging to the profession.

In a study looking at the relationship between 'black students and white teachers', Wright (1987) recognises the social and economic factors which may hinder the academic performance of many children, however, Wright argues that successful delivery of education to a community with complex social and cultural nuances is distressed by certain school processes. Wright poses the question, '*What influence do school practices, procedures and organisation exert on the educational outcome of black students*?' For Wright, schools require knowledgeable professionals, from minority ethnic backgrounds who are afforded the leverage to influence school practices at classroom and management levels. Applying Bourdieu's concept of '*habitus*' to the situation in which minority ethnic pupils are faced, Callendar (1997) suggests that dominant cultural signals (such as those found in traditions and language) reproduced in the classroom operate to exclude minority ethnic pupils. She argued '*the habitus held in common by the dominant group permeates schooling, yet habitus can only be obtained by family upbringing*'. Thus, teachers have a professional obligation to be cognisant of certain culturally specific communication methods used within the classroom and which may serve to marginalise certain groups of pupils and consequently influence, negatively, future potential teachers.

With its roots in developmental psychology, which considers the interrelationship between individuals and their social context, sociocultural theory contends that educators require sufficient understanding of external factors, specifically the social world in which students live and grow, in order to communicate effectively with learners. The challenge to teachers and schools, therefore, has been to develop professional strategies to make children's learning experiences compatible with their knowledge of the world. Increasing knowledge in children, Vygotsky (1978) argues, '*is as a result of the social interactions between the growing child and other members of that child's community that the child acquires the 'tools' of thinking and learning*'. It is important to point out that the differences in language, social and cultural understandings, however, do not detract from the ability to understand high order concepts, rather they demand alternative approaches by teachers to the processes of teaching such concepts. In their study of *black* teachers in London, Maylor et al. (2006) recognised the need for a teaching profession that is more akin to the social and cultural variations in society and whose members, in their '*explicit practice and in their subconscious behaviour and attitudes*', are capable of responding to the learning needs of diverse pupil populations. For Maylor et al. a more diverse teacher population was also important to the fight against individual and institutional racism in schools and to provide *inspirational* role models for minority ethnic pupils.

This report
The following two sections of this report present findings from our study which addresses, first, minority ethnic teachers' perceptions of the status of the teaching profession. The section responds to the first research question which asks '*What part*

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does the current status of the teaching profession play in attracting people from minority ethnic backgrounds to the profession?' Here teachers speak about the ways in which their personal experiences and observations of schools and the education system have informed their decisions to enter the teaching profession. Secondly, teachers consider the extent to which schools have advanced towards a greater understanding of the learning needs of minority ethnic pupils. This second section of the report responds to the second research question, '*Do minority ethnic teachers hold alternative perceptions of professionalism, which perhaps make teaching more or less attractive to them*?' Teachers discuss matters of professional responsibility towards pupils and reveal the extent to which their own *occupational esteem* is threatened by perceived systemic and systematic disparities in educational provision.

Chapter 2: FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CAREER ASPIRATIONS OF TEACHERS

'*What part does the current status of the teaching profession play in attracting people from minority ethnic backgrounds to the profession*?'

This first section of the findings is concerned with gaining a greater understanding of the motivations and ambitions which attract minority ethnic people to a career in teaching. In discussions about their entry to the profession, teachers consider the necessity for schools to promote equitable career opportunities, in order to create positive role models to support the needs of minority ethnic pupils and raise standards in education generally.

The ambitions of minority ethnic teachers

The General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) commissioned a study (Maylor et al., 2003) which estimated a minority ethnic teacher population of 9100, representing 2.4 per cent of all teachers in England. Of this cohort, the report found that '*only 0.8% of teachers are Black, 1.3% are of Asian origin and 0.3% are of 'other' ethnicities'*. The report advocates strategies for increasing the proportion of minority ethnic teachers to 6.9 per cent, proportionate to their estimated minority ethnic pupil population of 12.9 per cent, in maintained schools (Maylor et al., 2003). This section discusses the organisational and individual drive, to establish a more ethnically diverse teacher community in maintained schools in England. The extent to which the stated aims of the guardians of the nation's education system are reflected in the experiences and perceptions of minority ethnic teachers, is considered.

The government's aspirations for minority ethnic teachers may bear limited resemblance to minority ethnic teachers' own reasons for entering the profession. The study by Maylor et al. (2003) found that '*minority ethnic teachers are very much more motivated by a desire to give something back to the community or society than are white teachers*'. The supporting data to this finding shows that of the 'black' and 'Asian' respondents, 33.2 per cent and 33.4 per cent, respectively, were motivated by feelings of community obligations compared to 18.9 per cent of 'white' respondents. The research design for this study does not support comparative analyses between minority ethnic and white teachers with regard to their reasons for entering the profession, however, it is worth considering some of the factors which influence the decisions of minority ethnic teachers. A greater understanding of these influencing factors would help us to appreciate some of the concerns which these same teachers have in relation to their relative status within the teaching profession.

Overwhelmingly, in the present study, minority ethnic teachers in London, the North West and the West Midlands were enticed to the teaching profession by their altruistic motivations to act as role models, improve opportunities for children and influence what they viewed as a mono-cultural education system. An African Caribbean teacher, from the North West said that her '*main motivation was to be a positive role model for black kids*'. African Caribbean teachers attending a focus group in the West Midlands discussed

the low status which they felt their community held in schools and society and argued that the cause of their low status was to be found in the education system. Fearing that African Caribbean children were being unfairly assessed, an African Caribbean maths teacher from the West Midlands took issue with recently published education statistics in relation to the ethnic breakdown of pupils having special educational needs. He complained that

> *they've got alarming statistics talking about 28 per cent of black kids have got SEN statements, and some other frightening facts, which I just think are completely untrue. There are not enough people like us to deal with them. We just don't have enough role models ... there's nothing wrong with the kids.*

Teachers in this group felt that the low expectations which many teachers hold for African Caribbean pupils are unfair and damaging to their academic prospects. Furthermore, such attitudes are thought to perpetuate further negative and stereotypical attitudes towards African Communities in society. Although a Bangladeshi teacher from London felt that Bangladeshi pupils needed Bangladeshi teachers as role models, he made the point that there were those within the Bangladeshi teaching community who would oppose his view, he explained, '*There have been recent discussions about this and some* [Bangladeshi teachers] *believe that they should not be expected to be role models ... I think having role models is important*'. A couple of the Pakistani teachers spoke about earlier pre-teaching experiences when they worked in their local mosques assisting with learning programmes for other Pakistani children outside of normal school hours.

Minority ethnic teachers, from all backgrounds, however, emphasised the need to act as role models for all pupils, irrespective of ethnicity. For these teachers it was crucial that while they were providing the motivational support for minority ethnic pupils, all pupils would benefit from their knowledge and expertise. For an African Caribbean assistant headteacher in the West Midlands it was essential that all children accepted the fact that being of African Caribbean heritage did not automatically equate with under-achievement. He said '*there needs to be the role model for black students ... but I also think it's important too for the white children to see black teachers*'. The principle of being a role model for all pupils was essential to the work of a London-based head of department and advanced skills teacher (AST) whose mission was to present herself as a positive image in schools. She explained her efforts to deliver greater racial awareness among her students, for example by taking white, Bangladeshi, African Caribbean and pupils from other ethnic backgrounds on an arts-based excursion to Belfast exposing them to a wealth of cultural experiences, she said '*that's why I came into teaching because I'm a black person and I wanted there to be more black role models in schools. I wanted them* [minority ethnic pupils] *to think "I can do whatever I want, it doesn't matter what colour I am".*

For some teachers, the lack of minority ethnic teachers during their own school lives was a negative experience which helped to feed their desire to become teachers and this is explored further in the next part of this section. In other cases, teachers recalled the rare occasions, during their own schooling, when they drew strength from the presence of a

minority ethnic teacher. An African Caribbean teacher from the North West spoke of her first sighting of an African American teacher:

> *In about 1961 we had an exchange of teachers in my primary school, and the American teacher that came over was black and I was so shocked. I ran home and told my dad we had a teacher and she was black. As a child I was relieved to find that you can have teachers who are black, or mixed heritage etc, it's so important. They may not get the promotions but I'm quietly saying* [to pupils] *"you could do it".*

