

Attrition Rate of Black and Minority Ethnic Managers in the Further Education Colleges Sector of England

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a higher rate of attrition of BME college managers from the further education sector than their white counterparts, and that racial discrimination is a strong contributing factor. The research study used a small sample of former college managers to ascertain their reasons for leaving the sector.*

Aims, Participation and Methodology

The aims of the report were to:

- try to increase understanding of some of the possible reasons for the exit of BME managers from the FE college sector.
- seek the opinion of BME former college managers as to what could be done to prevent the excess attrition of BME managers from the college sector.
- focus on the attrition of BME managers from FE colleges and not address itself to the situation of BME managers within other elements of the post-16 sector as a whole i.e. Learning and Skills Councils, the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL), etc.

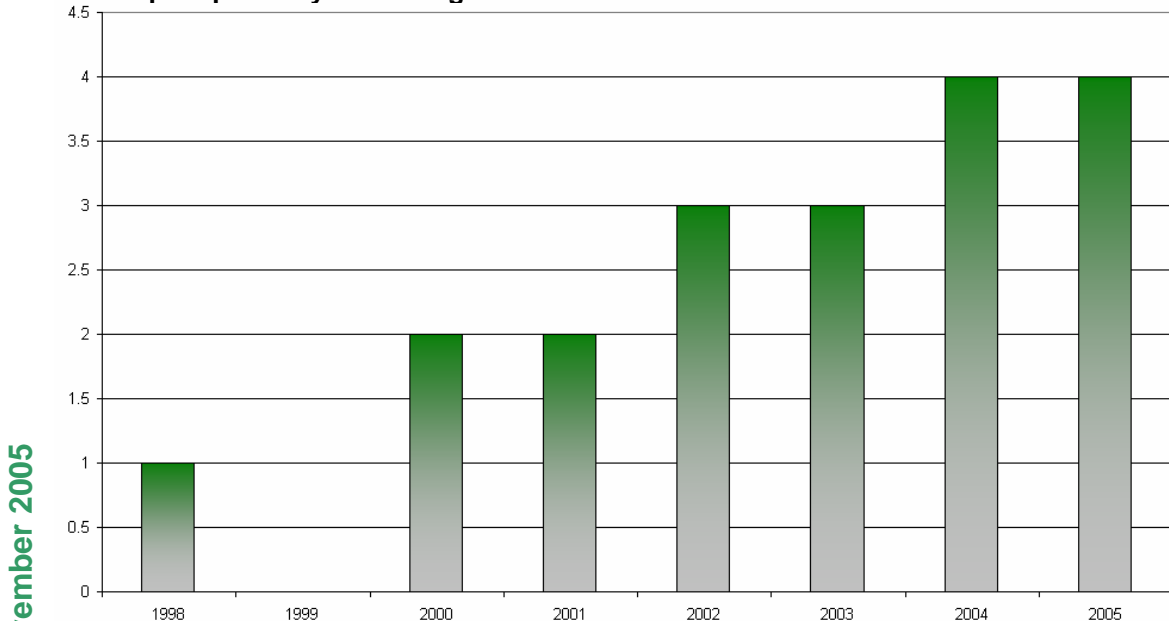
A total of 19 participants were recruited via the Network for Black Managers both through a flyer that was sent out to its members and through the Network leadership's knowledge of BME managers who had recently ceased working within the college sector. 18 of the participants had left the FE sector in the past 5 years, 14 of these had left in the past three years.

The majority of those participating within the study were male



Telephone interviews were used as the methodology. The interview questions can be found on the Network's Web site at www.nbm.org.uk. These interviews took place in June 2005 and each lasted approximately 25 – 30 minutes.

