

Research Unwrapped: Ethnic disparities and apprenticeship participation

Recommendations for employers

Why this matters – the opportunity and the risk

Evidence shows that apprenticeships are likely to have a **high positive impact** on youth employment outcomes. They offer a welcome opportunity for marginalised young people to overcome disadvantage and succeed in employment.

But access to and progress within apprenticeships is **not equal for all young people**. Analysis of 2022/23 data shows that young people (aged 16-24) from minoritised ethnic backgrounds are around **half as likely as white peers** to start an apprenticeship.

Our new research

In 2024, Youth Futures Foundation commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) to **explore the experiences of young apprentices from minoritised ethnic backgrounds**.

What did we discover?

Barriers to apprenticeship participation and completion for young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds include:

- 1. Awareness and perceptions:** Parents and family networks can steer young people toward academic pathways instead of apprenticeships. This was felt to stem from a lack of awareness and understanding about apprenticeships within minoritised ethnic communities.
- 2. Financial barriers:** Low wages in apprenticeships can be a deterrent, particularly for those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Although young people cite the lack of student debt as an incentive to undertake an

apprenticeship, they report that low pay often creates financial strain, which can impact both initial interest and the ability to complete apprenticeship programmes.

3. Inclusion and experiences of racism:

Our interviewees reported that some employers lack cultural awareness, leading to discrimination and feelings of alienation among apprentices from minoritised ethnic backgrounds. Employers, training providers and young people also highlighted instances of racism, both overt and systemic.

This echoes findings from Youth Futures Foundation's Discrimination and Work report, where **over half of young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds reported experiencing discrimination at work**.

“Rejection experienced due to discrimination is too much for some apprentices to handle, leading to struggles completing programmes.”

Young interviewee.



4. Regional and Sectoral Variations:

The availability and accessibility of apprenticeships varies significantly, with different barriers emerging in different regions and sectors. For example:

- In London, low pay in a city with a high cost of living is a pronounced barrier.
- In Yorkshire and the Humber, lack of public transport infrastructure outside the major towns and cities was seen as a deterrent for socio-economically disadvantaged young people.
- In Health, Public Services and Care industries, negative perceptions around progression routes were cited as a barrier to engagement for young people.

What can employers do to drive change?

Collated recommendations from Youth Futures Foundation and the new research conducted by the National Centre for Social Research:

1. Reach young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds through targeted recruitment and outreach:

- Promote apprenticeship opportunities through informal networks, such as local community-based organisations, and schools with high numbers of students from minoritised ethnic backgrounds.
- Partner with organisations that already work with the young people you are targeting, who can bridge the gap.
- Work with organisations that engage parents/carers, to help to raise awareness of the positive outcomes of apprenticeships. Influence the influencers!
- Demonstrate the diversity within your organisation by using diverse and inclusive imagery in recruitment materials, and sharing stories from ethnically diverse role models.

2. Address discriminatory behaviour and build an inclusive workplace culture:

- Take a zero-tolerance approach to racist remarks, jokes, 'banter' and non-inclusive behaviours by colleagues, clients, and customers.
- Deliver training for line managers around inclusion and pastoral support for apprentices.
- Foster support networks for apprentices from minoritised ethnic backgrounds.
- Provide religious and cultural awareness training to all employees.

“Promoting diversity as an employer could make the next person feel safe.”

Young interviewee.

3. Offer financial support for apprentices:

- Be transparent about your pay and progression processes so that young people can see what opportunities are open to them and plan for their future.
- Offer financial support to apprentices, like travel loans and subsidies.

Read the full report and find more resources on our [Employer Hub](#).