An African Caribbean teacher in London had a similar childhood experience with the teacher who inspired her academic success and drove her desire to provide a similar experience for other African Caribbean children. She said, '*it was important because that was the only black teacher I had in my school life'.* She felt that this teacher was able to adapt and relate to her learning needs, '*… Oh yes she was fabulous'.*

Meanwhile, in the West Midlands, an African Caribbean teacher was grateful that he could boast at having two African Caribbean teachers when he was a pupil but he does not believe that African Caribbean pupils appreciated the messages they were attempting to impart. He recalled:

> *There was one guy who used to march down the corridor and he used to grab you round the neck and throw you down the corridors and we couldn't get that message that he was trying to tell us. He was saying that as a black student, you've got to work twice as hard as any other students and your white counterparts because in this day and age, to be successful, you're going to have to have education. You've got to have a strong foundation in order to progress and you're going to have to aim high. We actually witnessed the ordeal he was going through as a black teacher in that school, and we didn't realise it.*

Whilst there was relatively little mentioned by Bangladeshi and Pakistani teachers with respect to the more extrinsic reasons for entering the teaching profession, such comments from Indian teachers were even more scarce. None of the Indian teachers spoke directly about wanting to be role models, however, one of the Indian teachers from the West Midlands spoke about the connection between his faith and the desire to teach. Talking about his motivation to teach, he said '*basically the way I look at religion is, it teaches you about personal and social education, knowing yourself and knowing your role in society. So I've found it very comfortable being a teacher and I can see a lot of positives and I appreciate that it's an important role in society educating youngsters'.* Perhaps the relative success of Indian pupils in schools, when compared to both African Caribbean and Bangladeshi pupils, negates any desire for Indian teachers to assume the position of role model. Analysis of the national 2002 Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) by Bhattacharyya et al. (2003) showed that examination grades for Indian and Chinese pupils exceeded those for all other groups, including white pupils. Furthermore, the

report found that test results for African Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils trailed the results of white pupils at all Key Stages (i.e. throughout their entire compulsory school years). Recent records (DfES, 2006) revealed the continuing trend where test results for African Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils, in 2005, were out-stripped, at every Key Stage, by those of Indian pupils.

Tackling decades of under-achievement

Here, teachers recount their early childhood experiences and reveal the connectedness of these experiences to their mission to prevent further deterioration of the educational opportunities of minority ethnic pupils. Certainly, some of the African Caribbean teachers felt duty-bound to work against those education systems which they felt impeded their own education careers and still existed to hinder the educational growth of children, but in particular African Caribbean pupils, today. Having entered the teaching profession after an earlier career with the Commission for Racial Equality, one of the African Caribbean teachers in the West Midlands considered it her professional responsibility to combat racial injustices and confirmed '*I've always gone into all my professions with an emphasis to re-dress the imbalance and it's an unconscious thing with me, to push forward the black agenda*'. These were sentiments shared by an African Caribbean assistant headteacher in the North West, with responsibility for special educational needs (SENCO) coordination, who said '*I came into teaching 14 yrs ago and it was about the lack of black history within the curriculum. But I was fortunate, I had three black teachers when I was at school and that was in the 70s'*. She explained that it was hearing stories about African American and African Caribbean freedom fighters and feeling '*outraged*' at their treatment that gave her the drive to succeed as a teacher. '*I thought I'm going into teaching to make a difference*'. Alas, for this teacher, her political verve had been dashed under the strain of what she felt had been fruitless battles, she confessed, '*my ideas and views have changed now, the system has taken its toll on me*'.

This theme was continued by an African Caribbean secondary school head of department for whom teaching was a second career choice, as he preferred to tackle educational disadvantage from within schools. '*I began wanting to make a difference to black and ethnic minority students who from personal experience get a raw deal in the British education system. I went into policy, not prepared to deal with the harsh reality of teaching, but soon learnt the only positions available* [in education policy making] *to people with none teaching backgrounds was administration with no real impact on policy ...I decided to change policy from within rather than without*'. The impetus to support their own ethnic communities was not the domain of African Caribbean teachers alone, however, as Bangladeshi teachers also shared this desire. Appreciative of the support which she had received from the local Bangladeshi community, a Bangladeshi teacher felt committed to remaining and working with other Bangladeshi children in that same area of London, she explained, '*I felt that if I worked in this borough where I grew up and had all of my education, from primary to degree level, I would be giving back to the community*'.

Intrinsic reasons for choosing a teaching career

As mentioned above, Indian teachers expressed little in the way of extrinsic purposes for entering the teaching profession but these teachers, along with teachers from the other minority ethnic groups, shared some of their more intrinsic reasons. One Indian teacher, a secondary school ICT (information communications technology) teacher from the West Midlands, reflected on his days as a student and when he assisted his fellow students with their studies. Comparing those experiences with his teaching role, he said that he '*was able to help them get GCSE passes and I found I got a lot of pleasure out of that*'. Explaining her reasons for entering the profession, another Indian teacher spoke of her own pleasurable primary school experience and the fact that she '… *always felt quite valued and comfortable and it had a big effect on why I wanted to become a teacher*'. Another Indian head of department in the West Midlands who was discouraged from entering the teaching profession by his parents, defended his decision to discourage his daughter from becoming a teacher, also. He explained, '*I didn't do it* [discourage his daughter] *because of the money. My parents discouraged me because they thought it was a low paid job, whereas I tried to discourage her because it was stressful job*'.

African Caribbean teachers also had personal ambitions in taking up teaching careers, citing the fulfilment of childhood dreams and personal prestige. Their comments concur with Callendar's (1997) assertion of that '*traditionally, many African Caribbeans saw teaching as a route to increased status … the low and ever decreasing numbers of Black teachers entering the profession is a cause for concern*'. An African Caribbean primary school deputy headteacher shared her experience and concluded, '*I've always wanted to do it, since I was seven years old and I just followed my dream*'. A former secondary school teacher, now a local authority schools advisor, held aspirations for headship from an early age and elaborated, '*I do remember the influence of the head of my primary school and I remember thinking, when I started teaching* "*that's what I want to be, I want to be a headteacher*"'. She explained that she wanted to be the one to reward children as well as dealing with disciplinary issues but she emphasised that this desire existed at a time when headteachers also retained some level of classroom teaching responsibility. '*I remember him* [her primary school headteacher] *coming in and teaching handwriting and I thought "Yes, that's what I would love to do, I want to be just like him". I wanted to be the head of a school but still have that contact with the children. But as time passed that all changed* [the ambition to be a headteacher] … *the headteachers at the schools where I've worked were never there, or were in their office, counselling or whatever*'.

As seen above, much of the teachers' reasoning about their decisions to enter the profession centred on the drive to improve opportunities for pupils who they felt were the most vulnerable to academic disadvantage and/or failure. For many of the teachers participating in this study, the opportunity to support, effectively, the learning needs of minority ethnic pupils, depends upon their equitable access to senior positions and the level of support received from school leaders and other stakeholders (parents, local authorities and central government). These issues are dealt with in chapter 14 of the Evidence Base to the Teacher Status Project Final Report (Hargreaves et al., 2007a). However, of interest to this study, also, is the extent to which minority ethnic teachers felt

access to teaching positions in schools, particularly to senior posts, and their early school-based experiences were able to support their stated ambitions. We discuss this next.