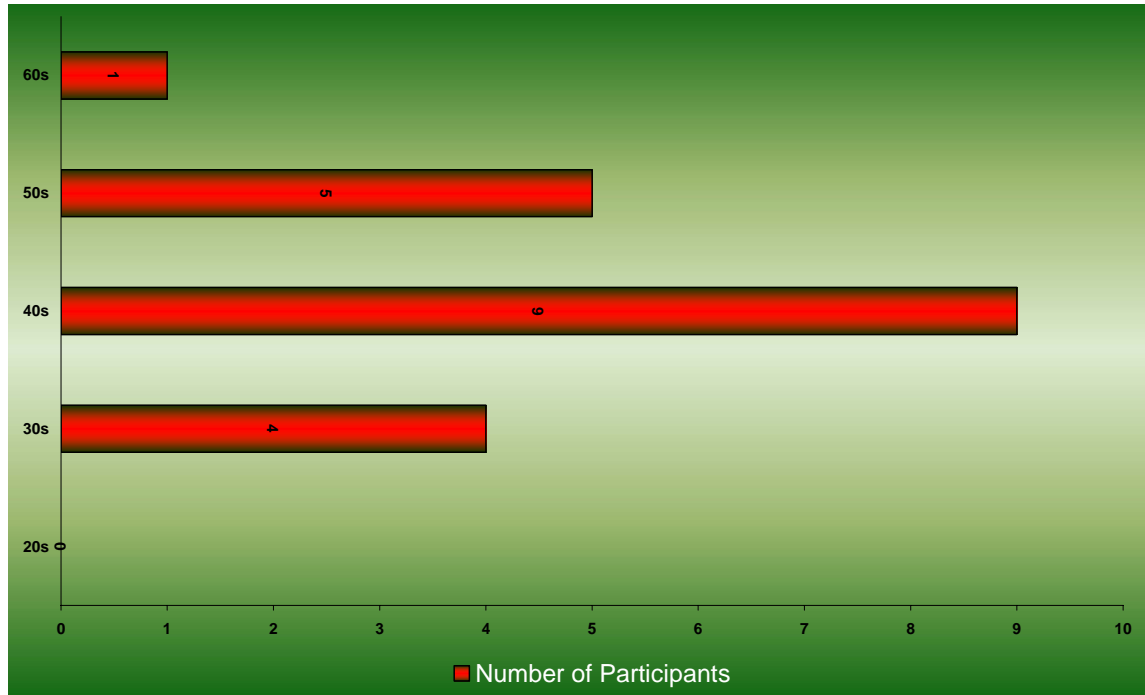
Participant profile: year leaving FE sector



November 2005

*BME Former College Managers Attrition Research Survey August 2005

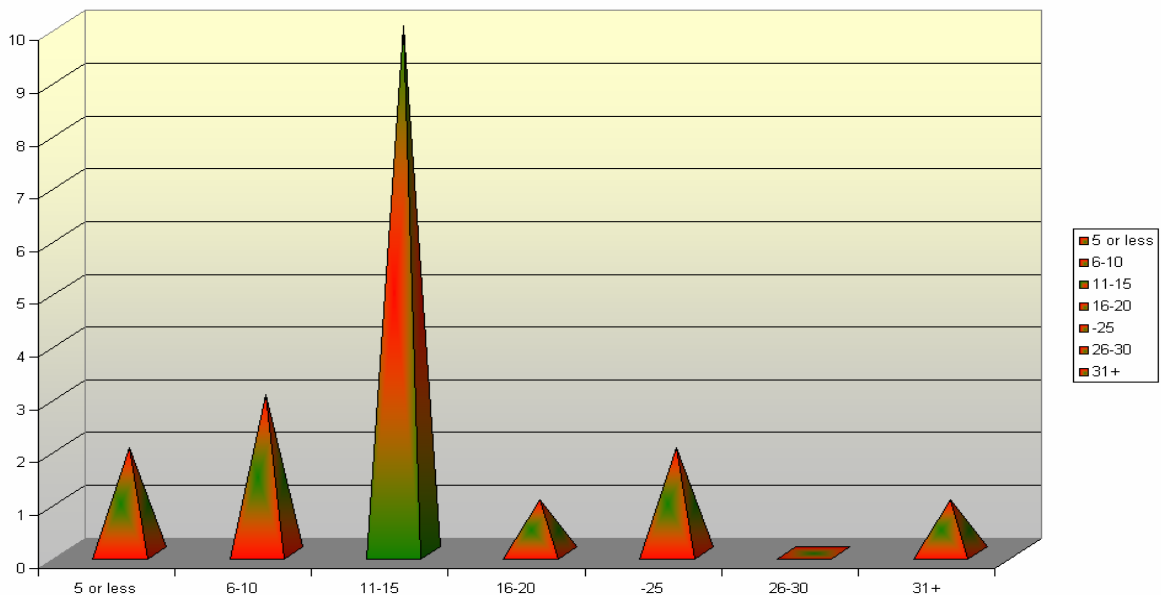
Participant profile by age



Participant attrition rate by region

Region	N° of Participants
East of England	1
East Midlands	2
London	9
North East	0
North West	0
South East	1
South West	1
West Midlands	5
Yorkshire and Humberside	0