Gaining access to the teaching profession

One of the ways in which the status of teachers was explored was through their access to the profession and, in particular, to the more senior positions (advanced skills teacher, assistant/deputy headteacher and headteacher). This part of the study is crucial to understanding the experiences which have influenced minority ethnic teachers' attitudes towards their sense of belonging to, and their relative status within, the British education systems. When expressing their feelings about their status within the profession, teachers most frequently drew comparisons between their own positions and what they perceived to be the status of their white counterparts, irrespective of gender. A study conducted by Powney et al. (2003) found that 60 per cent of the minority ethnic teachers and 23 per cent of white teachers, who responded to their survey, felt that their ethnicity was relevant to their promotion prospects. Similarly a NUT survey (NUT, 2003) revealed the view commonly shared by black and minority ethnic teachers in senior management positions '*that they needed to constantly prove themselves and work harder than their white counterparts*'. A question in this study which asked teachers to deliberate how successful they felt schools had been in ensuring equality of opportunity to teachers, revealed concern about recruitment to and progression within the profession. In terms of gaining access to the profession, a clear divide existed between the experiences of those teachers who had completed their training and acquired qualified teacher status (QTS) in England and those who were trained overseas, regardless of the length of time they had been a qualified teacher overseas. Thus the processes in place at government and local levels, which regulate access to the teaching profession, are viewed with suspicion and considered a disincentive for some minority ethnic teachers.

Teachers who were trained in England, did not express any difficulties in securing teaching positions at schools based in most inner city/urban areas, however, many had doubts about their ability to secure posts in schools with few or no minority ethnic teachers. An African Caribbean secondary school assistant headteacher in the West Midlands spoke about his teacher training experience, explaining that when securing his placement for his teacher training and when comparing the placement locations of his white fellow trainees, he was aware that whilst they were going to grammar and other high achieving schools, he would have to join a school with more challenging circumstances. In their report about the recruitment of minority ethnic trainee teachers, Carrington et al. (2000: 20) found that teacher training staff '*were concerned to avoid placing black and Asian trainees in schools where levels of racial harassment were known to be high*'. An African Caribbean primary teacher, from the same area of the West Midlands, recounted her experience when she worked as a supply teacher and was trying to obtain a permanent position. She was told by the headteacher that due to the length of time that she had been working at the school, she may have to consider employing her but she felt that the headteacher did so reluctantly.

Overseas teachers' entry to the teaching profession

The plight of overseas teachers is worthy of mention, here, as these teachers have grave concerns about the difficulties that they experience in schools. Overseas teachers explained how hindrances to their entry to the profession had the potential to diminish their endeavours to join and rendered teaching in England a less attractive prospect. These teachers voiced strong reservations about the fairness of the processes involved in achieving recognition of their qualifications and experiences and what they considered to be an abuse of the services of overseas teachers. Each of these teachers had either recently obtained or were in the process of obtaining QTS. The youngest of these was a London-based African Caribbean (Jamaican) primary school teacher who, on the advice of a teacher employment service, had worked as a supply teacher in several areas of London and gained a wealth of local knowledge in schools which she found were generally welcoming. Her attempts to gain a permanent position, however, even after acquiring QTS, were thwarted by regular rejections. She explained that of the many experiences of rejection by schools her ambition to teach in England was dashed by the insensitivity of headteachers and teachers at an all-white school where she had secured a teaching position. She said '*it rocked the core of my world and I couldn't teach after that for about another year. I finally got a contract at a school and I thought finally I've been accepted, they're going to recognise me as a teacher*'. However, this teacher felt that her professionalism had been undermined as she was placed in a position subordinate to the NQT who she was expected work with. Emphasising the low status which this school had afforded her colleague, the African Caribbean deputy headteacher, in the same focus group, interrupted, '*the fact is the NQT was still above you even though you had all of that experience*'. The overseas teacher continued, '*actually you've hit the nail on the head because I was listening to a person two to three years younger than me and had absolutely no experience whatsoever, she was literally fresh out of college and I had to take her guidance*'. The reason why she was appointed to the post soon became clear to the overseas teacher, as the school was due to receive its cyclical Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspection. The school clearly valued her knowledge and expertise but perhaps were more interested in the fact that she was a minority ethnic teacher who could fulfil their quota.

However, not only did this teacher feel used, with her rights to equality being violated and her professional knowledge and expertise undermined, she also experienced the further humiliation from a headteacher apparently determined to destroy her self-confidence. This teacher had developed her teaching career further through training at the Institute of Education, however when challenging her headteacher about her career prospects, the head's retort was bluntly, "*I don't understand why the Institute took you on, I know the status of that institution*". The teacher received this remark as an attitude endemic among white teachers towards the status of black teachers. She recalled her emotion at that time, '*that just blew my mind, it just ripped me apart*'. Resigning her position, this teacher was no longer prepared to occupy a status subordinate to NQTs, and was indignant towards the offending behaviour of teachers and headteachers that deterred her from advancing her teaching career.

Also trained overseas, an Indian secondary school teacher was struggling to break out of supply teaching in favour of a permanent position and was scathing of what she considered to be inequitable recruitment practices and procedures of recruitment agencies through to the internal workings of the schools. This teacher was convinced that the difficulties she had faced were rooted in racially biased recruitment strategies which she felt discouraged minority ethnic overseas teachers from entering the profession. She complained that '*there is still racism and it depends on how qualified you are. They prefer white* [British white teachers], *if they can't get white they will go for* [white] *South Africans or New Zealanders and then they'll go to African then Asian countries, that's what I found at the beginning of my career in the UK at the agencies and in the schools*'. She said that she received numerous rejections when applying for teaching posts, she explained '*I held a long-term position* [as a supply teacher] *in a school in London, I taught my Head of ICT about the national curriculum regarding ICT but still I'm struggling to find a permanent job …*'. She explained that she had made many attempts to secure a position through agencies, local authorities and direct personal approaches '*but no responses, nothing*'.

A more experienced Indian primary school teacher, also based in London, had trained and held senior teaching positions including headship in India. Now, qualified to teach in England and with several years teaching experience in primary schools is very happy at her school. However, she remains alert to what she recognises as unfair treatment of overseas NQTs by headteachers prepared to take advantage of their experience for as long as possible without paying salaries commensurate with their skills. She relates to her own experience as an NQT:

> *I applied to almost 500 places, the pool* [teaching agency] *itself and not a single reply. I was a qualified teacher in India, I had 6yrs primary teaching experience in London, teaching Years 5 and 6. Then I decided to do my PGCE, so technically I was an NQT - a qualified teacher with years of experience! They* [headteachers] *save money on NQTs … having an experienced teacher as an NQT was a treasure - but not a single reply* [from her job applications]*, not a single response.*

One of the reasons for conducting focus groups in different regions of the country was to enable the study to investigate any differences in experiences or perceptions that might be explained by geographical factors. Whilst the findings have not revealed any such differences, the remainder of this section shows that teachers held a strong sense that minority ethnic teachers were not welcome in certain areas of England.

Exclusion zones

Although teachers who have reported incidences when they have been hindered from opportunities for permanent teaching posts have chiefly been overseas teachers, teachers trained in England have not been totally exempt from perceived discriminatory practices. Perhaps the most clear-cut example is that offered by an African Caribbean teacher in the

West Midlands who had applied and been successfully interviewed for a teaching post in an area renowned for its high proportion of white working class residents. She recalled:

> *when the interview ended the lady took me aside and said "you've got all the qualifications, you've got the experience but we're not going to give you the job because we think the parents would give you too much of a hard time. If you see a job in another area then go for it but not in this area because we're frightened for you".*

An Indian supply teacher based in London faced a similar fate when she applied for a position in a school located in an affluent, predominantly white, area of London. She explained that she was offered the position, however the position was later withdrawn as she was about to start the job. She was particularly struck by the hostility she felt when she visited the school and tried to describe it: '*When I entered the school the parents and teachers were sitting in the reception area and they were looking at me like this* [she demonstrated a disapproving look]. *When I went into the school I saw that the students were also looking like this. The deputy head was fine and I gave my demonstration which was excellent and they offered me the job'.* At this stage she was feeling buoyant about her new teaching career, however, '*then after that they refused* [withdrew the offer] *it'.*

Most of the teachers participating in the focus groups who were trained in England had positive experiences with regard to gaining entry to schools, and felt that their ethnicity had not impeded their access to the profession. This finding should perhaps be tempered by the fact that most teachers spoke resolutely about their conscious decisions to steer clear of teaching opportunities in particular geographical areas. These tend to be rural areas of England or inner city/urban areas with no or low proportions of minority ethnic people. In effect, they were exclusion zones and teachers preferred to protect themselves from what they anticipated would be certain rejection by the school, the community or both.

Data collated by Maylor et al. (2003) showed that well over a third (38.4%) of all Asian and over half (53.3%) of 'Black' teachers are located in London. For the teachers in the teacher status study, fear of racial abuse, verbal and physical, dominated their reasons for self-restriction from employment opportunities outside familiar territories. Although none of the focus group participants spoke of any personal experiences of racial abuse, their knowledge of the notoriety of certain predominantly white working class areas was sufficient to deter them from considering a career in these areas. An Indian primary school teacher in the North West spoke about the areas where she would not work, in particular she said '*I wouldn't work in Salford because they're traditional white working class areas, and the racism ...'* An African Caribbean secondary head of department explained that due to her previous work experiences, with the CRE, she felt she had a greater insight about what she considered to be '*safe areas'*. She explained,

Teacher: '*There are places I wouldn't apply to, for my health and safety. I wouldn't apply to Devon or Cornwall; I wouldn't apply anywhere down there'.*

| Researcher: | 'Is that for fear of racism?' |
| Teacher: | 'Oh yes, direct overt racism ... and I would not apply north of the border.' |

Similarly, two Indian teachers in London mentioned areas where they were adamant that they would not work. An Indian primary school teacher said that she would not apply for a job in Surrey *'because of it's high proportion of white teachers',* whilst the supply teacher speaking during the same focus group session explained that she *'wouldn't want to work in Essex, although I know Asians are in certain parts of Essex. I wouldn't want to go to Romford because I know that when I leave the school I could suffer from harassment, I'm scared. I went to Upminster but still there was fear in me'.* Whilst most teachers seemed to have ideas about areas where they felt unwelcome, a few teachers considered it their responsibility to make inroads to such areas; these teachers were willing to challenge the status quo and enter the perceived 'exclusion zones'. One such teacher is an African Caribbean overseas teacher in a secondary school in the West Midlands, who, coming from Jamaica and being relatively unfamiliar with areas which other teachers in the focus group were concerned about, was happy to apply for a job in any of the areas. His complaint to the rest of the group was *'... we should not fulfil the stereotype that they* [potential employers] *have, that we should not go to certain places'.*

A London-based African Caribbean head of department had demonstrated her defiance to the idea that minority ethnic teachers should be excluded from working in predominantly white working class areas by securing a senior position in a school based in one of the more racially divided areas of London. She explained that after completing her training she had the option of a job in a more leafy area of London but chose what she considered to be the more challenging opportunity *'... it's* [the school] *in the Isle of Dogs. I knew all about the racism issues they were having and the BNP* [British National Party] *had a seat, so I wanted to be a black teacher in that school. Oddly enough, I was appointed and got the post'.*

Summary

The aspiration to serve their communities provided the overarching impetus for the majority of minority ethnic teachers who shared their reasons for entering the teaching profession. The teaching profession was viewed by most as a respectable and desirable occupation which afforded minority ethnic teachers the scope to serve their communities whilst servicing the learning needs of all pupils. Prominently, but not exclusively, among their reasons was the drive to present themselves as role models for pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. Teachers, who shared this enthusiasm, spoke of their fervent desire to tackle educational disadvantage and contribute towards the educational, social and political progress of their communities. Gaining access to the profession, however, posed challenges for a minority of teachers participating in the focus groups. Overseas teachers in particular, found that gaining access was a miserable and trying experience, despite having obtained the statutory QTS and regardless of their prior teaching experiences. These teachers were confronted with what they perceived to be school systems content to exploit their services at minimal expense. Arguably, just as destructive as the racially discriminatory practices perceived to be exercised by certain schools, is minority ethnic

teachers' own fear of direct or indirect racism that they felt they might experience in various parts of the England. Notwithstanding the legitimacy of their fears, by taking decisions not to work in schools based in areas they know or perceive to be less ethnically diverse, teachers, have voluntarily excluded themselves from alternative teaching opportunities in exercising self-preservation. The fact that these teachers felt they needed to avoid certain areas raises questions about attitudes in the teaching profession as a whole.

Having held the teaching profession in high esteem, their experiences on entry to the profession challenged the tenacity of some minority ethnic teachers who found barriers to their progression within the profession. In spite of their negative experiences, most of these teachers managed to hold on to their ambitions to work with some of the most academically vulnerable pupils. The next section, however, reveals the ongoing challenges which some teachers believe threaten their professional integrity and '*occupational esteem*'. In this section we focus on the factors which teachers believe affect their ability to meet their commitment to ensure that pupils are recipients of teaching and learning practices which are socially and culturally relevant.

Chapter 3: CHALLENGES TO PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT

'*Do minority ethnic teachers hold alternative perceptions of professionalism, which perhaps make teaching more or less attractive to them?*'

When asked to consider any professionalism distinctive to minority ethnic teachers and the aspects of their work which teachers felt made teaching more or less of an attraction to them, teachers argued that their professionalism as minority ethnic teachers was inseparable from the need to engage pupils with teaching and learning concepts which were culturally relevant. The extent to which these teachers felt that their professional endeavours with minority ethnic pupils was supported by their colleagues and headteachers, was pivotal in their assessment of the relevance of the profession to minority ethnic communities. Specifically, these teachers were concerned that the motivations which underpinned their entry to the profession should be realised in their classroom practice and they discussed the ability of the national curriculum to provide the scope for meaningful teaching and learning strategies.

In the course of this study, African Caribbean teachers[2], making up two-thirds of the total number of teachers participating, have been exceptionally vocal with respect to the importance of appreciating and reacting positively to the cultural norms which inform and motivate minority ethnic pupils. It is to these teachers that we turn in answer to this final question. African Caribbean teachers argued that their personal experiences and preparedness to investigate social and cultural differences, is central to their professionalism and is often intertwined with their sense of professional identity and reasons for entering the teaching profession. Analysis of their comments revealed two main themes. First, 'a curriculum in support of teacher professionalism' discusses the inclusion of certain teaching and learning materials and teaching practices, which minority ethnic teachers believe would give credence to their perceptions of professionalism. Secondly, 'appreciating socio-cultural differences' requires a willingness and ability on the part of school leaders and teachers to embrace pupils' ethnic heritage, adapting teaching practices and teacher/pupil interaction techniques in order to accommodate the learning needs of diverse pupil populations.

A curriculum in support of teacher professionalism

In their deliberations about the national curriculum, the teachers explored its impact in terms of both the statutory nature of the curriculum content and the teaching strategies with which they were expected to comply. They were clearly cognisant of the distinction between those policies which carried statutory obligations and others which provided recommended frameworks for schools. They were concerned, however, about headteachers' narrow interpretations of both lesson content and delivery which diminished opportunities for flexible teaching approaches. Consequently these teachers felt that their pedagogical practice was severely constrained by prescriptive

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[2] Teachers from other minority ethnic backgrounds have made relatively minor contributions to this discussion, therefore their views have not been included.

interpretations of the national strategies. It is unsurprising, therefore, that they conflated, during these discussions, matters related to statutory and recommended practices.