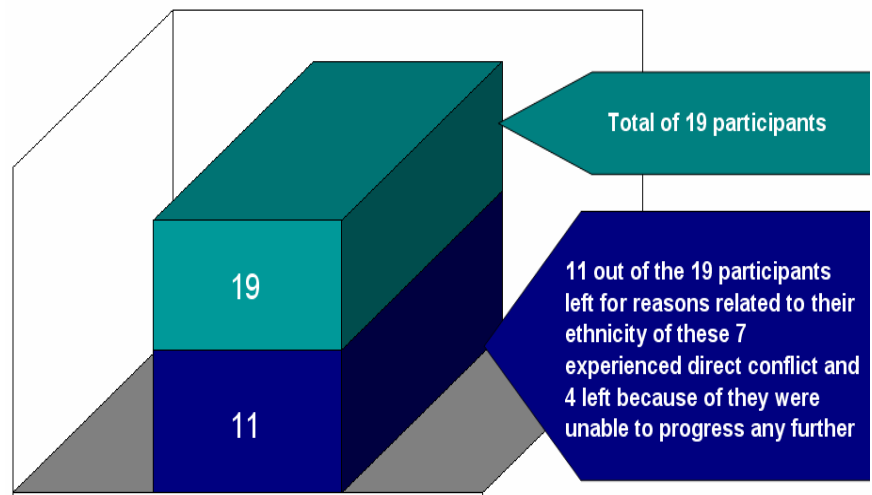
Participant profile: number of years in service



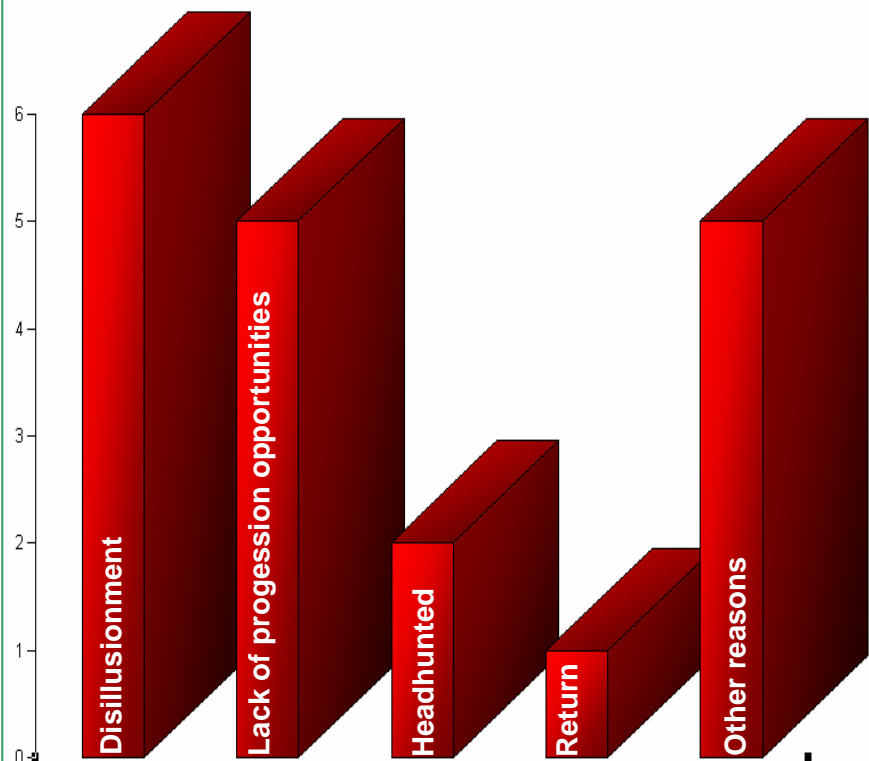
On the whole, most participants had really enjoyed their jobs within further education colleges. They spoke of their positive experiences with students and with colleagues and feeling a strong commitment to the purpose of the organisation. However a number of negative points were mentioned, as follows:

- There was a strong level of vertical and horizontal segregation within the college sector and both of these caused problems for BME staff looking to progress their career.
- BME managers tended to undertake roles related to external sources of funding (esp. work with minority ethnic communities) rather than the college's core curriculum work.
- Some participants felt that during their time within FE they were forced to continually prove themselves and that their contributions were 'watched' more closely than those of non-BME managers. As a result, such participants felt they had to work 'twice as hard' as other non-BME colleagues in order to progress within their institution.
- Individuals would more likely be told that they lacked broad experience for the top management roles within the colleges
- Some participants argued that the sector as a whole lacked an awareness of equality and diversity issues.
- Being passed over for promotion was a common experience
- Based on their experiences some BME managers felt that they were considered suitable for operational work but unsuitable for strategic work. This meant that they were usually blocked from senior posts.

Reasons for leaving the FE sector



Eleven of the nineteen participants left their last college jobs primarily for reasons related to their ethnicity. Of these eleven, seven experienced some direct conflict prior to leaving. The remaining four left because they knew, as minority ethnic managers, they would be unlikely to be able to progress their careers further within that organisation.



Disillusionment was the most common reason for leaving the sector – especially for those who had left or been forced out due to perceived racial discrimination. Six participants cited this reason for leaving the sector. A further five participants left the sector because they believed they would not get another college job at the right level. Two of the participants were headhunted out of the sector. Of the remaining six participants one had already returned to the sector and a further two were considering a return to the sector at a later date. The last three had left the sector for a combination of reasons including early retirement.

What can be done to prevent the excess attrition of BME managers from the sector?

A number of suggestions, grouped in terms of actions for six of the key actors within the sector, were made by participants based on their own experiences, and on their knowledge of what has happened to other BME managers within the sector:

Learning & Skills Councils	Learning and Skills Councils needed to ensure they always treated fairly the senior BME college managers they interact with.
College Governors	Governors in general could take more 'risks' with appointments and not just always appoint someone who is in the exact demographic mould of the current senior management team
College Principals	College principals should be held more accountable for the attrition of BME managers from their institutions. It was felt by some participants that compromise agreements were encouraging silence on this issue. Crucially participants also wanted principals to recognise that there is a problem within the sector and be committed to tackling it.
Network for Black Managers	<p>Participants suggested that regional networking (i.e. between managers at neighbouring colleges) might be useful in terms of preventing the isolation of BME managers.</p> <p>Some participants who had experienced very negative treatment from their senior managers within the sector had suggested that the Network could consider whether it needs to do more to provide active support to BME managers who are experiencing difficulties within their colleges and that it should consider its role in relation to the Unions on this issue.</p>
Black Leadership Initiative (BLI)	Whilst secondments and mentoring were considered useful to the development of careers and the prevention of attrition from the sector. Some participants felt that the BLI should raise its profile to encourage more sceptical BME managers to participate and feel more positive about their careers.
BME Managers	Some participants felt that BME managers should be more prepared to move around sector colleges in order to progress their careers.

Conclusions

The research project explored experiences of a small sample of BME managers who had left the FE college sector within the past few years. A high proportion of these managers left the college sector for reasons relating to their ethnicity. Racial discrimination either manifested in direct conflict or in terms of a glass ceiling was the major reason most of those questioned chose to leave the sector.

Future research should:

- examine whether the findings that BME managers tend to leave the college sector due largely to racial discrimination is repeated with a larger and more randomly selected sample.
- consider whether or not BME managers are leaving the FE college sector at a higher rate than their White counterparts.
- consider the roles undertaken by BME managers within colleges and the extent and possible effects of any horizontal segregation. Links between any horizontal segregation and the already well-documented vertical segregation of BME managers within the sector should also be examined.