Opposition to the national curriculum was certainly not to be found, on any large scale, among African Caribbean teachers who participated in the focus groups. Indeed, teachers appreciated the principle of a national approach to raising standards in schools. One London-based overseas teacher, for example, for whom the national curriculum was an appealing feature of the job, commented '*I know the strategies here* [in England] *are brilliant, I'm not knocking them because they actually make children learn*'. The main obstacle for these teachers, however, proved to be the perceived rigidity of the framework for teaching which teachers felt inhibited their ability to impart subject matter to minority ethnic pupils in a meaningful way. Interestingly though, when Maylor et al. (2003) asked teachers about the roles they would like to develop in the 21st century, they found that '*black and Asian teachers (30.8% and 28.8% respectively) were less likely to state that teachers should be free to use autonomous and creative teaching and learning approaches*'; 36.4 per cent of 'white' teachers felt this way. In the judgment made by an assistant headteacher in the West Midlands, a conscientious teacher would seek to understand the needs of all their pupils, he explained:

> *If you look at a good quality teacher he or she with enough breadth about her she would be saying "I'm going to deliver this subject, I'll look at the make up of the school but at the same time I want to look at the material that is available because we are talking about a multi-racial society. I want to make sure that I'm reflecting everybody's culture within my lessons and within my curriculum and within my school".*

Based on their own school experiences, which they claimed had the potential to nullify any sense of belonging and attraction to the British education system, several teachers found they could relate directly to challenges which minority ethnic children face, with regard to feelings of alienation within lessons and detachment from fellow pupils as the result of being required to respond to concepts outside of their own cultural domain. A teacher in the West Midlands recalled, '*When I was at school the curriculum didn't reflect my ethnicity at all and that's why we didn't feel part of that system, that structure. We felt that we were at a disadvantage because where we wanted to learn about our own black culture, it wasn't reflected in the curriculum*'. A London-based deputy headteacher criticised the language and imagery used in English lessons, which bore no resemblance to her own experiences. She said:

> *English that is taught in schools, even at Year 6, who is it for? It bears no relation to these children. I remember going to a secondary school and they had some sort of test with a question about 'cats and dogs', why should I know that 'cats and dogs' means rain? That's far from my root experience ... it's far fetched from their experience, teach them something that they know about, make it real for them.*

Notwithstanding the concerns of many of these teachers with respect to the lack of diversity in teaching strategies, a few teachers alluded to the positive work taking place in certain schools to enrich the learning experiences of all pupils. In their review of diversity in the national curriculum, Ajegbo et al. (2006) were able to identify examples of good practice. He explained:

> *In conducting our review, we have been privileged to visit many schools across the country that are trailblazing with inspiring work in this area, developing and exploring cultural, religious and ethnic diversity in creative ways, using a wide variety of teaching and learning styles. These schools are ones in which the ethos of the school, its curriculum and its community, go a long way towards defining the concepts of identity and inclusiveness; and where understanding and dialogue around these issues are intrinsic to the curriculum and the classroom.*

Regrettably, as Ajegbo et al. (2006) point out, such schools are '*far from the norm*'. Teachers in our study, including those who were able to acknowledge areas of progress, maintained that in the majority of cases curriculum and teaching styles were unresponsive to the needs of some minority ethnic pupils.

The inability of some minority ethnic pupils to relate to English idioms used in the classroom could serve to alienate them from formal and informal interactions and exclude them from the historically and socially derived '*habitus*' shared by the white majority group of pupils. A relevant contribution to this discussion came from an Indian teacher in London who felt that prescribed teaching practices needed to be challenged for the benefit of pupils who, like himself, shared little common social and cultural understanding with their English counterparts. It was important, in this teacher's view, that in areas with high proportions of minority ethnic pupils both reading materials and even the person delivering the readings to pupils should be culturally accessible. He explained:

> *Getting books that the parents can relate to, possibly getting a good Bengali writer who can translate experiences into primary school books. If you ask a Bangladeshi parent, even one who was brought up here, who reads books with their primary school children, for them it doesn't mean a thing. Baa Baa Black Sheep or any nursery rhyme, I can say it but to me it's got no meaning.*

Teachers felt it unreasonable to deliver, to the majority of minority ethnic pupils, a learning programme designed by white middle class people, and delivered chiefly, by white middle class teachers and expect minority ethnic pupils to work comfortably with it. An African Caribbean teacher in the West Midlands spoke of her growing disinclination to teach, stating that she was sceptical about the motives behind the introduction of a national curriculum, declaring '*The national curriculum is all about keeping Britain white. "Yes you live here but you're not really part of the system as such.*

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You can contribute but if we start putting in your history, what about our history? I can't glorify myself anymore".'

For an assistant headteacher, in its current form, the national curriculum did little to enhance the status of the teaching profession, she explained,

> *teaching's about raising the expectations of all children no matter what your colour is, so to me it's about everybody in my class counts. To me it's about looking at teaching, raising the status of the teaching profession, looking at addressing the national curriculum. The national curriculum is white middle-class, it doesn't address the cultural needs of different pupils.*

Some teachers have succeeded in adapting their learning materials and teaching styles to satisfy the learning needs of their classes, however, headteachers have not always been supportive of their strategies. An assistant headteacher from the West Midlands shared her covert strategy for dealing with the absence of information about black and Asian history in the curriculum. She explained that behind the closed doors of her classroom she encouraged her pupils:

> *… to go home and ask their grand-parents to tell them how black and Pakistani people played a great part in World War Two. Whereas with my white counterparts, I know they wouldn't do that. I see myself as someone who's got information to enable them to say "I contribute, my culture contributed something and I feel good about myself".*

This is a teacher who claimed to be on the brink of leaving the profession due to the levels of racism which she believed she had experienced, coupled with a lack of pedagogical freedom in the classroom. During a discussion between teachers in another focus group in the West Midlands, about the constraints of the mathematics syllabus, an assistant headteacher felt teachers needed to be prepared to stretch the boundaries in order to aid the development of pupils' understanding of the subject and satisfy their own professional commitments. He advocated the use of mixed teaching methods:

> *It could be that you say "well this is the English way they've done it, in Jamaica this is the way we were taught" and you could get several children saying "I actually understood it better from a Jamaican perspective". I think there's a multitude of opportunities there, it's how we utilise it.*

He continued to explain that teachers should employ their own strategies to ensure that their pupils gain the knowledge they need to attain good results, regardless of the restrictions placed on teachers, through prescribed teaching strategies. For this teacher, minority ethnic teachers who were not free to make these pedagogical adjustments were at risk of losing faith in the profession.

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, the suitability of mono-cultural curricula has been challenged publicly, particularly since Coard's (1971) work but also by other commentators (e.g. Kunjufu, 1986; Gurnah (in Troyna), 1987; Sewell, 1997 Webb (in Dilworth, 1998) and Maylor et al., 2006) during the past few decades. In response to such arguments and in their mission to facilitate improved standards in education the government commissioned a review of the national curriculum. The recently published 'Curriculum Review: Diversity and Citizenship' (Ajegbo et al., 2006) considered advice and practice in the promotion of diversity throughout the curriculum for all age groups and the study assessed ways to integrate modern British social and cultural history into the secondary school citizenship curriculum. The document sets out its five year vision '*for all schools to be actively engaged in nurturing in pupils the skills to participate in an active and inclusive democracy, appreciating and understanding difference*' but its key findings highlight obstacles that stand in the way of this vision. Some of these hindrances are directly pertinent to the arguments posed by teachers attending our own focus groups, namely:

- *not all school leaders have bought in fully to the imperative of education for diversity for all schools, and its priority is too low to be effective*
- *there is insufficient clarity about the flexibility within the curriculum and how links to education for diversity can be made*
- *some teachers lack confidence in engaging with diversity issues and lack the training opportunities to improve in this area*

The review was concerned also with implementation and ensuring that professionals are equipped with the teaching and learning capabilities to deliver new priorities in innovative ways. For the teachers attending our focus groups, the acquisition of such professional competencies represented a vital aspect of teachers' role and the impetus for their choice of career. These teachers' views concur however, with the worrying revelation recorded in the key findings to the curriculum review, that '*teachers do not see the link between their subject and education for diversity and are unaware of how to treat it*' (Ajegbo et al., 2006). Minority ethnic teachers argued that the existence of a statutory national curriculum and prescriptive teaching frameworks designed to create consistency across all schools, necessarily reduces teachers' scope to respond to children's social and cultural needs. Yet, the ability and determination of these dedicated practitioners to respond to these needs represented, for African Caribbean teachers, the essence of their teacher professionalism and their raison d'être. Teachers, in the next part of this section, speak about the professional responsibility which they felt should be incumbent upon all teaching staff to widen their knowledge of, and respond positively to, the communication and learning needs of minority ethnic pupils.

Appreciating socio-cultural differences

The second area of major concern for these teachers was the extent to which their colleagues and headteachers were prepared to embrace and provide for the social and cultural differences of minority ethnic pupils. Minority ethnic teachers felt that the disregard demonstrated by other teachers for the cultural differences of pupils

represented, by extension, a disregard for the cultural differences within the teacher population, which is indicative of the perceived attitudes which act as a disincentive for prospective teachers.

African Caribbean teachers have spoken of the reluctance of some of their white colleagues to broaden their understanding of other cultures and to adapt their approach to teaching and learning in a way that might enhance the learning opportunities of minority ethnic pupils. Consequently, they felt that this lack of attention may contribute to the underachievement of minority ethnic pupils. An African Caribbean teacher in London spoke about her experience with such teachers:

> *When I first started teaching, one of the schools I worked in, some of the teachers had a very narrow perspective of children who came from a different culture and a different background and they didn't have an awful lot of knowledge, were quite ignorant about why a child might behave in a particular way. Also they didn't have the mind-set that would allow them to question themselves to find ways of working around the child.*

A similar view was held by a secondary school teacher in the West Midlands who expressed his concern at the scale of the problem of underachievement among African Caribbean boys. He applauded the level of commitment that primary school teachers afforded to the pastoral care of pupils but felt that secondary school teachers were less willing to devote the effort to understand the socio-economic issues facing African Caribbean boys, he said:

> *they haven't got the time, the inclination, the concern unless it's an individual teacher who will put themselves out and go the extra mile. I don't think it's a time issue at all, I think it's an attitude ... and that's one of the reasons why our black boys aren't doing so well because that attitude prevails.*

A London-based head of department voiced her annoyance at teachers who lack the inclination to appreciate the learning needs of pupils of minority ethnic backgrounds, she said:

> *many of my colleagues subtly imply I "must understand the students better", this assumption has decreased over the years but the level of lack of empathy and cultural understanding of students from minority ethnic backgrounds by colleagues still continues to disturb me.*

This teacher expressed the concerns shared by others that the slow progress by majority ethnic teachers, over the years, to developing an understanding of the needs of certain minority ethnic groups is reflected in the slow take-up of teaching positions by more established minority ethnic communities, due to feelings of alienation.

Joining the call for strategies to attract more African Caribbean men to the teaching profession, a London-based deputy headteacher felt that minority ethnic teachers were more inclined, than their white colleagues, to embrace other cultures, she said, '*because you come from an ethnic background you do tend to empathise and you do want to find out about other people's ethnicity, their background and their culture*'. She explained that parents of African pupils were changing their children's names, for ease of pronunciation, '*we're saying "no, that's the child's name, that's who he is, that's his identity. Why do you want to change it to fit in?" I think as a person who comes from the Caribbean you would try to embrace other cultures and not try to impose your own on them*'. Another teacher in London expressed her disappointment at her white colleagues who were not prepared to embrace other cultures, an attitude which she felt reflected the sense of status experienced by minority ethnic pupils and teachers alike. She said, '*There continues to be a lack of empathy, a lack of wanting to find out about other people's cultures. It's almost like "you've come to us so you fit in, I don't have to fit in with you"... We're still the under-dogs, that's how I see it*'.

Also in London, a headteacher argued that black pupils, particularly boys, need role models who will support their learning in positive ways. For her, a more diverse teacher population was vital to tackle racist attitudes in the classroom and within the teaching profession which serve to discourage minority ethnic communities from joining the profession. She considered the absence of such teachers to be detrimental to the academic success of minority ethnic pupils and a loss to the professional capacity of the teaching profession. She said teachers with a greater understanding of pupils' background may stand a better chance of getting through to them. She referred to the comment made to her by one of the white former teachers at her school:

> *She was talking with me about the low attainment levels of some of the black pupils and she said "well, what can you expect from the children of prostitutes and drug dealers?" Of course she's no longer with us. I sacked her but not just for that comment, I later learned that she was renowned for her attitudes towards the children, but this was a woman who had been at the school for over 15 years'.*

Teachers felt they played a crucial role in interpreting and working with pupils' cultural differences and some of them described ways in which their own life experiences assisted the process. Teachers spoke about the ways in which these differences are often manifest in pupils' speech and body language. A deputy headteacher in London explained how ignorance of pupils' cultural differences can have detrimental effects on relationships with teachers, she said:

> *You find your black child comes into the school. Your child has been brought up in his black culture and talk* [she imitates hand and body gestures] *that's part of his culture. He goes into school, he does the same, "You're rude!" An African child goes into school, part of their culture is you don't look an adult*

in the eyes, it's disrespectful. They go into school holding their heads down because they're in shame or because they want to prostrate to whoever it is and it's "there's no understanding".

Teachers at a focus group in the West Midlands discussed the merits of using patois[3] (West Indian creole) with some African Caribbean pupils, both as a means of aiding pupil understanding and in order to manage pupil behaviour:

> Key Stage Coordinator: '*If I'm talking to black students in standard English and they're not responding I just talk in patois and I get them to respond.*'
> Researcher: '*Why are they responding to the patois and not the English*?'
> Key Stage Coordinator: '*They know we're serious*'.
> Assistant headteacher: '*It's the body language that comes with the Jamaican patois but it's also the way you say it, the assertiveness and the relationship that it has in the house* [pupils' homes]'.
> Key Stage Coordinator: '*It taps into possibly mom, aunty, grand-mother and they know that you're serious*'.

Whilst these teachers were not advocating the wholesale use of patois across schools, they were keen to demonstrate that for some African Caribbean pupils the ability to use patois, with the accompanying voice inflections and gestures, had served as vital tools for African Caribbean teachers who were keen to transmit clear instructions and ensure that their pupils remained on task. Hence, for African Caribbean teachers the freedom to invoke culturally derived teaching strategies contributes towards their sense of professionalism. Furthermore, school acceptance of these cultural needs may produce an image of a British education system that is welcoming to other minority ethnic communities. In his discussion of the use of patois in schools, Troyna (1987) referred to the point made by Dalphinis that '*the positive backing of creoles through their inclusion in mainstream educational systems would have beneficial educational effects upon both the educators and educated ...*' The legitimacy of the claims of these teachers are not appreciated by some non-African Caribbean teachers, as explained by a teacher in the West Midlands. She described her fury at what she felt were the racist attitudes of local authority ethnic minority achievement grant (EMAG) teachers, who refused to support the learning needs of African Caribbean pupils. Further, she explained that a particular EMAG teacher had dismissed, condescendingly, the patois with which many African Caribbean communities could associate.

> *She said to me that her understanding of patois was that it was used as dissent, and it was black boys particularly using it so that white people could*

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[3] For a detailed discussion on the origin and varieties of West Indian creole see Callendar, C. (1997) Education for empowerment: The practice and philosophies of black teachers, Staffordshire: Trentham Books Ltd (p31-37).

not understand them ... You've got EMAG teachers coming through who might have a good background in English but do they actually understand the children? Do they want to understand the children? Do they have a feeling for what the children are going through? Are they planning for the children to progress because they enjoy being with these kids?

She debated with the EMAG teacher about the merits and importance of appreciating patois, however, the EMAG teacher refused to accept it as a viable means of communication. This finding is perhaps unsurprising as opponents to the use of African and Caribbean creoles have long held the view that these forms of communication are merely '*an inferior and 'bastardised' derivative of standard English*' (Callendar, 1997).

Another West Midlands based teacher explained situations where African Caribbean pupils had been misunderstood by white teachers and how her intervention had brought about mutual understanding between parents, teachers and pupils in dealing with cultural and language differences. She said:

> *Whether you're an adult or third generation from parents coming into England, the language is profound and it's really important. And sometimes some of the language that we use is not the language that would be used in a white context. There's also the body language, because it's not understood that's always an issue as well.*

The animosity expressed between the teacher above and the local authority EMAG teacher was not an isolated incident and, as other African Caribbean teachers pointed out, is, perhaps, indicative of the '*dilution*' of the EMAG remit and consequential diversion of resources away from under-achieving African Caribbean pupils and towards pupils with English as an additional language. Included in the next section are a few of the spirited exchanges between teachers who held concerns about the ways in which EMAG resources were being used to distance the African Caribbean community from the teaching profession.

The diminishing role of EMAG

Teachers, during focus group sessions, were asked to discuss any government initiatives which may have affected their professionalism and influenced their sense of status. Whilst two teachers were complementary about a National College for School Leadership (NCSL) programme, Equal Access to Promotion, designed to prepare black and minority ethnic teachers in middle management positions for school leadership roles, the question invoked, for the majority of teachers, two main concerns. They were anxious about the potential for school leaders to carry out discriminatory practices as a result of the Workforce Reform (DfES, 2002) initiative and the perceived barriers created for African Caribbean pupils as a result of the expansion of EMAG. The former of these issues is discussed in Chapter 14 of the Evidence Base Report (Hargreaves et al., 2007a), whilst

this section reports teachers views of an EMAG policy which, in their view, is pushing African Caribbean communities away from the education system.

The common strategy for the delivery of EMAG supported activities involves interaction between schools and local authority support services (often called Ethnic Minority Achievement Teams), from which schools buy in services. Headteachers can use their EMAG funding to pay for local authority-based teaching staff to conduct/support projects geared towards raising standards for minority ethnic pupils.

African Caribbean teachers, particularly those who had been teaching long enough to witness the change in the EMAG (formerly known as Section 11) focus over the years, claimed that vital teaching resources had been withdrawn from African Caribbean pupils. This is a view shared by a study by the Mayor's Education Commission (2004) and reinforced by the Ofsted report (1999) which concluded that '*Section 11 funding is rarely used to address the needs of Black Caribbean pupils*'. EMAG has seen significant changes in its remit since its inception, under Section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966. A study by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR, 2005) pointed out that the traditional focus of EMAG resources had been on the needs of African Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils but argued that '*as changes in immigration result in more diverse immigrant communities the way in which policy responds must move beyond a tripartite understanding of diversity as Black, White, and Asian.* The IPPR fear that narrowly focused policies may alienate certain smaller and less established minority ethnic communities.

Nevertheless, teachers maintained that African Caribbean pupils were the main losers, following government, local authority and school-based re-emphasis of EMAG resources. African Caribbean teachers complained that funding had previously made a positive impact on the progress of minority ethnic pupils, however the tendency for schools to focus, solely, on the needs of pupils with English as an additional language, is at the expense of the progress of African Caribbean pupils. Teachers explained that they had previously derived, from EMAG, encouragement for their own struggles against under-achievement in their communities, however, the EMAG reforms now served as a discouraging feature of their careers.

Attending a focus group in the West Midlands, an African Caribbean teacher articulated her anxiety with what she and several other teachers felt had been an abuse of EMAG funding by headteachers. She explained that the preference to divert resources away from the learning needs of African Caribbean pupils, represented a dereliction of duty on behalf of schools. Her call was for more African Caribbean headteachers whom she felt would transform the prospects of under-achieving African Caribbean pupils and provide greater encouragement for people from minority ethnic communities to enter the teaching profession and develop a sense of belonging to the British education system. Her contribution draws this section to a close, she contended:

> *We are valuable teachers, we've got so much to offer the profession, they need to keep us there but they need to keep us at a management level as well to*

show an impact. Since the black presence in Britain, there has always been the under-achievement of black children, we're getting them into school at the highest level at age seven and when they leave the system they are under-achieving. And when they get back into education, when they're older, they are achieving higher than their white counterparts. So therefore, what is it that they're not doing? We need to get up there, at management level so that we can make decisions with them to raise the attainment.

Summary

The discomfort described by teachers with regard to the inflexibility with which school leaders interpreted the national curriculum reflected their anxiety over the relevance of the curriculum to minority ethnic pupils. Furthermore, these teachers drew parallels between their own school experiences and the experiences of their pupils, explaining that the lack of relevant and inclusive teaching approaches alienated some minority ethnic pupils and deterred minority ethnic communities from pursuing teaching careers. Teachers concluded, regretfully, that little had been done officially over the years to make the learning experiences of a diverse pupil population more culturally relevant. Teachers advocated, therefore, a professionalism which is more responsive to the learning needs of minority ethnic pupils and thus capable of attracting people from these communities into the profession. Teachers felt that by disregarding diversity, a mono-cultural national curriculum, in turn, scorned the heritage of many other ethnic groups, and reflected negatively on the status of these groups.

African Caribbean teachers discussed their reservations about the unwillingness of their colleagues to research and embrace pupils' cultural and social distinctions in order to inform their formal and informal interactions with pupils; an omission which they felt had negative consequences for pupil attainment. The enthusiasm with which African Caribbean teachers are prepared to communicate with pupils and respond to the needs inherent within their own social milieu, whilst encouraging, is perhaps not considered essential by their colleagues. For African Caribbean teachers, the ability to respond to the social and cultural differences within pupil populations was an essential component to their sense of professionalism, the absence of which has caused some teachers to their membership of the profession.

Finally, for some African Caribbean teachers, a negative aspect of their teaching experiences has been the witnessing of the withdrawal of support for African Caribbean pupils under the EMAG initiative. Changes to the EMAG remit since its creation in 1966, has resulted in a widening of its scope, causing the introduction of strategies which teachers feel obstruct their own professional ambition to overcome decades of under-achievement within the African Caribbean community.

Chapter 4: CONCLUSIONS: RAISING STATUS TO RAISE STANDARDS

This report has presented a section of findings from the study of the status of minority ethnic teachers (a strand of the Teacher Status Project). The first part of this study is reported in the Evidence Base to the Teacher Status Project (Hargreaves et al., 2007a) and reveals minority ethnic teachers' concerns for the factors that contribute to their low sense of status often experienced through what were perceived strongly to be individual and institutionalised racist practices in schools. The second element of the study, presented in this report, discusses the personal ambitions that influence minority ethnic teachers to enter the teaching profession and the extent to which they feel able to realise those ambitions within schools. Hargreaves et al. (2007a) show that the public and teachers themselves accord headteachers higher prestige than they do teachers. Whilst minority ethnic teachers may accrue high esteem from their communities, this study strengthens the case for ensuring that more minority ethnic teachers rise to senior positions in the profession and so gain, what Hoyle (2001) refers to as higher occupational prestige.

The views expressed in this report are the perceptions of 49 minority ethnic (African Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani) teachers participating in focus groups in the West Midlands, the North West and London. These teachers have articulated perceptions which are crucial to matters of teacher recruitment, retention, training and status. Indeed, regardless of whether the sentiments expressed by interviewees are accurate representations of government, local authority or school-based policies, the fact that they perceive the situation in certain ways is of sufficient concern, as this clearly has an impact on issues related to their status and sense of purpose within the profession. Some of the issues that teachers have raised about their personal campaigns to tackle pupil under-achievement are summarised below along with teachers perceptions of the hindrances to their ambitions.

Factors influencing the career aspirations of minority ethnic teachers

'*What part does the current status of the teaching profession play in attracting people from minority ethnic backgrounds to the profession*?'

The number of minority ethnic teachers in schools, particularly when compared to the numbers of pupils, is well below that which the government would like to see. It was important to gain an understanding of the extent to which teacher status might have influenced participants' decisions to enter the teaching profession as this could have some bearing on the problem of recruitment with which the government is faced. In demonstrating their more altruistic nature, teachers declared their resolve to present themselves as dependable role models for pupils. Crucial to African Caribbean teachers, was the need to intervene in a system which they felt had mis-educated pupils from African Caribbean backgrounds, for decades. They sought to right the wrongs which had

plagued them and the parents of African Caribbean pupils by offering their presence as a model of successful achievement to which pupils could aspire in subject areas. This act in itself would seem to suggest that African Caribbean teachers considered the role of the teacher to signify worthy accomplishment.

The Bangladeshi teachers felt, strongly, a responsibility to support the development of their community at every level and argued that such work needed to start at schools where they could influence Bangladeshi pupils' aspirations. They recognised, however, that the mission required the participation of a wider range of Bangladeshi professionals in various sectors of public life equipped with the intellectual strength to influence decision-making processes. Bangladeshi teachers therefore, in recognising their own status as role models for pupils, placed an emphasis on the necessity to stimulate a community spirit capable of motivating their children.

Whilst it may be commendable for people from minority ethnic backgrounds to enter the profession with a view to act as role models for pupils, two important points need to be made. First, as discussed in the Evidence Base (Hargreaves et al., 2007a) and highlighted by Maylor et al. (2006), teachers were wary of any recruitment process which sought to appoint teachers solely on the premise that they might serve as good role models by virtue of their ethnicity. The overriding principle, they insisted, must be the recruitment of good teachers who can identify with pupils' educational requirements and deliver accordingly. Secondly, most teachers felt duty-bound to assume the position of role model but they resisted any attempt to be pigeon-holed as teachers with specific responsibility for minority ethnic pupils. When looking at teachers' careers Powney et al, (2003) found that minority ethnic teachers' personal circumstances and ambitions influenced their reasons for entering the profession, and their experiences in the profession and contemporary local and government policies were important to their long term career choices. These factors were more influential to their decisions in both areas than their ethnicity. Nevertheless their findings, as regards minority ethnic teachers' under-representation in promoted posts, strongly support the findings of the present study.

These teachers believe minority ethnic pupils are consigned to an education system which continues to assess their needs unfairly, and thus perpetuates the preconceptions about under-achieving minority ethnic pupils which fuel teachers' and schools' low expectations for these pupils. Discourse among teachers at focus groups revealed concerns that the scarcity of minority ethnic teachers, which had existed during their own school careers in England, and with whom they had been able to identify as successful professionals, ought not to exist in schools today. Consequently, some minority ethnic teachers are motivated to join the profession by the will to challenge a school system which, in their view, has failed to provide minority ethnic pupils with academic and pastoral support to enable them to aspire to excellence and white pupils with sufficient awareness of the equal potential aptitude and professionalism of people irrespective of ethnicity.

Overseas teachers offer a valuable source of expertise which, if harnessed sensitively, could make a significant difference to the government's teacher recruitment dilemma. In their contributions to this study, however, overseas teachers have related instances in which they felt schools had racially discriminated against them with regard to recruitment, exploited their skills and expertise and used them as a form of cut-price labour. These teachers appealed for fundamental changes to the rules governing their recruitment by schools and for greater statutory recognition for their teaching qualifications obtained overseas. Attention to these concerns might improve overseas teachers' opinions of the status of the profession in England and encourage their participation.

Minority ethnic teachers took a rather jaundiced view of the idea of seeking work in certain areas in England, known to them as potentially racist. Any strategy to increase the numbers of minority ethnic teachers in areas outside of their traditional migratory paths will first need to reassure the majority of teachers for whom racism or the fear of racism, direct or indirect, simply was not worth the hassle. Minority ethnic teachers have judged some headteachers, of schools situated in areas with high proportions of white working class people, as guilty of perpetuating racist attitudes by maintaining recruitment policies which deter or disqualify minority ethnic teachers from positions in their schools. It is perhaps predictable that minority ethnic teachers, already working in areas with high proportions of minority ethnic pupils, and who felt aggrieved at what they perceived to be inequitable access to senior positions (as recorded in the Evidence Base report), would be resistant to the suggestion that they should work in areas outside of their comfort zone.

Challenges to professional commitment

'*Do minority ethnic teachers hold alternative perceptions of professionalism, which perhaps make teaching more or less attractive to them*?'

The views held by African Caribbean teachers with respect to the professional expertise and commitment required to generate an enthusiasm for the profession, centred on their determination to challenge schools with pedagogical strategies which were culturally relevant to their pupils. Discussions held by African Caribbean teachers with regard to the relevance of the national curriculum revealed these teachers' concerns about its ability to cater for pupils of minority ethnic backgrounds. Teachers from other ethnic backgrounds contributed little to this element of the study. Minority ethnic teachers are expected to deliver to minority ethnic pupils a national curriculum, the strategy and contents of which they feel is culturally biased and dismissive of the pupils' own heritage and ancestral contributions both socially and intellectually. Having experienced the same teaching strategies and learning resources, during their own schooling, teachers spoke with authority of the potentially negative impact of these approaches on pupils of minority ethnic backgrounds. For these teachers, the imposition of a 'common curriculum', exposing all pupils, irrespective of background, to a common culture, is unproductive. Rather, there is the feeling that African Caribbean pupils would benefit from being segregated for certain subjects. Although such claims are supported by

evidence to separate pupils based on gender, no such research has examined the efficacy of ethnically variable teaching practices. Yet teachers felt that such radical action was appropriate to improve opportunities for African Caribbean pupils and to encourage African Communities to engage with the teaching profession at all levels.

Teachers remain perplexed that an education system which purports to be striving to raise the attainment of minority ethnic pupils should continue to administer a mono-cultural curriculum which has been inaccessible to generations of the minority ethnic population in England, for whom this policy has consistently failed. Some African Caribbean teachers went so far as to surmise, therefore, a conspiratorial governmental strategy, supported by school management regimes intent on failing minority ethnic pupils. African Caribbean teachers' request, of the government and headteachers, is for greater autonomy to adapt their lesson plans in ways that they feel would render them culturally relevant to African Caribbean pupils. This freedom, along with more inclusive attitudes from their colleagues towards the cultural diversities and learning needs of minority ethnic pupils, might contribute to raising pupil attainment and, simultaneously, create a renewed self-esteem and sense of ownership and belonging to the profession among minority ethnic teachers.

In summary, these teachers were confident in their ability to provide greater learning opportunities for all pupils and afford minority ethnic pupils the empathetic support required to enhance their life-chances. Teachers felt they had a pivotal role in the academic and social development of minority ethnic pupils and in the cultural awareness of white pupils and teaching colleagues; but with the caveat that school leaders should not see them as 'ethnic teachers'. This responsibility was central to many teachers who participated in focus groups and, for most, underpinned their reasons for entering the teaching profession. African Caribbean teachers, who were most vocal about their assessment of the extent to which they have realised their community minded ambitions, spoke of feeling culturally irrelevant. These teachers perceived an education system which stifled their professional drive to meet the needs of some of the most academically vulnerable pupils. Their own experiences and fear of racism from various geographical areas should be of major concern to government, school leaders and all other groups concerned about diversity in the teacher population. Most of the teachers chose not to work in areas they have perceived as potentially racist but these are decisions which may deprive teachers of valuable career enhancing opportunities, whilst starving certain schools of much needed enrichment of teaching and learning experiences for pupils and teachers alike.

There is evidence that government and other agencies have been responsive to concerns about decades of under-achievement, stereotypical and racist[4] attitudes in schools. For instance, the 'Aiming High' (Tikly et al., 2006) pilot project engaged school leaders in whole school strategies to raise the achievement of African Caribbean pupils. An

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[4] For information about anti-racism strategies for schools see:
http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/library/racism/ or
http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes2/ks4citizenship/cit03/03q4?view=get or
http://www.qca.org.uk/301_2515.html

Excellence in Cities EMAG pilot project (Cunningham et al., 2004) targeted schools in disadvantaged areas, wherein a range of locally determined activities sought to raise the attainment of minority ethnic pupils. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) provide an online resource recommending policies and guidelines for schools and teachers wishing to '*do more to value diversity and challenge racism in the classroom*' (QCA, 2001).

Initiatives directed at minority ethnic teachers, on the other hand, have been scarce. The joint, National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and the National Union of Teachers (NUT), partnership provided, through 'Equal Access to Promotion', support for teachers wishing to gain senior and school leadership positions. An Institute of Education (funded by London Challenge) London-focussed initiative, 'Investing in Diversity', provides a programme of support and training for minority ethnic senior teachers aiming to obtain school leadership positions. These small advances towards the diversification of whole school processes are to be welcomed. Black and minority ethnic teachers in senior management positions, in their response to a survey by the NUT (NUT, 2003), shared many of the concerns raised by teachers in our study, particularly in relation to the equality of access to opportunities in schools for minority ethnic teachers. In their recommendations the NUT highlighted the need for further action to '*tackle both the direct and institutional racism within schools faced by black and minority ethnic staff*'. Crucial to the success of any of these programmes will be the cooperation of school leaders to be attentive and responsive to the challenges facing minority ethnic teachers and pupils alike. Nevertheless, the many negative experiences and perceptions expressed by teachers from centres as far apart as London, the North West and the West Midlands, is indicative of the breadth and depth of concern. In denying the exercise of their generic and specific professionalism, the education system risks losing dedicated teachers with specialised knowledge and expertise. We suggest that the case for a national review of minority ethnic teachers' professional progress is overdue.

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